



Miri-Piri

The Political-Spiritual Sikh Doctrine

State of the Panth, Report 7

July 2021



State of the Panth

State of the Panth series is a report on Sikh matters presented by the Sikh Research Institute to the global Sikh community. The series reports on matters affecting either a large section of the Sikh Nation or a perspective on critical issues facing the human race at large. It surveys the self-identified Sikhs on their stances. It outlines a Sikh perspective based on *Gurmat* (the Guru's Way) traditions of *Bani* (wisdom), *Tavarikh* (history), and *Rahit* (lifestyle). It offers recommendations for the individual Sikhs and Sikh institutions in best practice approach to strengthen the bonds within the community.

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Acknowledgments

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We are indebted to Gurmukh Singh and Harleen Kaur for their insights during the research phase of this report. Their comments on early versions of the manuscript were invaluable in shaping its final iteration. Any omissions or errors found in the report are the full responsibility of SikhRI.

Creative Consultants

We thank Anantdip Kaur, Devinder Singh, Misha Berveno, and Sean J. Holden for sharing their expertise and enhancing the report. The strength of our brand is supported by their knowledge.

Financial Supporters

We are grateful to the estate of Sardar Nirwair Singh (Saskatoon, Canada) for their grant.

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Summary

Miri comes from Perso-Arabic “Amir” or “Emir” and signals political power. Piri comes from the Perso-Arabic “Pir” and signals spiritual power. Miri-Piri encapsulates the Political-Spiritual doctrine in Sikhi, rooted in both the worldly and the timeless, and in sovereignty beyond the nation-states.

This report aims to understand and explore how the Miri-Piri doctrine influences the political and spiritual behavior of Sikhs worldwide. The report analyzes ideas conveyed in Miri-Piri from a *Gurmat* (or Guru’s Way) perspective, as inferred from *Bani* (wisdom), *Tavarikh* (history), and *Rahit* (lifestyle).

The Bani section explores Miri-Piri doctrine as it is found in primary and secondary texts, and explains other commonly-used terms rooted in Miri-Piri like Raj-Jog and Bhakti-Shakti. The Tavarikh section traces and analyzes Miri-Piri doctrine from its beginnings with Guru Nanak Sahib through its development, institutionalization, and application through time and context over 553 years – covering the Guru Period, the Khalsa Raj, the Sikh Empire, the Sikhs and the Crown, and the Sikhs and the Indian State. The Rahit section explores present-day tensions in application of Miri-Piri doctrine under competing citizenships across India and the diaspora, covering the US, UK, and Canada and exploring the following questions: *Can Sikh politicians serve the State and the Panth? Will Sikhs rise to positions of political influence to serve the State and the Panth? Will Sikh political representation learn to develop consensus? How do Sikhs navigate Sikh issues, Panjab issues, and Indian issues without involving political leaders as the center of their struggle to pressure the Center?*

A global survey, included in the report, was presented to more than 500 self-identified Sikhs from 19 countries. The purpose of this survey was to gain insight into Sikh understandings and applications of Miri-Piri doctrine today.

Overall, responses outlined both a desire to understand better Miri-Piri in idea and practice and a contemporary understanding of Miri-Piri that prioritizes the spiritual or religious over the temporal or political. There was, however, a large consensus that institutions can play a more significant role in encouraging civic engagement and political literacy, leading to more representation in politics and more coalition-building across lines of caste, class, race, ethnicity, and gender.

This report makes recommendations based on the Gurmat components that individuals and institutions can use to understand Miri-Piri better and live out the Political-Spiritual doctrine in competing nationalisms and citizenships. Bani, Tavarikh, and Rahit offer guidance to individuals on understanding Miri-Piri doctrine as it is found in primary and secondary sources and applying it to their contexts with the guidance of historical examples. The Gurmat framework offers guidance for institutions towards taking the lead on building a foundational understanding of the Miri-Piri doctrine, holding events that encourage political literacy and civic engagement, and fostering critical discussion and engagement with various political viewpoints.

Miri-Piri



Miri comes from the Perso-Arabic “Amir” or “Emir,” which means wealth, leadership, and royalty; it signals temporal power. *Piri* comes from the Perso-Arabic “Pir,” meaning saintly acts, spiritual mentorship; it signals spiritual power. Miri-Piri together encapsulates the Political-Spiritual doctrine in Sikhi, rooted in both the worldly and the timeless, in sovereignty beyond nation-states.

A survey of 548 self-identified Sikhs from 19 different countries was conducted to gain insight into Sikh understandings of Miri-Piri, especially regarding its application in the current realities of 21st-century nation-states. Responses outlined both a desire to better understand Miri-Piri in idea and practice and a contemporary understanding of Miri-Piri that prioritizes the spiritual or religious over the temporal or political. There was, however, a large consensus that institutions can play a more significant role in encouraging civic engagement and political literacy, leading to more representation in politics and more coalition-building across lines of caste, class, race, ethnicity, and gender.

This report makes recommendations based on Gurmat (the Guru’s Way) as inferred from Bani (wisdom), Tavarikh (history), and Rahit (lifestyle) that can be used by individuals and institutions to understand Miri-Piri better and live out the Political-Spiritual doctrine in competing nationalisms and citizenships.

Kartarpur Sahib, June 2020
Photo by Ali Rizvi

Bani *Wisdom*

One of the most common misconceptions about Miri-Piri is that the terms “Miri” and “Piri” are separate and at odds with one another: that Guru Nanak Sahib was a “Piri” Guru, and that “Miri” was introduced later by Guru Harigobind Sahib. To begin to understand these terms and their relationship with one another, one must explore them in the context of Bani, along with other symbiotic terms like “Raj-Jog” and “Bhakti-Shakti.”

Raj-Jog

The Sikh Panth was a spiritual doctrine and a nation with unique lifestyle practices, ideals, and governance structure from its conception. This Raj (governance, or rule) was established by Guru Nanak Sahib, as described by the following composition of Bards Satta and Balvand (contemporaries of Guru Arjan Sahib, 1563-1606):

*Name-Identity All-Powerful Creator raises,
how can that command be evaluated?
Divine virtues and eternity are like sisters and brothers,
a gift to the one whose service is accepted.
Nanak started the Raj,
the eternal fort was built on a strong foundation.
[Guru Nanak] positioned canopy over Lahina's head,
who drank Immortal-nectar of the Praise.
With the wisdom bestowed by Divine Being,
[Guru Nanak] graced [Guru Angad] with the gift of life by the strength of the sword.
The Guru saluted the disciple,
Nanak did so safely-securely.
Sovereign [Guru Nanak] marked-anointed [Guru Angad] while living.ⁱ*

– Guru Granth Sahib 966

In the first line, Satta and Balvand speak of the All-Powerful Creator. They say that the one whose name (and name, in this case, is pointing to identity, meaning “whoever”) is uplifted by the Creator, that Command cannot be evaluated or measured. If the Divine raises someone’s identity to the Guru level, how can anyone question that? This refers to Guru Nanak, which comes in a later line: Nanak started the Raj. Nanak started the Raj because the All-Powerful Creator raised Nanak to that level of Divine virtues and eternalities. Therefore, these notions became like brothers and sisters to the Guru. This is the gift to the one who is in service of the Creator. The gift is of life because before being raised to the level of Divine virtues, one is not fully living.

This excerpt from Satta and Balvand also establishes that Sikhi is not solely a spiritual tradition – it never was. Sikhi is really a Raj. In establishing such a dominion, the same light, the same wisdom, and the same systems were carried through time, while only the body of the Guru-embodiment was changing. The Raj is not solely political either. It is built on the strong foundation of Praise of the Divine Being, Wisdom bestowed by the Divine Being, and Sovereignty rooted in the Divine Being.

Bhai Gurdas (c.1558-1637), scholar, theologian, and a contemporary of four Gurus, explains what this Raj constitutes and that the True Emperor of this Raj is the Guru, alluding to Guru Nanak Sahib’s legacy leading up to Guru Arjan Sahib:

*Eternal-Guru is the eternal sovereign; the eternal throne of Sadh-Sangat (Saintly-Congregation) is peaceful.
The eternal Sabad’s mint is eternal; its touch transforms all eight elements (castes and orders) equally [to gold].
Raj is eternal and inevitable; the palace is of beautiful new color and forever.
Prevailing Command is eternal, it is accepted as eternal and immortal, and it is enjoyed as eternal flavor.
[1’s] Glory is eternal, [1’s] Praise is eternal, they praise the eternal at immortal moments (early morning).
Gurmukh Panth is eternal; their teachings are eternal; they are not caught in pride.
Hopelessness within hopefulness is their movement; the play is eternal, their play to connect-allyship is eternal.
Gurmukhs (the Guru-centered ones), those Sikhs are like the Guru, and Guru is like their disciple.¹*

What is made very clear in this excerpt is the interplay between spirituality and politics within the Sikh model, much before Guru Harigobind Sahib (often called the Miri-Piri Guru). This *pauri* (verse in a ballad) was written during the time of Guru Arjan Sahib. Bhai Gurdas explains that IkOankar (1Force) is the eternal Sovereign, the Word is eternal, the Rule is eternal, the Command is eternal, the Praise is eternal. The Panth is eternal, and so are the teachings. There is no superiority complex or sense of pride in this. The movement of the Panth is a kind of play of hopelessness within hopefulness, a sense of realism, and an understanding of the larger picture, rooted in connection to 1Force. And even that play is eternal. That play is a *play* to develop connection – in this context, with 1Ness, with people. That play is a play to develop allyship, to treat with importance the question of who we work with and who we share values with. Hopelessness within hopefulness is not a pessimism or an optimism, but instead a realism in expectation, an understanding that “Miri” and “Piri” will not always come together in a way that reflects Miri-Piri doctrine, and a more realistic outlook on how it manifests differently for different people.

The moments when the Gurmukhs, the Guru-centered ones, are doing all of these things without pride, when they can exist in the play of hopelessness within hopefulness, when they can continue to seek out alliances with those who share their principles, when they understand that no single person is a perfect leader but that the *plurality* of the Gurmukh Panth is equal to the Guru and makes up the physical institution of the Guru – in these moments, they are like the Guru, and the Guru is their disciple. Thus, the collective of the Guru-centered *becomes like the Guru* when exhibiting these behaviors and virtues.

Guru Nanak Sahib introduced a new paradigm of IkOankar that shaped a unique worldview, where the “spiritual” and the “temporal” were not separate spheres. The Guru lived out Raj-Jog through the establishment of “Creator-ville.” The IkOankar paradigm was manifested in creating city-states, such as Kartarpur Sahib, where a new system of rules was implemented, and an inclusive vision of the coexistence of various religious communities was realized. Guru Nanak Sahib set up the city of Kartarpur after undergoing the *udasis* (epical journeys “to meet Perfection-oriented” ones), as there did not exist a rule in any other city that would abide by these new principles inherent in the IkOankar worldview. Guru Nanak Sahib’s Raj-Jog principle is referred to in the following excerpt:

[Guru Nanak Sahib] enjoyed the Raj as well as the Jog; the enmity-free One lives in the [Guru's] heart.

[The Guru] became free due to incessant Nam-Identification, and with it benefited the whole creation.

Sanak-like sages and Janak-like kings have been singing the virtues of [Guru Nanak Sahib] for many eras.

Great, great, great is the Guru; [the Guru's] birth was useful and good for the world.

Bard Kal voices: Melody of [the Guru's] glory is heard from the nether-regions as well.

O' Guru Nanak, the lover of 1-Light's Identification! You enjoyed the Raj and the Jog.ⁱⁱ

– Guru Granth Sahib 1390

Here, Raj and Jog (Divine connection, or union) are discussed, and the creation of a Raj which operated in a unique governance of both. The Bard, Kal, invokes Sanak and Janak, two well-known entities in Indic culture, as archetypes of the sages and kings, or the Pirs and Mirs. This invocation of these known figures in the Indic context eulogizes Guru Nanak as the one who both the Pirs and the Mirs sing of, for the Guru is the epitome of Raj-Jog.

The Bard also uses the context of the four-era system of Hindus to eulogize Guru Nanak Sahib. He invokes different significant events throughout the eras to emphasize the unshakeability of Guru Nanak Sahib's Raj because of what it is *built upon*. He uses the example of King Bal, who agreed to give Vamana, a dwarf, as much of the kingdom as he could cover in two and a half steps. Vamana covered all of it. This invocation points to an identification with the underdog and a foundation in fighting with power and insinuating that King Bal was not paying attention to his guru and could not recognize the Divine. This invocation also acts as a foreshadowing, emphasizing that Guru Nanak Sahib's Raj is made of all of these elements and more and that his Raj will not end:

In Satyug [it was] You [who] enjoyed [Raj and Jog], when you outplayed [King] Bal, it pleased [You] to become a dwarf.

In Treta [it was] You [who] enjoyed [Raj and Jog], when You were called Ram of Raghu-lineage.

In Duapur [it was] You [who] was Krishan the adversary of Mur; [You] emancipated-killed the [king] Kans.

[You] gave the Raj [of Mahtura] to [King] Ugarsain and fearlessness to devotees and votaries.

In Kaljug, O Guru Nanak, [it is You who is] the capable one; [You called Yourself] Guru Angad and Amar[das].

Revered Guru's Raj is unshakable and inevitable as proclaimed by the Primal Being.ⁱⁱⁱ

– Guru Granth Sahib 1390



The Guru operates in both realms – the world of religion and the world of politics – and creates freedom in both through the offering of *Nam* (Divine Identification) culture, taking the whole universe towards that freedom. This Raj has both the spiritual and the political elements, which work in tandem to create a system that moves towards a more equal and just society in service of all of humanity. As the Sikh nation grew, the Gurus set up various city centers, such as Goindwal Sahib, Kiratpur Sahib, and Anandpur Sahib. With multiple cities and local political contexts, a throne is needed. This led to the *Manji* (administrative unit) system established by Guru Amardas Sahib. The Mughal Empire at the time was divided into 22 regions; the Guru appointed 22 Manjidars, who were leaders, emissaries, or administrators. From these seats of authority, a headquarters was also required. Thus, Akal Takht Sahib was founded as the *Panth's* (Sikh collective's) seat of political authority, representing the throne of *Akal Purakh* (Timeless Being).

Guru Nanak Sahib proclaimed that there was no political authority other than Akal Purakh, and Guru Arjan Sahib later echoed this by stating that there was no savior Monarch, but only the Immortal Being.² With the establishment of Akal Takht Sahib, Guru Harigobind Sahib solidified and institutionalized this idea that the immortal authority belongs only to Akal Takht Sahib.

Thus, the Raj was envisioned and declared by Guru Nanak Sahib, institutions to establish the Raj were developed through the Ten Nanaks, and the Sikhs were trained by the Ten Nanaks, Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, on how to govern justly. The Sikh doctrine of Miri-Piri, that spirituality and politics are integrated, and that the political dimension is complementary to Sikh spiritual activity, legitimizes capturing political power as a catalyst for social change.

Akal Takht Sahib, by Wim Swaan
Source: The J. Paul Getty Museum

Miri-Piri

The common narrative around Miri-Piri is that Guru Nanak Sahib was a solely spiritual or religious Guru and that the emphasis on the temporal or the political did not occur until Guru Harigobind established the Akal Takht Sahib. However, the first mention of Mir and Pir is in "*Babarvani*," a compilation of *sabads* uttered by Guru Nanak Sahib. The referencing is by Guru Nanak Sahib first when explaining what the Mirs and Pirs do. It is not about the foundational principle coming together. The world did and still does see these two elements in separation. Miri-Piri in principle and practice did start with Guru Nanak Sahib; the Miri-Piri system continuously developed and became explicitly *institutionalized* and clearly *organized* under the aegis of Akal Takht Sahib by Guru Harigobind Sahib.

The ruler at the time of Guru Nanak Sahib's *Babarvani* was the Sultan of Delhi: a Pathan named Ibrahim Lodhi. Mughal emperor Zahir ud-din Muhammad Babar invaded from Central Asia. A confrontation between these two power centers, the conquerors and the indigenous, led to a big battle – not of religion-based violence, but of two practitioners of Islam vying for power. At this time, Guru Nanak Sahib was embarking on the fourth Udasi (journey), going from Mecca to Medina to Kabul to Saidpur, and Babar's army was devastating the Panjab. Guru Nanak Sahib, in the now popularly-termed collection, *Babarvani*, describes his eye-witness accounts of the atrocities of Babar and his men in Saidpur (now Eminabad, Panjab, Pakistan).

Guru Nanak Sahib writes about the genocidal campaign and describes the massive killings in graphic language, documenting the events taking place. The Guru also makes a statement that invokes Mir and Pir:

*[When the Pathan rulers] heard the political-head (Mughal Babar) was invading,
they kept millions of spiritualists [for their supernatural powers].
[But even with their magic],
many buildings and strong palaces were burnt [by Babar's forces],
[Pathan] princes were cut into pieces and rolled in the dust.
No Mughal was blinded; no [spiritualist] was able to perform any magic.^{iv}*

– Guru Granth Sahib 417

The Guru asks, where are the millions of spiritualists, or *Pirs*? Those known for their spiritual or religious practices, for performing miracles, and being leaders in society? Where did they all go when they heard that the *Mir*, the emperor or political head, was invading? Guru Nanak Sahib emphasizes that even with many spiritualists all around, none of them did a single thing when political power, Babar, was attacking the people (a reference to Babar and his men raping and pillaging are cited in Babarvani as well). The spiritualists may say that they will show the people magic or mysticism that will take care of any issue, that will cure any ailment. But Guru Nanak Sahib urges one to remember that those who are *only* spiritualists actually tend to work together with the political heads to control the masses. When the time comes to show that they mean what they say, the spiritualists are nowhere to be found. The principle here that is eventually institutionalized is that one ought not to go just by what the spiritual or political heads say. Action is important. Behavior is important. Ideally, Miri-Piri is a principle that drives the Sikh ethos and creates a worldview rooted in understanding the relationship between the spiritual and the temporal.

Bhai Gurdas Singh wrote in Ramkali Var Patshahi Dasven Ki (1787) about the institutionalization of the Miri-Piri doctrine in the formation of the Khalsa. The Sikh is developed from the time of Guru Nanak Sahib, and the Khalsa organization is the institutional embodiment of Miri-Piri. Bhai Gurdas discusses what the Khalsa is doing and how the world was affected:

Divine Wisdom originated from the command of the supreme Guru, the Timeless One.
Then, the Khalsa was chiseled naturally as a complete human.
The Singhs rose roaring; the whole world was in awe.
Cemeteries, temples, crematoriums, and mosques were deconstructed to fields.
Vedas, Puranas, six Shastras, Quran too were ousted.
Prayer-calls and salutations were ousted, Sultans were killed.
All Mirs and Pirs went into hiding; the religions went upside down.
Maulanas and Qazis were exhausted, did not have any insights.
Hundred-thousand Pandits, Brahmins, and astrologers were caught indulging in vices.
They were also in great doubts while worshipping stones and gods.
This is how both ways were greatly soaked in deception.
This third school of the Khalsa originated as the supreme.
They flashed their sword by the command of Guru Gobind.
They remembered the Timeless after defeating all enemies.
Again such a command of the Timeless was revealed in the world.
Then, the Turks trembled because no one could force circumcisions.
This is how the whole nation of Muhammad was eventually frustrated.
Then, the drumbeats of victory sounded in the world, ending pains and sorrows.
This is how the Third Panth of the great warriors started.
Awesome, awesome is Gobind Singh, Himself the Guru as well as the disciple.²

This was written post-Guru Gobind Singh Sahib. The first line refers to the command of the supreme Guru, IkOankar. The Khalsa is the Divine's; the Khalsa was chiseled as a religious-political archetype of the complete human, new to the already existing organized religions. This archetype came from the Wisdom, which came from the Divine. The one who is translating this Wisdom is Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, the ones who chiseled this Khalsa into being were Nanaks 1-10.

This is historic, but not in terms of describing a specific event; this is a narrative about what the Khalsa did in the 18th century. The invocation of Singhs refers to those who are warriors; though they were primarily Sikh men, warriors were not limited to only men. Bhai Gurdas discusses the context of that time: that cemeteries and crematoriums and temples and mosques were turned into fields – physically, emotionally, and mentally. He refers here to the elimination of a sense of “sacred” space or organized religion that dictates sacredness. The Khalsa made all of these things irrelevant.

Sultans were killed. The Khalsa destroyed rulers. And when that happened, the political figures and the spiritualists went away too. This is how weak the existing organized religion was – they were only thriving and continuing because of the rulers who ruled with might and with spiritual and political figureheads. The scholarly Muslims and the law interpreters had no insights when this happened. They could not figure out what to do. The Hindu high castes and priests were not even looking for insights because they were busily engrossing themselves in vices. The Khalsa is presented as the third “religion,” the third school, the third organized entity. This is how Mughal Emperor Babar’s dynasty (the Turkish dynasty, the Mughal empire) crumbled. This is how the nation of Muslims, the Ummah, was frustrated. This goes back to the idea that conventionally organized religion crumbles when the king is gone, and so are his court members.

Both the Hindu and the Muslim organized religions are critiqued here against the new organization of the Khalsa, of the people, and by the people. The Khalsa did not separate Mir and Pir. The Khalsa is made of Sikhs aspiring to be the Miri-Piri people, who practice this doctrine not just in their slogans but also in their lived remembrance.

Miri and Pir are two separate entities in the world when referring to the mortals. Mostly they are part of the lists: Mir when it is about politicians, Pir when it is about spiritualists. Mir and Pir are also used for 1-Divine. The following is one example of this kind of reference in the Guru Granth Sahib:

*Compassion is the Mecca, dust of feet (mentorship of seekers) is the fast.
Understanding and living the words of the Pir is the heaven.
Khuda is maiden, light, and fragrance; devotion to Allah is the best chamber.^v*

– Guru Granth Sahib 1084

The Hujra mentioned in the above excerpt is the chamber in which to enjoy the maidens as promised by the Qur'an. Here, ideas about what one ought to be seeking out to receive the promised gifts from the One are being challenged in favor of larger principles and inculcation of virtues. Compassion is the Mecca, mentorship of seekers is the fast, understanding, and living the words of the spiritual is heaven, the Divine is the maiden, and devotion to the Divine is the place to enjoy.

Know in your heart; all is temporary.

Family-home and siblings are all entanglements.

Mirs, rulers, and wealthy are mortals; only Khuda's Court is eternal.^{vi}

– Guru Granth Sahib 1084

Here, the Guru tells the political people who think they are immortal, who think their rule is eternal, that they too will eventually leave the earth, and that their rule will perish.

So, while the world distinguishes the Mir and the Pir, the Sikh paradigm integrates them. 1Force's Wisdom revealed that the Guru shared and lived Miri-Piri. The Sikhs aspire to understand and live it. The same idea is recorded in many secondary texts. In "Hikaitan" (composition attributed to Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, though contested), the Divine is labeled as both the Mir and the Pir as well:

[Khuda] is both the Mir and the Pir in both the worlds.

Khuda is the giver of all gifts and comforts.³

Bhakti-Shakti

A phrase that is similarly invoked to point to Miri-Piri is the phrase Bhakti-Shakti. Bhakti and Shakti are two sides of the Guru. While deep internal contemplation and devotion (Bhakti) and the exuberant worldly power (Shakti) are often painted as dichotomous, Sikh history, texts, architecture, and art demonstrate their interwoven and complementary nature.

However, this phrase does not come up in any primary or secondary texts up to the mid-1800s. It has primarily been invoked in the last century. Although this is a yogic idea with no textual foundation in Sikhi, it is a construct used to explain the Miri-Piri doctrine. It is worth mentioning that this idea is commonly practiced and understood. Still, its foundations do not lie within the Guru Granth Sahib, which, when mentioning *sakt*, invokes *Siv Sakt*, and *Bhagti* (variation of Bhakti) invokes devotion.

Popular Hindu belief is that the union of Siva (shiva) and Sakti (shakti) powered all things in creation. Interpretations of Siva-Sakti include Shiva's power or Maya, pairing of Shiva-Parvati (Shiva's wife), and Satvik (positive) and tamsik (negative) virtues. In Sikhi, this view is entirely disrupted by the statement that those who inculcate Sabad so that it resides in their minds can break bondages:

*After 1-Self created Siva-Sakti, 1-Self Creator operates the command.
1-Self operates the command and observes, gives rare Wisdom-oriented understanding.
[They] break bondages to become free by residing Sabad in their minds.
Whoever 1-Self enables, they become Wisdom-oriented and connect with the One.
Nanak voices: 1-Self is the creator, and 1-Self gives understanding of the command.^{vii}*

– Guru Granth Sahib 920

Even the words Bhagti and Sakti do not appear together in the Guru Granth Sahib. Bhakti-Shakti seems to be an adoption used to explain Sikhi within the context of more Indological frameworks in the 20th century and appears in verbal *kathas* or explanations. The term is an important part of the Sikh ethos. It was important in *developing* the Sikh ethos. While the earlier bhagats (devoted) placed emphasis only on Bhagti, or loving devotion to the divine through renunciation of the world, the Gurus conceived of a Bhagti very much of the world in the form of Bhakti-Shakti. They wanted to inculcate along with love and devotion to IkOankar the spirit of fearlessness and valor among the Sikhs. Bhakti-Shakti refers to a worldly power motivated not by fear or by ego but by devotion to 1Force. Bhakti-Shakti helps us understand Miri-Piri. But it has no explicit mention in Guru Granth Sahib. The following is a source of Bhagti in Guru Granth Sahib:

*O Fellows, there is no devotion without the Wisdom-Guru.
Even if all long for it, the devotion is not realized without the Wisdom-Guru. Reflect.^{viii}*

– Guru Granth Sahib 31

Bhagti is a gift, a loving devotion for the 1Force that is realized via the Wisdom. The relationship encapsulated in Bhakti-Shakti is rooted in the relationship encapsulated in the principle of Miri-Piri. It is rooted in an active dissolution of binaries, active removal of barriers we might place between the "spiritual" and the "temporal" or the "religious" and the "political."

Thus, there is a clear relationship between investment in the material world and devotion to 1Force. The Bhakti-Shakti principle means that whatever a Sikh does in the world is rooted in *Gurmat* (Guru-granted Sikh paradigm). A Sikh is constantly working toward developing an understanding that creates a higher consciousness through *Bhagti* and continually working toward force or power for the sake of experiencing, identifying with, and connecting to IkOankar through *Shakti*. Bhagti reminds a Sikh what to center themselves in, what ought to motivate their Shakti or worldly actions, and that the only true eternal Sovereign is *Akal Purakh* (Timeless Being).

In Bhagti, Sikhs find reflection, centering and re-centering, introspection, and devotion to the Vastness of IkOankar – beyond time and place. In Shakti, Sikhs take that reflection and turn it into action. These two seemingly dichotomous aspects are actually in constant conversation with one another. There *cannot* be one without the other. If one is sacrificed, the other suffers. The worldly power of a Sikh ought to be inherently devotional, the devotion of a Sikh ought to be inherently powerful. The two qualities belong to one another and are inherent to one another. This is a worldview about more than just one's actions; it is also about consciousness behind those actions – to use worldly power in a manner motivated by love and devotion to the One.

Tavarikh *History*

How do Sikhs assert their sovereignty through the Miri-Piri doctrine in shifting state relationships with various players? Through different times, different contexts, and with other states and powers, Sikhs throughout history have found ways to navigate the political landscape in a way that honors Miri-Piri.

The Sikh Revolution

The goals of the Sikh revolution, as described by Jagjit Singh, were:

1. To build up an egalitarian society
2. To use this new society as a base to wage an armed struggle against religious and political oppression
3. To capture political power by the Khalsa.⁴

These aims were integral parts of the Sikh thesis – that injustice, inequality, and hierarchism, in whatever form, must be combated. Sovereignty rooted in the eternal and not the worldly, rooted in *Akal Purakh* (Timeless Being) as the true Sovereign, is integral to the Sikh *raison d'etre* (reason for existence).

*To sit at another's door, O Farid!
Do not place me there, O Beloved!
If You are going to keep me like that,
Take my life-being out of the body.^{ix}*

– Guru Granth Sahib 1380

Here, Bhagat Farid's ask is to the beloved Sovereign, IkOankar: Do not make me subservient to any other authority but You. The understanding is clear: worldly sovereigns come and go, but the eternal Sovereign is IkOankar. Bhai Gurdas elaborates on this:

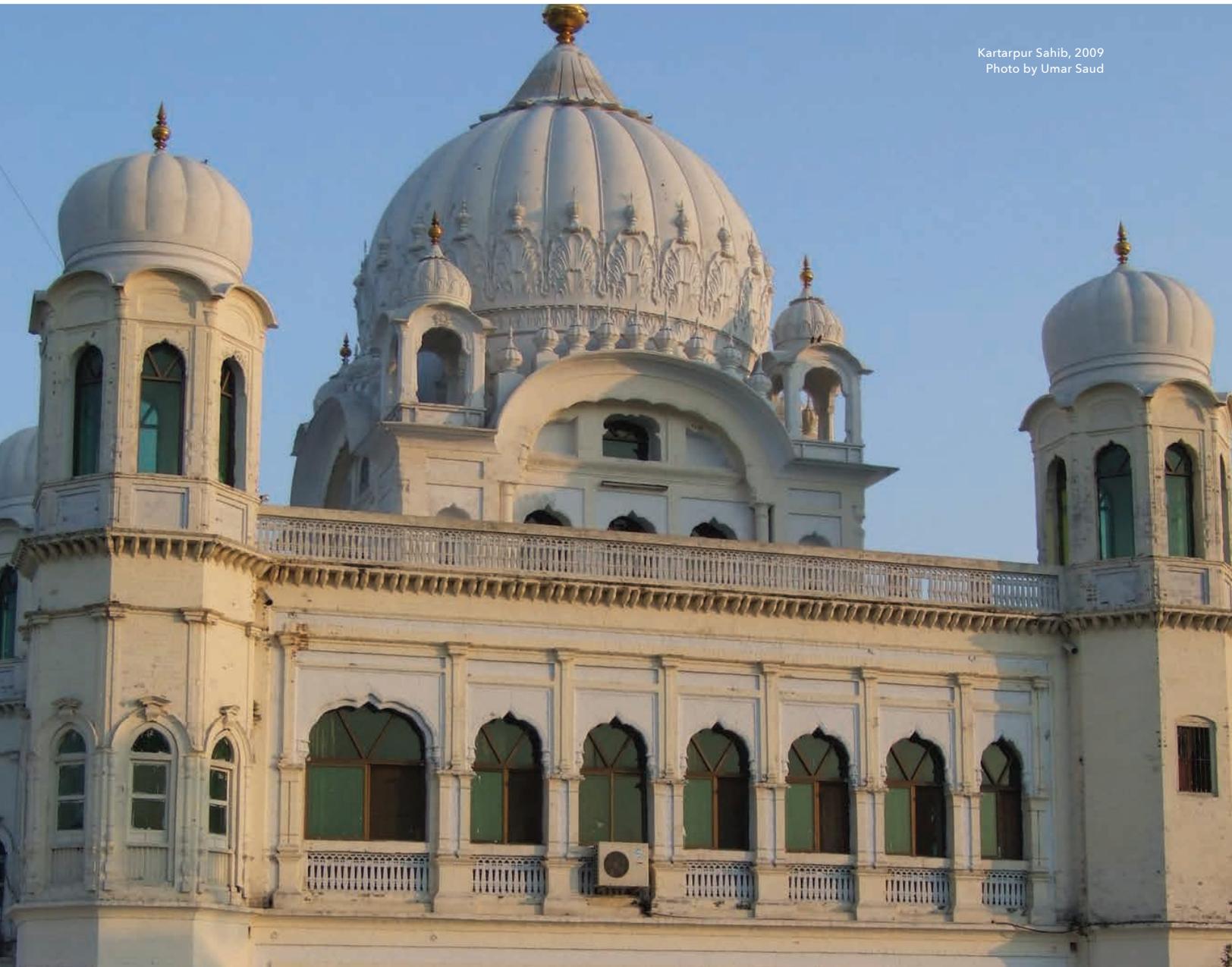
The eternal Guru [Nanak] is:
Eternal sovereign of the sovereigns,
Is the anointer of the sovereigns.
Presides over the eternal throne,
Lives in the eternal realm of divine company.
Eternal decree, eternal flag,
Eternal command cannot be reversed.
Eternal Sabad-Teaching and Mint-School,
those who connected with Sabad-Teaching Guru became Guru.
Eternal devotion, eternal treasure-house,
Enjoys the jewels of rag (musical measure) Sabad singing.
Eternal path is Guru-orientedness,
Administers eternal mandate and eternal rule.
Ascends twenty of the world (determination), ascending one of the Divine (love).⁵

– Bhai Gurdas, 26:1

Bhai Gurdas says that those who connect with the “Sabad-Teaching Guru” became Guru, in reference to those who came after Guru Nanak Sahib in the Guruship: Bhai Lahina connected with Sabad to become Guru Angad, Bhai Amru connected with Sabad to become Guru Amardas, and so on. This is not about the body being eternal or about the embodied Gurus as eternal, but about the Sabad-Guru being eternal. Miri-Piri started with the eternality of the Guru. The phenomena that Bhai Gurdas describes is that the *embodied* Gurus change because of connecting to that eternal Wisdom, and each Guru furthered that Wisdom. Bhai Gurdas says that the Guru ascends twenty of the world, which refers to the use of the phrase *vih visve*, used literally to describe an allotment of land equivalent to *twenty visve* (South Asian units that vary from one-third acre to three acres depending on the region), and figuratively used to imply perfection. The phrase was often used to refer to land-allotted Pandits and Brahmins and others whose voices were powerful and considered experts. Bhai Gurdas invokes this phrase to assert that the Guru is beyond even this proclaimed highest state of existence. Bhai Gurdas emphasizes the establishment of Panth and the furthering of leadership here:

After [the triumphant] Multan journey, [Guru Nanak] then again came to Kartarpur. Day by day, the artful-impact kept increasing, [Guru] Nanak imparted contemplation of Nam-Identification in the dark-ignorance era. [Because] asking for anything except Nam-Identification causes the pain amongst the pains. In the world, [Guru] Nanak issued a coin (sovereign paradigm) and started the filth-free (ego-free) Panth (collective). Anointed [Bhai] Lahina while alive by raising the canopy (sovereignty emblem) over [Guru Angad's] head to establish Guruship. Connecting the light with the light (Guru Nanak's Wisdom to Bhai Lahina), Eternal-Guru Nanak now took another form (embodiment). [This mystery] no one comprehended; it was the wonder of the wonders. Transformed the body [of Bhai Lahina] to a beautiful form (Guru Nanak and Guru Angad became the one and the same).⁶

– Bhai Gurdas, 1:45



Kartarpur Sahib, 2009
Photo by Umar Saud

This was unparalleled in annals of world history: the mentor declared the protégé to be the next leader to supervise that same command and be followed by all, including the earlier leader, in all affairs Miri-Piri. Additionally, some relatives and followers questioned the anointment because it did not follow worldly hereditary norms and the existing religious or political conventions. Bhai Lahina became Guru Nanak's Own, becoming "Angad," meaning "part of my body." Hence, Guru Angad equally enjoyed the Raj-Jog.

The Sikh revolution is motivated by an understanding of Miri-Piri, a deep identification with Akal Purakh, and the desire to see the principles of radical equality and 1-Ness reflected in the world. Professor Puran Singh writes:

Guru Nanak embodied in himself a revolution—religious, social and political... It is remarkable that he [Guru Nanak Sahib] invokes no concept [of] god. He calls forth the Great One Cosmic Spirit of the Universe, who is Person and Guru, and is a Personal God, who is Word-embodied (Sat Nam), creative personality (Karta Purakh), devoid of the sense of fear, of hatred, whose form is timeless, eternal; born of the Spirit... This revolution in the religious world was manifested also by a corresponding revolution in society. A reconstruction followed. The individual was made so happy that he willingly shed his ego-centred individuality. Selfishness was washed into unselfishness by his great love, in the great gladness of life so realized... No man or society that has risen from the dead into the life of the spirit can tolerate political subjugation or social slavery to unjust laws or rules. Politics, in the sense of fighting against all social injustice, all tyranny, all wrong taxation of the poor, all subjugation of man to man were the 'politics' of the Guru... The Sikhs raised by the Guru fought for freedom... their very fighting for liberty is the mark of the new soul consciousness that the Guru had awakened in them.⁷

The Ten Nanaks (1469–1708)

How did the Gurus further the goals of the Sikh Revolution?

The principle of Miri-Piri began with Guru Nanak Sahib and was implemented and furthered throughout the Guru period by each Guru.

Guru Nanak Sahib was a learner, scholar, and teacher of the world who acquainted himself with Hindu, Muslim, and other faith systems. The Guru's revelation of IkOankar, One Universal Integrative Force, of radical 1Ness, was a major disruption to the Indic systems of caste and hierarchy that permeated society and continues to permeate Indian society today. A misconception is that Guru Nanak Sahib did not think of the worldly needs of the people. To give practical and worldly shape to the principle of equality, Guru Nanak Sahib instituted the custom of *langar* – interdining in a common mess hall attached to every place of learning and worship.



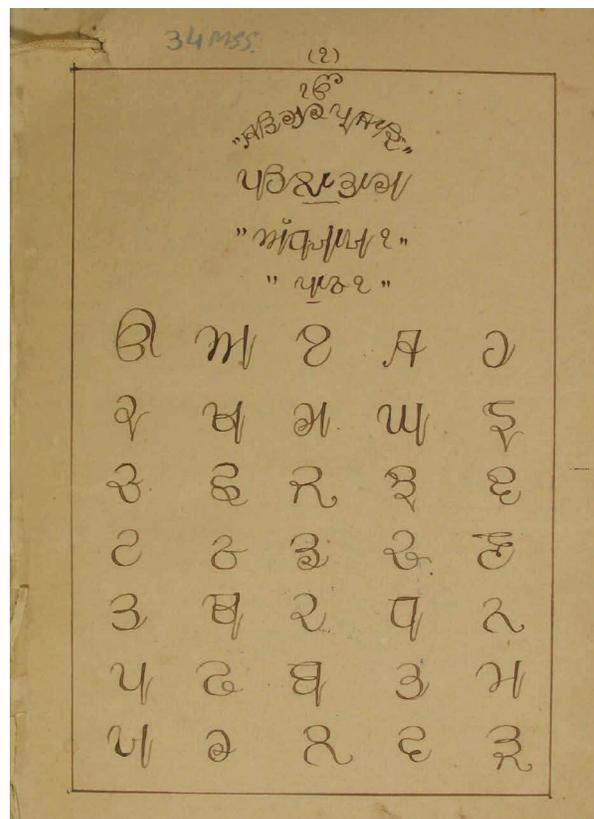
Langar Hall at Harimandar Sahib, Amritsar
By Nicolas Mirguet, 2016

Additionally, “no devotion or programme of life was genuine which did not lead to the love of mankind, which in practice must mean social service. He laid down very simple rules of conduct, which did not forge any new shackles in place of the old ones, and left the people to work out their social conscience themselves.”⁸

Guru Nanak Sahib, both in *Asa Ki Var* (Song of Hope) and in the earlier quoted Babarvani, offered commentary on the corruption and hypocrisy of the political and religious elites, and warned the common people against falling for their manipulation. The abolition of caste was not the only goal of the Sikh revolution. It was also to fight the religious and political oppression of the rulers. With the introduction of the new paradigm of IkOankar and his challenging oppressive systems and rulers, Guru Nanak Sahib embodied the Miri-Piri doctrine.

Guru Angad Sahib furthered the goal of the Sikh Revolution by codifying the *Gurmukhi* script to accommodate all prevalent languages of the people of South Asia, which served as a reminder of a Sikh's duty to the Guru while organizing and accommodating the masses and their diverse languages. This was also a challenge to the Muslim and Hindu priestly hegemony. The codification of a new script served as a blow to Brahmins who were validated and uplifted by their knowledge of Sanskrit, which was considered the "language of religion." The codification of script allowed people to organize (a furthering of Miri) while also allowing them access to the same wisdom without priestly intermediaries (a furthering of Piri).

Guru Amardas Sahib furthered the Miri-Piri doctrine by continuing to develop langar, asking everyone to partake before seeing him, including Mughal Emperor Akbar and the Raja of Haripur. This was a physical manifestation of the renunciation of social prejudices and a physical acknowledgment of 1Ness and radical equality. He also founded 22 *Manjis* (administrative units) to further the Guru's mission and keep the various populations of Sikhs in touch with the center. The establishment of Manjis was a form of organizing to consolidate political power and a way to foster further political power through education. He also integrated Sikh doctrine, rejecting Hindu philosophy and using the Guru's words for worship and ceremonies. This further strengthened the accomplishment of working to build up an egalitarian society centered around Sikh principles.⁹

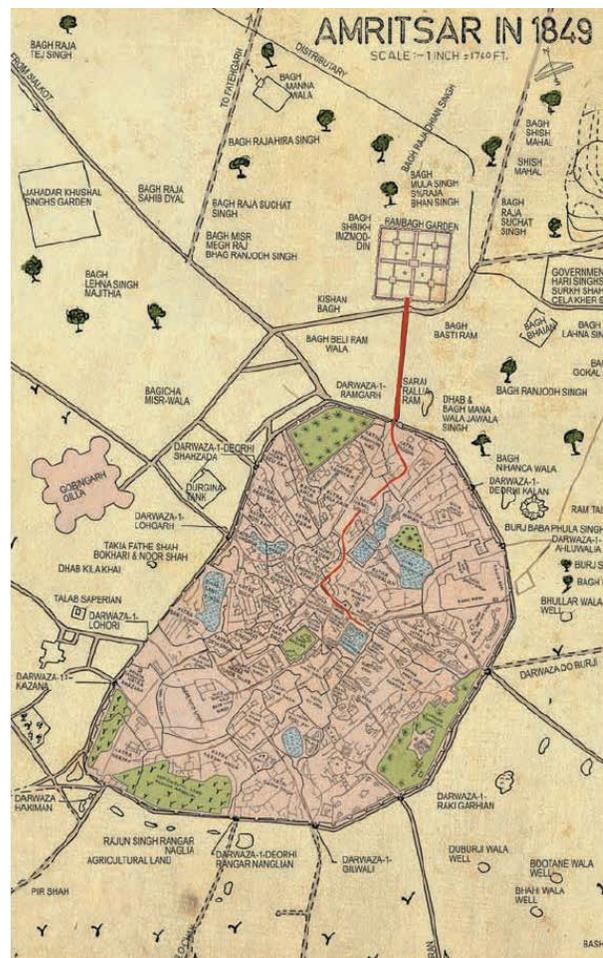


Gurmukhi Alphabet
Courtesy of Panjab Digital Library

Guru Ramdas Sahib founded a new city, Amritsar, which grew to be the biggest center of trade in the North. This was important not because the Gurus themselves did not have worldly resources; some Gurus did, other Gurus did not in their worldly existence. Instead, with their guidance, the people took an active part in city-building because there were no prejudices against labor and trade due to spiritual growth. The establishment of a city allowed for centralized power and a center for trade, furthering the Miri-Piri doctrine.

Guru Arjan Sahib founded Harimandir Sahib, with four doors open on all sides to symbolize both humanity and universalism. Guru Arjan Sahib, through the ideas of Guru Nanak Sahib, integrated Miri-Piri and lived this principle by refusing to rely on anyone who was solely spiritual or solely political and cultivating this principle in his Sikhs. The spiritual and political heads of the time became worried that Guru Arjan Sahib's continuation of the mission of the Sikh Revolution spoke to all people regardless of caste, color, gender, or social category. It was a threat to the status quo and a threat to the power of those heads. To ensure unity of belief and practice, the Guru compiled works into the Adi Granth, which can be understood as the constitution or manifesto of Sikhs – yet another assertion of sovereignty. Harimandar Sahib, then, became the center to impart the vision and the culture as enshrined in the Adi Granth. This is how Miri-Piri was being institutionalized.

The harshness with which Mughal Emperor Jahangir treated Guru Arjan Sahib appears to have stemmed more from the perceived political threat than from hostility to Sikh religious doctrines. Religious leaders who cultivated large popular followings suffered persecution.¹⁰ The martyrdom took place under the orders of Emperor Jahangir during the second year of his reign. Nothing exists in a vacuum; most likely, it was the combination of familial animosity, Sikhi growth, and political challenge. Sikhi was perceived as a threat to Islamic supremacy. Any sort of "Sikh-Muslim conflict" or religious fanaticism was not the determining factor that is said to have led to the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Sahib. Rather the cause of the martyrdom was grounded in the inherent conflict between the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces. A state exercises its power whenever it perceives that its hegemony is being defied by those whom it identifies as rebel or counter-hegemonic or anti-establishment.¹¹



1849 Map of Amritsar

Guru Harigobind Sahib, as part of his childhood education, received training in horse riding, swordsmanship, and warfare under the guidance of Baba Buddha.¹² His emphasis on the protection and defense of the community was not a turn away from Guru Nanak Sahib's vision. Thus, the manifestation of The Guru's institution of rule existed with Guru Nanak Sahib, with the full scope of the foundation being laid by each of the Ten Gurus. This vision culminated into the physical structure of Akal Takht Sahib, or at the time Akal Bunga (Timeless fortified residential watchtower), as institutionalized by Guru Harigobind Sahib.

In fact, prior to the *shahidi* (martyrdom) of Guru Arjan Sahib, the Guru gave a parting message to his son, who would later become Guru Harigobind Sahib, as recorded in a commentary of the 11th Var (Ode) of Bhai Gurdas, by Bhai Mani Singh, the 18th-century Sikh scholar. Bhai Mani Singh records that Guru Arjan Sahib, while being tortured before his eventual martyrdom, sent two Sikhs, Bhai Sigaru and Jaita, with the following message to Guru Harigobind Sahib:

The arms we are going to don, will don in the embodiment of the Guru Harigobind. The era of darkness-ignorance is coming. After acquiring knowledge of arms, we will seize the politics of the political. And by understanding the Infinite-Wisdom's love, we will grasp the spirituality of the spiritual. You shall remain in the presence of the Sixth Emperor.¹³

In 1606, the structure of the Akal Takht Sahib was created by Guru Harigobind Sahib, who laid the foundation for the building. Its construction was completed under the instruction of Baba Budha (c.1506-1631), revered Sikh *granthi* (one who knows the Granth), diplomat, and teacher, who performed Guruship ceremonies for the first five Gurus, and Bhai Gurdas. With the creation of Akal Takht Sahib and its relationship with Sri Harimandar Sahib, a physical manifestation of the Sikh principles of Miri-Piri is represented.

Akal Takht Sahib and Harimandar Sahib



On June 24, 1606, Bhai Buddha performed the investiture ceremony at Akal Takht Sahib, during which Guru Harigobind Sahib donned two swords, one on each side, symbolizing Miri-Piri sovereignty. The Guru sat on the Throne, delivered Gurmat explanations, listened to the people's complaints, and administered justice. Bards Natha and Abdulla described the event as witnesses. In South Asian traditions, many wear the turban as a status symbol. Natha and Abdulla, after describing the dual swords of Miri-Piri, ranked the status of the turban of Guru Harigobind Sahib higher than that of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir:

The Guru donned two swords:
one of politics, one of spirituality
One of grandeur, one of the Rule;
one protects the sovereign.
Your turban [matters], what of Jahangir?¹⁴

Akal Takht Sahib became the seat of Sikh power and gave the Sikhs a rallying point as a symbol of Sikh sovereignty. From the Akal Takht Sahib, the Guru administered justice like a king in a court, accepted gifts of arms and horses, and awarded honors and punishment. Guru Harigobind Sahib, for example, is noted as having 800 horses in the stables, 300 troopers on horseback, and 60 men with firearms at all times.¹⁵

Guru Harirai Sahib carried forward this tradition by maintaining an army that consisted of 2,200 mounted soldiers. The Akal Takht Sahib army came to be called the *Akal Sena* (immortal army), and its warriors were honored as the *Akalis* (the immortals). Akal Takht Sahib and Sri Harimandar Sahib are situated within the same complex, where one cannot be without the other – a physical manifestation of Miri-Piri. Without independent governance, one cannot freely think of spirituality, but all else is nullified without spirituality. Sikhs draw spiritual inspiration from Sri Harimandar Sahib and political vision from Akal Takht Sahib.

Guru Harikrishan Sahib embodied Miri-Piri when he did not appear before Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb when summoned to his court. It was not that the Guru refused all meetings with rulers, but that those meetings took place outside of courts in a neutral space or Gurduara. The meeting outside of courts of other rulers allowed for a meeting as equals. Defying a *summon* to the *court* of Emperor Aurangzeb was an assertion of sovereignty even when the subcontinent was under the rule of the Mughal empire.

Guru Teghbahadar Sahib embodied Miri-Piri when he was martyred after remaining steadfast to Sikh principles and defending the Kashmiri Brahmins from being persecuted and converted. This embodiment of the principle Guru Teghbahadar Sahib stuck to, "fear not, frighten not," was taken as a challenge to Emperor Aurangzeb's authority through the assertion of sovereignty outside of Mughal rule.¹⁶

Guru Gobind Singh Sahib emphasized literary activity to "infuse a new spirit among his followers and to steel their hearts against all injustice and tyranny."¹⁷ He inaugurated the Khalsa and led 20 odd battles with Hindu Chiefs and Mughals.

He aimed to make Sikhs strong enough to free themselves from oppression and maintain that freedom. He inaugurated the Khalsa, merging the personality of the Guru with the ranks of his disciples, freeing Sikhs by giving them self-respect and human dignity, and building up a nation of the Khalsa. *Khalsa* has its roots in the Arabic *Khalis*, meaning “pure, free from, or belonging to.” There is a connotation in the word of belonging directly to the Sovereign, and a notion that if one has become “pure” in their virtues, they have become like the One, IkOankar, and are at once sovereign and at once belong to the One.

There is a play in the understanding of sovereignty even with the Khalsa, who are sovereign on earth (meaning they did not bow to any worldly authority except the Guru, for they belong the Guru), but who recognized that the only eternal Sovereign is IkOankar. The Khalsa would continue to make Guru Nanak Sahib’s revolutionary vision a reality in the world, a vision that understood earthly freedom to be rooted in spiritual freedom, and that the two could not be separated from one another.

Kapur Singh writes:

In the 1708, Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, after discussions and parlays with the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, the son and successor of Aurangzib, came to the firm conclusion that “all means of peaceful persuasion” had failed, and it had, therefore, become the right and duty of Sikhs to ‘move the hand to the hilt of the sword’, and in the same year (February 1708), the Guru initiated a Hindu yogi and occultist, Madhudas bairagi, as a Sikh and renamed him Banda Singh, and then appointed him the Generalissimo of the Sikhs, after conferring upon him the military title Bahadur. Banda Singh Bahadur, was then ordered to proceed to Panjab with the assignment of ‘due chastisement of the Mughal rulers, who have usurped the power that belongs to the people, condign punishment of those guilty of atrocities, destruction of their military bases and reestablishment of the freedom of the people.’¹⁸

Nishan Sahib at Sirhind Fatehgarh Sahib, Panjab
By J. Nara



The principle of Miri-Piri began with Guru Nanak Sahib, and the implementation of that principle, in all of its manifestations, can be seen throughout Guru Nanaks I-X period in ways that are particular to the context of the time. Every Guru developed institutions and prepared Sikhs to internalize this foundational principle and implement it in the physical space.

The Khalsa Raj (1709–1716)

How did Banda Singh Bahadar continue the Sikh Revolution rooted in Miri-Piri?

Banda Singh Bahadar was commissioned by Guru Gobind Singh Sahib to initiate a process of political change and reform, continuing the Sikh Revolution.¹⁹ Banda Singh called for radical unity and revolution of the oppressed. It was a proclamation calling upon all those who suffered at the hands of oppressive Zamindars or were tormented by anti-social elements, bullies, and despots, to join him to get justice. It evoked an overwhelming response from people of all faiths, including Hindus and Muslims – to create a vision for a people’s revolution.²⁰ He ensured that places of religious worship were not allowed to be touched in any endeavors to build up the Khalsa Raj in an effort to prevent the struggle from being reduced to a sectarian strife.²¹

In 1710, Banda Singh declared the freedom of the province of Sirhind, fixed as its capital the fortified Mukhalispur, in the hills, near Ambala, and the Sikhs adopted the legend on their State Seal, which began:

We hereby place our impress of sovereignty upon both the worlds, the seen and the unseen.²²

The Sikh Nation also had a Khalsa Coin (1711) and Seal (1710), further asserting their sovereignty:



Khalsa Coin ca. 1712
American Numismatic Society South Asian Collection

Coin struck in both the worlds by the guarantee of Guru Nanak's Sword — By the grace of sovereign Master, victory to Guru Gobind Singh, the king of kings.²³

Minted in the age of peace by the blessed fortune of the Khalsa sanctioned by the glorious throne in the city. Year 2 [Calendar commenced upon conquering Sirhind in 1710].²⁴

The cauldron to feed, sword to defend, and the resultant victory have been achieved with the unrestrained help received from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh.²⁵

Under Banda Singh, new government positions were appointed to the administration of the Khalsa Raj, the Zamindari system was abolished, land was returned to its original tillers in a land revolution, and lower classes were appointed as Thanedars and Tehsildars.²⁶ Even Banda Singh's enemies wrote that he "ruthlessly annihilated social inequalities born out of caste prejudices, enforced rigid abstinence of the Sikhs from adultery, and otherwise adopted codes of conduct for his forces."²⁷ The Khalsa Raj showed that "oppressors were liable to be called upon to account for their sins of omission and commission...[unleashed] dynamic forces in the body politic and...instilled irrepressible confidence in the community."²⁸

And thus, through the establishment of the Khalsa Raj and the overturning of various class-based and religion-based systems of oppression, the fundamental doctrine of Sikhi, that of Double Sovereignty, of Miri-Piri, was reiterated and furthered.

The Ghallugharas, the Dals, and the Misls (1716–1799)

How did Sikhs organize under Miri-Piri Doctrine after Banda Singh Bahadar's martyrdom?

After the collapse of political power of the Sikhs under Banda Singh Bahadur in 1716, the Sikhs shifted their center of activities, both spiritual and political, to the Harimandar Sahib and the Akal Takht Sahib.

Sirdar Kapur Singh writes:

Ever since 1721, the Golden Temple with the complex of attached structures, has remained the centre of the Sikh world, the Sikh history, the Sikh politics, and the Sikh theophany. Throughout the last 250 years, whether the Sikhs were declared as outlaw by the State, whether the Golden Temple and its adjuncts were reduced to mass of ruins or they were forcibly occupied by the State, whether the Sikhs were a sovereign people or politically subjugated, they have never abandoned or compromised the position that (1) the Golden Temple and its adjuncts are the hub of the Sikh world, not as a matter of concession by any worldly power, but as the inherent right of the Sikh people, sui generis and inalienable, and (2) there is no ultimate dichotomy in the true Sikh doctrine between this world and the next, the secular and the religious, the political and the spiritual.²⁹



Harimandar Sahib and Akal Takht Sahib c 1890
Photo from Library of Congress

Harimandar Sahib as the theo-political center was deeply ingrained in the Sikh psyche and became a powerful stimulus to the Panth as the fulcrum of its self-assertion.

Bhai Mani Singh, the 18th-century Sikh scholar and martyr, sought to perfect ideas of Granth and Panth – Sarbat Khalsa, the whole community, acting as Guru. That was a democratic concept, far ahead of its time, and led to the concept of *Gurmata* (Guru's decision) taken by the community under the primacy of Akal Takht Sahib.³⁰

Bhai Mani Singh also contributed the medium of *Ardas* (collective supplication), which continues today, recounting the deeds and contributions of both Sikh men and women throughout history, honoring those who gave their lives for the Panth, serving as a groundswell of hope and inspiration by connecting the past with the present. During this period, Sikhs faced widespread persecution, many abandoned their homes and lived in the jungle. After spending years in the jungles being hunted, the guerilla tactics Sikhs had perfected gave them enough resources to be considered for the title of Nawab. Zakaria Khan, governor of Lahore, wanted to co-opt them into the system. Kapur Singh was the first and last Sikh Nawab and created *Budha Dal* (war veterans of over 40 years old to manage shrines and teach) and *Taruna Dal* (people under 40 to fight in times of emergency).³¹ It was Bhai Mani Singh who helped Sikhs perfect and live out the principle of Granth-Panth, and it was through this centering the Sikhs developed political ambitions to emerge as sovereigns of the Panjab, in addition to developing the ability to survive ruthless persecution.³²

Zakaria Khan offered substantial rewards for information on the whereabouts of Sikhs. Prices were put on Sikh heads. Looting and killing were deemed lawful. Sikhs were publicly executed at the horse market of Lahore, since renamed "*Shahidganj*," place of the martyred.³³ Khan proclaimed that no Sikh was alive anymore. In the act of defiance, Bhai Bota Singh and Bhai Garja Singh levied taxes on Panjab's busiest road (connecting Lahore to Delhi). They sent a letter to the state, proclaiming that the Khalsa was very much alive and asserting the sovereignty of the Panth.

After Zakaria Khan's death, the dispute over succession enabled Sikhs to consolidate and leverage their political position. In 1745, they assembled at Amritsar and issued Gurmata; the Sarbat Khalsa resolved to "organize the existing bands ranging from a dozen to larger numbers into 25 sizable regiments of cavalry under the overall command of Nawab Kapur Singh."³⁴

In 1746, Sikhs attacked Lahore, and military commander Jaspat Rai was killed by a group of Sikhs. His brother, Lakhpat Rai, revenue minister of Lahore, mobilized troops with the help of the new governor, Yahiya Khan, and called for the genocide of Sikhs. This came to be known as the *Chota Ghallughara* (Small Massacre). 15,000 Sikhs were killed,³⁵ and Sikh scriptures were desecrated and destroyed.³⁶

On Vaisakhi, March 29, 1748, the Sikhs, by a Gurmata, decided to form the Dal Khalsa by reorganizing over 60 *jathas* (bands) into 12 *misl*s (associations) under the leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluvalia. The cumulative forces of the *misl*s were termed **Sarbat Khalsa**, the entire Panth, and formed a commonwealth or confederacy without any regular constitution. In 1762, the *Vada Ghallughara* (Large Massacre) of 1762 (30,000 killed) took place.

In 1783, Baghel Singh, leader of the Karora Singhia Misl, led Sikhs into Delhi with Jassa Singh Ahluvalia. They raised the *Nishan Sahib* at the Red Fort. Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II reached a settlement with them that allowed Baghel Singh to build commemorative Gurduaras on Sikh historical sites and involved the Mughal State paying tribute to the Sikhs using a portion of the collected taxes (about 12.5%).

This Misdari period lasted three and a half decades, with Jassa Singh Ahluvalia proclaimed *Sultan-ul-Qaum*, the Supreme Leader of the Nation. Jassa Singh and the Dal Khalsa consolidated the Panjab. As a leader of the Dal Khalsa, Jassa Singh had organized the Sikhs militarily, overthrown Afghans, and won the right for Sikhs to rule Panjab independently. Sarhind came under Phulkian, Lahore under Bhangis, Jalandhar Doab distributed among several *Misl*s, and Kapurthala under Ahluvalias. However, the *Misl*s failed to weave themselves into a federal setup; there was a lack of unity of purpose. This led to *Misl*s forming alliances with outside forces or forming leagues within the confederation to fight each other over trivialities. The institutions of Sarbat Khalsa and Gurmata fell into disuse. However, in the 1780s, the Phulkian Misl's daughter, Bibi Sahib Kaur, without the support of her own Misl, was able to fight and defeat the Marathas with the help of other *Misl*s. She was able to practice Miri-Piri in her own way, even without the backing of the Misl through other alliances.³⁷

Despite the imperfections of this period, Miri-Piri was furthered. This is evidenced by the institutionalization of Sarbat Khalsa, the whole community acting as Guru, and the concept of Gurmata taken by the community under the primacy of Akal Takht Sahib. It is evidenced by the creation of the Budha and Taruna Dals. And it is evidenced by the leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluvalia. During this period, two goals of the Sikh revolution were further pursued: to use this new society as a base to wage an armed struggle against religious and political oppression and capture political power by the Khalsa.

*The Sikh Empire (1799–1849)
How did Ranjit Singh maneuver
relationships with the British and the
Afghans in an attempt to live out the
Miri-Piri Doctrine?*

Ranjit Singh, commander of the Sukerchakia Misl, was made responsible for the security of Amritsar, defending the city against Shah Zaman, who sought to take over Panjab. Because of this, Ranjit Singh was petitioned by communities in Lahore to capture the city and take them under his protection. His capture of Lahore in July 1799 without any resistance marked the ending of the Misaldari system and the beginnings of the rise of the Sikh monarchy. During the Misl period and of the monarchy of Ranjit Singh, no concerted effort was made to instill the teachings of the Gurus in the people's mind or take care to keep those teachings.³⁸

One of the notable elements of the Sikh Empire was the series of treaties formed between Sikhs, the British, and other nation-states. There were treaties between Sikhs and the British *before* Ranjit Singh, but the number of treaties and alliances during his rule is worth exploring. The following are summaries from Sikh Cyber Museum, which references the Encyclopaedia of Sikhism by Harbans Singh.

The First Anglo-Sikh Treaty (1806) was made between Sikhs and the East India Company, establishing a treaty of friendship. It was this treaty that prevented Panjab from becoming a theater of war between two foreign armies: The British and the Marathas.³⁹

The Second Anglo-Sikh Treaty (1809) left Ranjit Singh, the territories South of the river already in his possession. The British government would also accept the sovereignty of the Lahore Darbar and would in no way interfere with Ranjit Singh's dominions to the North of the Sutlej. Both governments pledged friendship with each other. Although the treaty of 1809 halted Ranjit Singh's ambitions at the Sutlej and prevented the unification of the Majha and Malva Sikhs into a new commonwealth of the Khalsa, it gave the Sikh sovereign one clear advantage. Security on the southern frontier allowed him freely to consolidate his power in the Panjab, evolve a centralized system of government, build up a powerful army, and pursue his conquests in the north, northwest, and southwest.



Maharaja Ranjit Singh by Emily Eden, 1844
From the Kapany Collection

The Tripartite Treaty (1838) between the British, Sikhs, and Afghans confirmed control of the Sikh Kingdom, in perpetuity, over the former Afghan possessions of Kashmir, Attock, Hazara, Peshawar and its dependencies up to the Khyber, Bannu, Tonk, Kalabagh and other dependent Waziri districts, the Derajat, and the rich and fertile province of Multan. For relinquishing its claims to Shikarpur, the Lahore Darbar, under British mediation, received 1,500,000 rupees out of the levy on the Amirs of Sindh.

Despite Ranjit Singh's contributions and various strategic treaties, his kingdom was ephemeral. Sangat Singh writes:

It contained within itself the seeds of its destruction. Ranjit Singh's lopsided appraisal of the fundamentals of his state, which constituted the basic nodes of his power, and his persistent failure to judge the character of the men he put in key positions and came to control the levers of power, especially at the time of his death, were the main factors for that.

In sharp contrast was Hari Singh Nalwa's public stand before the Maharaja, a decade before his death, when Ranjit Singh named Kharak Singh as his successor. Precisely, Nalwa stated, "This state belongs not to an individual, but to the Khalsa commonwealth. It is the sacrifices of a whole people over a century, blessed by the Guru's Grace, that we have won an empire. Let them choose who shall lead them by consensus (gurmata). Kharak Singh is my friend but not able to bear this burden. Let's not fail our people when they need our dispassionate lead most."⁴⁰



Hari Singh Nalwa

The Third Anglo-Sikh Treaty (1840), signed in the time of Maharaja Kharak Singh, provided for duties on a fixed scale, proportionate to the measurements of boats, and not on the variety of commodities.

The Fourth Anglo-Sikh Treaties (1846) after the end of the first Anglo-Sikh war, the British governor-general, Lord Hardinge, entered the Sikh capital and imposed upon the young Maharaja Duleep Singh, then only seven years old, a treaty of peace. The preamble to the treaty accused the Lahore government and the Sikh army of violating the treaty of 1809 by unprovoked aggression on British provinces. The territories of Maharaja Duleep Singh, situated on the left bank of the Sutlej, were confiscated and annexed. According to the treaty terms, the Maharaja renounced for himself and his heirs all claims connected with these territories. He ceded to the East India Company in perpetual sovereignty. The Sikh army was disbanded, and the strength of the new one to be organized was restricted to 25 battalions of infantry (20,000 men) and 12,000 cavalries. All guns used in the war were to be surrendered to the British. Maharaja Duleep Singh also agreed never to take or retain in his service any British subject nor any European or American national without the consent of the British.

The Fifth Anglo-Sikh Treaty (1846) provided for a British-controlled regency till the Maharaja came of age. Maharani Jind Kaur, who was acting as regent of her son, Duleep Singh, had believed that, as stipulated in the treaty of Lahore (March 1846), the British force would leave Lahore. But she was soon disillusioned as the British, instead of quitting, started strengthening their authority over the Lahore administration. The treaty transformed the Sikh Kingdom into a virtual British protectorate. The Darbar became a willing instrument subservient to the authority of the British resident, who was to superintend the internal and external affairs of the State in accordance with the instructions of the Government of India.⁴¹

Ranjit Singh did harness Sikh ideals and instruments to build his Kingdom. Sikh forces constituted the core of his power. He attributed his own achievements to the grace of the Guru. His acknowledgement of the wisdom of the Gurus and his unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib were in many ways a radical departure from the prevailing practice of his time.

The norm for other monarchies was that in any conflict between the monarch and the "church" – between the temporal and spiritual heads – the spiritual heads were more often than not overruled by the monarchy. In contrast to this, the sovereignty of the Khalsa Panth was asserted by Akali Phula Singh, a Nihang leader and an adviser to Ranjit Singh. This assertion of sovereignty was made when Ranjit Singh transgressed and asked for forgiveness. Forgiveness was granted on the condition that Ranjit Singh received the punishment of public lashing as decided by the Akali Phula Singh. Ranjit Singh agreed, and when he was ready to receive punishment in front of Akal Takht Sahib, Akali Phula Singh asked the sangat present if Ranjit Singh's willingness to accept the lashing was enough to earn him forgiveness. The sangat agreed, and Ranjit Singh was forgiven.

However, despite his reverence for Bani and Sikh history in his personal practice, Ranjit Singh openly contradicted Miri-Piri doctrine by setting himself up as a monarch with *absolute authority over the affairs of the state and over all Sikhs residing in it*. He thereby ignored the tradition Guru Gobind Singh had established by instilling in the Guru Khalsa Panth the Guruship and, therefore, authority and sovereignty. To attempt to dominate or rule over the Khalsa was like trying to dominate the Guru. Instead of decisions being arrived at collectively and by mutual consent, they were arrived at by individual decree.⁴²

The emphasis was on Miri and less on Piri. Ranjit Singh also had a deep distrust for his confederal cohorts. Instead of establishing a meritocracy as envisioned by Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, grounded in virtue and a code of service and self-sacrifice, Ranjit Singh established an aristocracy. There were those that Ranjit Singh appointed to positions of power within the Lahore Darbar, like Sham Singh Atariwala, who understood their roles and who tried to defend Panjab. There were even those after Ranjit Singh, like Bhai Maharaj Singh, who fought against post-Ranjit Singh Dogra dominance in the Kingdom of Panjab.

However, without realizing the basic foundations of his power and the fundamentals of his state, Ranjit Singh “passed on the levers of power to the hands of Dogras and Brahmins, and that too from outside the Panjab. They were infiltrators and had a longstanding animus against the Khalsa. That made him to err grievously.”⁴³

Ranjit Singh caused irreparable damage by dismantling the traditional management apparatus at Sri Harimandar Sahib and Akal Takht Sahib, the theo-political center of the Sikhs. Moreover, allowing for the state to take over management in 1824 was an affront to Sikh sovereignty at the Sikh center – the physical manifestation of Miri-Piri.

Sangat Singh sums up this period as follows:

Vigilance, it is well said, is the eternal price paid for the maintenance of liberty. The lack of Sikh vigilance against Brahminical infiltration in the wake of Abdali’s numerous invasions splintered the Sikhs socially, prevented consolidation of Sikh power in the hour of their triumph under the Misls, and caused a dent in Sikh theology. By 1849, Brahminism had not only shattered the Sikh political aspirations but also shaken the foundations of Sikhism to its core. Sikhism was now in a state of great perturbation.⁴⁴

The Sikhs and the Crown (1849–1947)

How was Miri-Piri Doctrine appropriated to serve British interests?

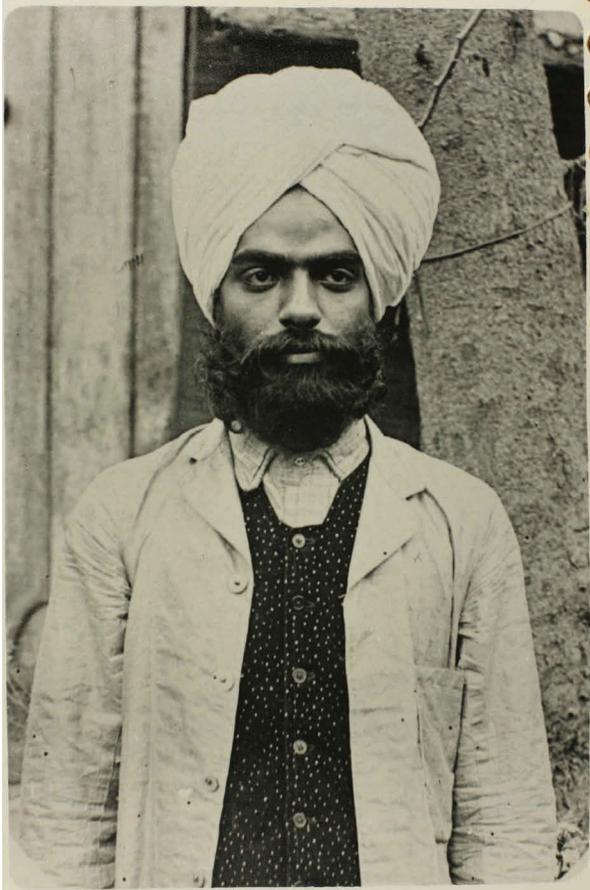
From 1849 to 1873, chaos ensued. The Sikh Empire had been lost. The British demobilized the Sikh army by putting over 8,000 of them in jail, most Sikh forts were demolished, and Sikhs were disarmed. There was an active effort by the British to pacify and divide Sikhs, recruiting them to serve in the British Army or police force in the colonies or keeping them busy with agriculture by providing large tracts of land with irrigation technology. Having Sikhs serve as extensions of the Imperialist state was rooted in the appropriation of Miri-Piri doctrine, stripping the understanding of sovereignty and service of its Sikhi and instead secularizing it to fit the Imperial narrative that Sikhs are protectors and fighters. It no longer was about honoring Miri-Piri through service to the people and the core principles of 1Ness. Instead, it was about honoring a version of Miri-Piri that made serving the Imperial power more palatable.

Mass conversions were taking place. Various sects were forming (Namdharis, Nirankaris, Christian and Muslim missionaries, Radha Soamis). Everything consolidated by Ranjit Singh was undone, and Sikh institutions were taken over by corrupt *mahants* (managers), whom the Crown encouraged. In Indic systems, mahants occupy a position of power in the Hindu religious order. They are often the heads of the priests at a temple or the head of their school of thought. This role was superimposed on Sikhs. The Gurus had created the position of a *masand*, an agent or representative within the community, which the Khalsa would later replace. Mahants, antithetical to the Sikh worldview, became superiors at the Gurduaras as head priests who often passed down the role through their hereditary line.

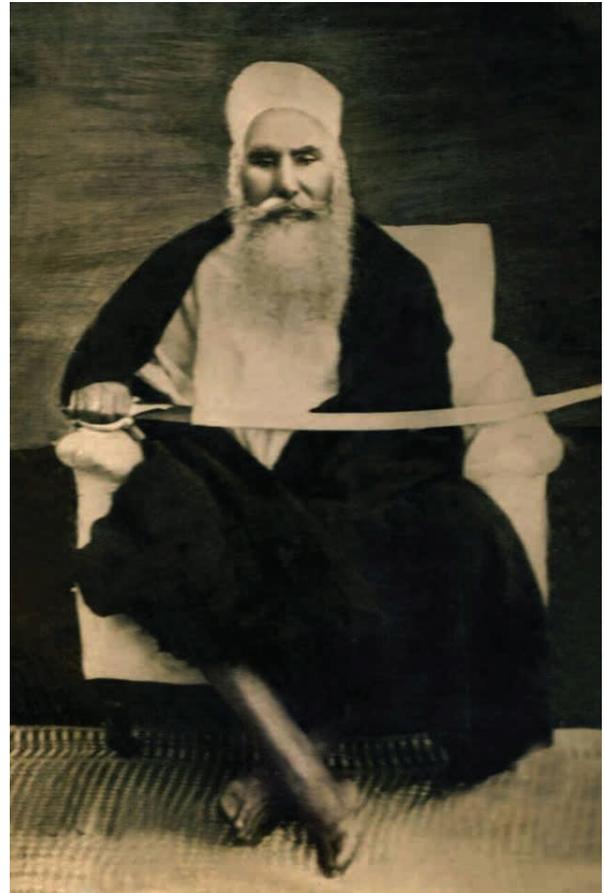
In 1857, the Sepoy Mutiny, an uprising against the British East India Company, occurred. Some Sikhs took part in the rebellion, others worked with the Crown to curb the uprising, and others avoided identifying with either side. The Sikhs fighting for the Crown were primarily credited with quelling the uprising.

The British set up separate Sikh Battalions with Gurduaras in all the cantonments and ensured their Sikh code of conduct. They printed the Guru Granth Sahib for soldiers to have with them at all times. They established *granthi* (one who knows the Granth) positions within Sikh regiments. They understood that they could not take the spirituality out of the Sikh officers, so they used it to their advantage. In this way, the Crown was able to emphasize Piri while subverting Miri and Sikh sovereignty ideas, associating Sikhi with fighting for the British Crown rather than an understanding of sovereignty rooted in serving the Timeless One sovereignty beyond worldly powers and nation-states.

At the same time, the British disliked those Sikhs who they thought to be only “pirs” or spiritualists like Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Attar Singh, who proved to embody both Miri and Piri in their actions. They were committed to defending the Panjab through economic and political activity and emphasizing the importance of education. They were seen as threats to the British Crown, as written in 1911 by Assistant Director of Criminal Intelligence for the Government of India, D. Petrie:



Bhai Vir Singh, Courtesy of Panjab Digital Library



Sant Attar Singh

Vir Singh is mentioned from many sources as a leading figure in the Sikh revival and as disloyal to the core. The same opinion is entertained of him by local officers ... He is reported to be making overtures to the Head Granthi of the Golden Temple with a view to bringing that institution under the control of the neo-Sikh party ... At present he has complete control of the Khalsa Tract Society. He is a member of the council of the Khalsa College... He may safely be regarded as a zealous neo-Sikh and thoroughly anti-British.⁴⁵

In 1859, the British drafted rules and regulations for the administration of Harimandar Sahib. A manager was to be appointed, guided by a council of nine initiated Sikhs. The drafted regulations stated that sole "ownership" of all Gurduaras was to be in the *Guru*, while the claim to discipleship was to be vested in the Khalsa. This, the British argued, paved the way for the Panth to eventually take over Harimandar Sahib under its direct management. However, the authority of the Crown to appoint a manager of its choice was one of the many rules and regulations that was unacceptable to Sikhs. The British were helping the mahants. The Crown eventually yielded after Sikhs were determined to oust the mahants. Harimandar Sahib came under the exclusive management of the Sikhs.

This period saw additional active anti-Sikh elements. Brahmins felt threatened by Sikhi and actively introduced the same Hindu myths, superstitions, gods, and incarnations into Sikhi which had all been rejected by the Gurus. Arya Samaj and other Hindu fundamentalist groups actively misrepresented Sikhi as a sect of Hinduism. Christian missionaries had also become active after Panjab's annexation by the British. With the Crown's support, they began building missionary schools and luring people to their institutions with promises of financial aid.

In this chaos, the Singh Sabha Movement, a Sikh educational movement founded in 1873, came about. The goals of the Singh Sabha Movement were:

1. To preach the real tenets, the doctrines, and the principles and religious practices of Sikhi to be strictly followed by Sikhs.
2. To curtail Brahmanical infiltration and the spread of Christianity among Sikhs by setting up educational institutions, Sikh schools, and colleges.
3. To set up newspapers and journals which would give the Sikh point of view against the misrepresentations propagated against Sikhi.
4. To set up Gurduaras and take steps to educate and awaken Sikhs toward correct perspectives.⁴⁶

The movement functioned as a recentering on Sikhi values, reemphasizing a rooting in foundations of Miri-Piri and an assertion of Sikh sovereignty through Panjabi language education, the establishment of the Panjabi Printing Press to publish newspapers and literature, and the establishment of Khalsa Schools. It was due to this that the period of 1900-1914 saw serious policy deliveries: conferences that set up Sikh schools, the founding of Chief Khalsa Divan to accommodate all Sikh leaders and coordinate their activities (1902), the removal of idols from Harimandar Sahib (1905), the Anand Marriage Act (1909, legalized the Sikh marriage ceremony, acknowledged separate Sikh identity and personal law), the formation of Khalsa Gurdwara Committee Delhi (1914, took over management of Delhi Gurduaras), and the exemption of the kirpan from the Arms act (1914), which allowed Sikhs to wear this article of faith. Sikhs began to take back their institutions. This period also saw the Ghadar movement, revolutionaries forming an international political movement for Indian independence, largely led by Sikhs.

Khalsa College Amritsar
By PL Tandon, 2018



In October 1920, the Sikhs held a meeting at Jallianwala Bagh, near Harimandar Sahib. They decided to take over Harimandar Sahib and Akal Takht Sahib and oust the mahants. Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar and twenty-five Sikhs were sent to do just that, and they took back the Sikh theo-political center. On November 15, 1920, a gathering of Sikhs took place at Akal Takht Sahib and decided to take over the management of all the Sikh Gurduaras by ousting the mahants without any further delay. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was elected by the Sikhs themselves for the management of Gurduaras. The meeting of this committee was held at Akal Takht Sahib in December 1920. Its office bearers were elected, and its constitution was drafted.⁴⁷

The Gurduara Reform Movement in the 1920s marked a turning point in the governance of Gurduaras, where the management was brought outside of the Sikh Panth into the Panjab Legislative Council. The Gurduara Reform Movement aimed to regain control of Gurduaras throughout Panjab from the mahants to whom the Khalsa had lost control of their institutions over the years. This movement eventually led to the introduction of the Sikh Gurduara Bill of 1925, which put all historical Gurduaras in India under the control of the SGPC. From then onwards, the management of Gurduaras, specifically in India, became intertwined with governmental control. The fact that the SGPC was essentially a British body was yet another tactic by the Crown to manipulate “Miri” via “Piri”.

The SGPC was created as a result of the Sikh Gurduara Act of 1925, functioning as a governance body for Gurduaras. The Sikh Gurduara Act was supported by the British Crown and pressured Sikh leaders to support it, even going so far as imprisoning some Sikh leaders until they agreed. Before the Gurduara Act, Jathedhars (leaders) were selected as per a merit-based Sikh tradition. Since 1920, however, the Jathedhars of Akal Takht Sahib have been appointed by the SGPC – effectively tying the SGPC to the governance of Akal Takht Sahib. The SGPC’s role in controlling the Akal Takht Sahib is not an original construct of the Sikh Panth, and in its current state, the separate authorities of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC are conflated. In 1920, The Shiromani Akali Dal was founded at Akal Takht Sahib to represent Sikh political interests.

In 1925, the Sikh Gurdwaras Act was written, declaring that:

1. All historical Sikh gurdwaras were to be under the direct control of SGPC.
2. Other gurdwaras, specified therein, were to be under the local management committees to be elected under the supervision of SGPC.
3. SGPC was to be elected by all the Sikh voters, and it was to elect its office bearer for one year.⁴⁸

The Sikh educational institutions pursued by the Singh Sabha Movement had been set up. The local Sikh population moved to set up Sikh schools and colleges in their areas to further the next generation’s education. With Sikhs in control of their institutions, the Akali Dal could devote time to Sikh political affairs. The Singh Sabha Movement and the various forms of resistance to the Crown and other oppressive forces were influential in further asserting the Miri-Piri doctrine even as there were active attempts to distance Miri from Piri or use Piri to manipulate Miri during this period.

After the 1849 annexation up to Indian independence, Sikhs chose to either ally with the British or participate in anti-British movements by being pro-Japan and pro-Germany during World War II. Sikhs like Mohan Singh became the General of the Indian National Army (INA), an armed force formed in 1942 by Indian collaborationists and Imperial Japan in Southeast Asia during World War II. Its aim was to secure Indian independence from the British Crown. The INA fought alongside Japanese soldiers in the Japanese campaign in Southeast Asia during World War II.

There were also Sikhs who took the route of being independently anti-British, like the Ghadarites, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Bhagat Singh, Randhir Singh, and the Babbar Akalis. Some had associations with the pan-India movement, while others were more Panjab-specific. The Ghadar Movement was an early 20th-century international political movement founded by emigrant Indians to fight for Indian independence from British rule. Kartar Singh Sarabha was an Indian revolutionary who helped found the Ghadar Party when he was only 15 years old, later becoming a leading member in the fight for Indian independence. Bhagat Singh was a socialist revolutionary inspired by the Ghadarites. These two acts of revolution against the British and execution at age 23 made him a folk hero of the movement for Indian independence. Randhir Singh was charged in 1914 with waging war against the British Crown and was sentenced to life imprisonment, dying in 1961. The Babbar Akali movement (1921-1925) was a radical outgrowth of the Akali movement for the reform of Gurduaras. The majority of the Babbars were returned immigrants from Canada, some of whom had actively participated in the Ghadar movement. The Babbars were initiated Sikhs against the British imperialist policies and did not agree with non-violence and noncooperation versions of resistance. The Ghadar dream continued through the Babbars. The movement was also alive in Diaspora Gurduaras, Khalsa Diwan Society (Vancouver and Victoria, BC, Canada) and the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan (Stockton, California, USA) funded and eulogized them.



Babbar Akalis on 16 May 1931
From Central Sikh Museum Collection

In the absence of understanding, or the deliberate appropriation and manipulation of Miri-Piri, the British used labels of “anti-state” and “terrorism” to suppress revolutionary Sikhs who embodied Miri-Piri. This practice, as elaborated upon in the next section, continued in the Indian state. However, despite the manipulation of the Miri-Piri doctrine by the British during this period, Sikhs still fought for collective freedom. They chose to go in different directions, forming different alliances based on their understandings of Miri-Piri and their politics. Educational movements created political movements which had centers in with Gurduaras in Panjab and the Diaspora and went all the way to 1947 – all fueled by Sikhi. This period raises an important question that is still relevant today: Can Sikhs work with different political parties and governments with varying ideologies *without* compromising their principles?

The Sikhs and the Indian State (1947–1984)

How did Sikhs protest against the Indian State using Miri-Piri Doctrine?

1947 and 1948 saw the formation of the Panjabi Suba Movement, a political protest led by the Akali Dal, demanding the creation of a Panjabi-speaking state. The Sikh population, after the Partition of Panjab, had become a majority population in a strategic land area for the first time in its history, with a new socio-political position. This enabled the Akali Dal to express Sikh political needs and provided the opportunity for Sikhs themselves to express a degree of autonomy from the Congress party and the central government through the Akali Dal. The movement was primarily conceived to secure a distinct Sikh political status as a safeguard for what was to be a small minority after independence. The Akali Dal considered the continued existence of the Sikh religion as predicated on the community acting as a consolidated political unit, which could only be effective with its own territorial unit. Regarding Sikh political participation as an integral to Sikh theology itself, as the Khalsa had been established in 1699 to organize religious Sikhs into a political community, one of Guru Gobind Singh’s signature contributions to Sikhism, the party received strong support from its base by offering this political organization rooted in religious tradition.⁴⁹

The movement gained momentum again in 1966. However, despite its success in creating the state of Panjab, its implementation left many unresolved issues behind. This included the allocation of the capital city of Chandigarh (the only state capital in the country to be shared with another state), adjustment of some of the territorial claims of Panjab, with many large Panjabi-speaking areas left out of the allocated state, and the distribution of river waters which remains unresolved. To address this, the Akali Dal would draft the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in the 1970s and re-launch the movement in the form of the Dharam Yudh Morcha in 1982.

The Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973 listed the demands of the Shiromani Akali Dal. The resolution included both religious and political issues. It asked for the recognition of Sikhs as separate from Hindus. It demanded that power be generally transferred from the Central to state governments and more autonomy be given to Panjab and all states to make India a “federal” nation.

The Akali Dal launched the Dharam Yudh Morcha of 1982 in partnership with Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale to fulfill a set of objectives based on the Anandpur Sahib Resolution.

June of 1984 saw the Battle of Amritsar, in which the borders of Panjab were sealed, and the Indian Army attacked Sikh the theo-political center, Harimandar Sahib. Dr. Joyce Pettigrew and Dr. Cynthia Mahmood wrote:

It was an attack “not on a political figure or movement but to suppress a religion, to attack their heart, to strike a blow at their spirit and self-confidence. The army ... went berserk and killed every Sikh man, woman and child who could be found inside the temple complex. They were hauled out of the rooms, brought to corridors on the circumference of the temple and with their hands tied behind their backs, were shot in cold blood.”⁵⁰

– Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Panjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerilla Violence*

Seventy thousand troops, in conjunction with the use of tanks and chemical gas, killed ... hundreds (possibly thousands) of innocent pilgrims, the day of the attack being a Sikh holy day. The Akal Takht ... was reduced to rubble and the Sikh Reference Library, an irreplaceable collection of books, manuscripts, and artifacts ... burned to ground. Thirty-seven other shrines were attacked across Panjab on the same day.⁵¹

– Cynthia Mahmood, *Death Squad, Anthropology of State Terror, 2000*

Akal Takht Sahib after the Battle of Amritsar, 1984



This state terror against Sikhs, contrary to state media narratives, was not a desperate last-ditch attempt. Lieutenant General SK Sinha (Indian Army General) stated:

...army action was not a last resort as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi would have us believe. It had been in her mind for more than 18 months. The army had begun rehearsals of a commando attack near Chakrata Cantonment in the Doon Valley, where a complete replica of the Golden Temple complex had been built... Another training involving Aviation Research Centre Commandos, was given in the Sarsawa area and Yamuna bed in helicopters converted into gunships. This plan, earmarked for implementation first in August last year (1983) and then in April this (1984) year, was given up as it had leaked out to the Sikh militants... In view of these military preparations, if Sant Bhindranwale and his men decided to defend the Golden Temple with all their might and means, no one can, and should, blame them... You are duty-bound to do your all when you know someone is going to raid your house. In this case, the house was the holiest Sikh Shrine in the world...⁵²

June 1984 also saw the beginning of Operation Woodrose, in which Sikh youth from villages were picked up and eliminated, leading to the deaths of hundreds of Sikhs and the arrest of thousands. November 1984 saw the genocide of Sikhs in another operation by the Indian State, targeting Sikh villages, shops, and homes and leading to the deaths of thousands and the rape of thousands. Though framed by State media as emotional riots, natural responses to the assassination of Indira Gandhi, these attacks were planned before the assassination of the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister's assassination ... Seized upon as a ... pretext ... to trigger a massive, deliberate, onslaught on the life, property, and honor of [Sikhs].⁵³

– Report of Citizen's Commission, 1985

The initial knee-jerk response had given way to what appeared to be a more systematic and organized outbreak of blood-letting. Sikhs were stabbed, burned, and butchered to death.⁵⁴

– BBC

Days of violence and loot and murder left the national capital dazed — an unprecedented holocaust. Criminally led hoodlum killed Sikhs, looted or burnt homes and properties while police twiddled their thumbs.⁵⁵

– India Today

The bodies beside the track were all Sikhs, some had burned while others burnt to death. The Sikhs were pulled from train by a Hindu mob outside New Delhi to face a slow death.⁵⁶

– Daily Mail

Master Tara Singh's words continue to ring true:

English-man has gone, but our [Sikh] liberty has not come. For us the so-called liberty is simply a change of masters, black for white. Under the garb of democracy and secularism, our Panth, our liberty and our religion are being crushed.

– Master Tara Singh, 1953

Rahit *Lifestyle*

When the religious and the political interact, both create conflict with the State. This is true in states that have official religions, like Greece, Pakistan, Malaysia, Armenia, Iran, and Hungary. It is also true in states that do not officially claim religious affiliation but that affiliate with one religion in the political sphere, like India, the United Kingdom, and the United States. There is a tension between self-proclamation towards a particular religion and the subsets of religious bodies that establish what that religious doctrine is and the State's requirements on those who proclaim religious affiliations. This was true in the United States when religious affiliation was more benign: when John F. Kennedy served as President of the United States, and his Catholicism became a significant point of tension for the State and the constituents, when Mitt Romney, a Mormon, ran for president, or when Jewish candidate Bernie Sanders campaigned. In India, it was true when religious affiliation was *central* to political ideology: when Hindu Nationalist Narendra Modi became prime minister. However, the questions of faith arise in politics primarily when those political figures are not affiliated with the majority religion.

When Sikhs are involved in policy-making positions in any nation-state, there is always tension between the State and the Panth. Even when Sikhs are just citizens, this is still the case. There is always a grey area in navigating that tension. After the establishment of the Khalsa was codified under the mentorship of Ten Gurus, the issue has become that everything is now legitimized through political control by the State. In that context, Sikhs in India have the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC). Raj and governance do come into play, but Raj and *rule* do not. This was not the case in the 18th and 19th centuries, where even if one was not part of an established Misl, Miri-Piri was still practiced beyond the ceremony. The Babbar Akalis even practiced this in the early 20th century. But from the 20th century onwards, the Panth has been controlled through the governance of the nation-state. There has been a loss of indigenous education rooted in the Miri-Piri doctrine, and instead, Raj is limited to governance – not rule – through elections. The following are post-1984 case studies on how Sikhs navigate this tension in the homeland and the diaspora.

Sikhs in Indian Politics

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is an organization in India responsible for managing Gurduaras in the states of Panjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh, and the union territory of Chandigarh. In Haryana, the SGPC management of Gurduaras has been contested since 2014, when Haryana started its own Gurduara Parbandhak Committee rooted in a rejection of working with the Akali Dal party. Unfortunately, the Central government interfered, and this dispute is still pending in the courts. The SGPC also has authority over Harimandar Sahib and Akal Takht in Amritsar. The SGPC is governed by the Gurdwara Act and manages the security, financial, facility maintenance, and religious aspects of Gurduaras.

The Delhi Sikh Gurdwaras Management Committee (DSGMC) is an autonomous organization that manages Gurduaras in Delhi and various educational institutions, hospitals, old age homes, libraries, and other charitable institutions in Delhi. The committee is supposed to be elected by Sikh vote every four years. Its current president, Manjinder Singh Sirsa, is a member of the Shiromani Akali Dal, a center-right Sikh political party, and a Member of the Legislative Assembly from the Bharatiya Janam Party (a Hindu right-wing party). He did not win on an Akali Dal ticket but rather ran on a BJP ticket and, after winning, became head of the DSGMC – a clear manipulation. He now holds two positions that are contradictory to each other: one is secular, and one is religious. This speaks to direct control via appropriated Miri-Piri. The same is the case in the SGPC. Its presidents and general secretaries are controlled by Akali Dal leadership, currently led by Sukhbir Singh Badal. The issue here is not that Sikhs ought to separate Miri-Piri, but that the State has claimed to be secular, and these positions are supposed to be secular as set up *within* the State political system. In this case, these tensions are not tensions due to Sikh paradigms, but instead, tensions of the governments Sikhs live under.

The dynamics between the central government and the Akali Dal party, which has control over both the SGPC and the DSGMC, has resulted in a lack of independence or sovereignty on the part of these two institutions over both their elections and their decision-making. And their influence actually “governs” global Sikhs since they control the Harimandar Sahib and Akal Takht complex and its leadership and funds. These conflicts between Sikh sovereignty and state sovereignty have existed throughout history.

India is the place where Sikhs have experimented the most in politics, and these experimentations have produced the most Sikh representation within the Indian state – the most Members of Parliament, the most Members of the Legislative Assembly, and Sikhs in the highest offices of President (Gyani Zail Singh) and Prime Minister (Manmohan Singh). However, simply being in these positions does not solve the incredibly large systemic and structural problems and issues in the State’s relationship with the Sikhs. No problem is solved by representation alone. As is the case in India, it is clear that even when there are Sikhs very much in the political sphere, alliances and allegiances are constantly changing.

Opting out of Imperfect Systems — Boycotting Panjab's 1992 Elections

Few state elections in India had as much significance as the Panjab poll in February 1992. Since 1984, Panjab has seen violence and state-sponsored terrorism, leading to the rise of a powerful separatist movement for an independent Sikh state. After the Battle of Amritsar, the Congress, under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, adopted a political strategy designed to solve the "Panjab Problem." Central to this strategy was the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, which *appeared* to meet most of the constitutional, territorial, economic, and religious demands of the Akali Dal, the main Sikh political party that had led the 1982 Dharam Yudh Morcha. However, the flawed Accord was never implemented but was accompanied by state assembly elections in September 1985 that saw the overwhelming electoral success of a moderate Akali Dal party.

The late 1980s saw the growth of the Sikh militant movement and the imposition of the President's Rule in 1987, marking a period of direct rule of Panjab by the Capitol, Delhi, that would last until 1992. The 1989 election for Panjab's lower house seats led to the victory of Sikh leadership that voiced the right to self-determination (at least 9 of 13 MPs supported this). This right to self-determination was asserted through the movement for Khalistan, a popular separatist movement for an independent Sikh state in the 1980s and 1990s; its pre-1947 existence centered around Maha (Great) Panjab, Azad (Independent) Panjab, Sikhistan, and Khalistan. After this, the National Front (coalition of political parties) leadership worried that holding Panjab elections would result in the separatist movement gaining further support. This led to the extension of the President's Rule. With the collapse of the National Front, the minority Janata government renewed talks with Sikh leadership and made a secret deal with smaller militant groups. Following the announcement of national elections in March 1991, the Janata government authorized notification for state assembly and parliamentary polls in Panjab. Rajiv Gandhi of the Congress party responded to this by condemning the deal and promising to revoke the elections if his party successfully obtained a majority at the center.



As the campaign progressed, armed militants called for a boycott, while in the absence of Congress, the other Sikh leadership groups competed with one another. Toward the end of the campaign, the level of violence escalated dramatically, and Panjab was declared a disturbed area. Still, the state administration was determined to hold elections on June 22, 1991. When Congress gained power at the center, the Panjab poll was postponed until September 25.

Confidence in the state was shaken as Panjab's Governor Malhotra resigned in protest. Sikh leaders from all spectrums united against the government's decision. At a meeting in Anandpur in early September, they decided to boycott any future poll on the grounds that the central government could not guarantee that it would be "free and fair." Congress revoked the election process in Panjab through an amendment to the Peoples Representation Act (1951) and further extended the President's Rule, postponing elections to February 15, 1992. In mid-January, Sikh leaders reaffirmed their decision to boycott the elections. Their conditions for participation ranged from the withdrawal of "military rule" to the involvement of the United Nations in administering the poll. In the month leading up to the election, Sikh political leadership campaigned for a boycott.

Voter turnout for the 1991 parliamentary elections was 21.5% and turnout for the 1992 state elections was 24.3%. The usual average voter turnout in Panjab was 68.2%.⁵⁷ In *rural* Sikh majority areas, the voter turnout was only 15%. Nevertheless, the Congress party made a near clean sweep of the assembly and parliamentary seats, gaining 87 and 12, respectively. The expected challenge to the Congress from the BJP and the Akali Dal did not materialize. Considering the boycott, the level of mobilization in the June poll, and the results of the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, it is more than reasonable to suggest that the Sikh political parties, united or factionalized, would have defeated the Congress party had they participated and encouraged participation. The boycott remains a mystery in Sikh circles even today.

In this case, an attempt to organize and work outside of the political system did not lead to the challenge against the Congress party that Sikh political parties were hoping for. Therefore, their decision not to participate was a "landmark development indicative not only of denial of self-interest but a recognition that simple elections will not restart the political process in Panjab."⁵⁸

Sikhs in Canadian Politics

Can Sikh politicians serve the State and the Panth?

Sikhs form less than 2% of the population in Canada while serving in major civil servant and ministerial roles at federal and provincial levels. Where do the allegiances of Sikhs in Canadian government positions lie? Are their allegiances primarily to the State or to the Panth? Do those allegiances differ when they are "initiated" as *Amritdharis*? Despite their positions, they have not successfully advocated for policy matters affecting India and/or Panjab. They also have not been able to fully advocate for the human rights of Sikhs in India or collectively, globally recognize the trauma and history of the Sikh Genocide in their new, adopted homelands where they do not face the same degree of political oppression.

While India has *appointed* and *elected* those directly accused of playing a role in the 1984 Sikh genocide, in Canada, a resolution proposed by the provincial NDP to declare 1984 a genocide was defeated in Ontario. It later won in the same province through the Liberal party, spearheaded by MPP Harinder Kaur Malhi and in collaboration with then-MPP Jagmeet Singh. This hard-fought recognition came up in the trips to India made by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan, where even the fact that the resolution passed was denied in India.

In both India and Canada, Sikhs are viewed as a pawn in the game of politics. Depending on who is in power and which vote bank they are catering to, politicians in both countries flip flop on whether the pain-filled recent history of Sikhs is worth acknowledging. It was only after 34 years, on November 28, 2018, the Delhi High court, in its landmark judgment, finally acknowledged the 1984 Sikh genocide: "The large scale rioting, mob violence, arson, plunder, genocide and looting has been duly proved and established." And on another judgment, while sentencing a former MP for a life term, the court acknowledged: "Neither 'crimes against humanity' nor 'genocide' is part of our domestic law of crime. This loophole needs to be addressed urgently."⁵⁹

In 1907, legislation was introduced to disenfranchise and deprive Sikhs of voting rights. Of the currently ruling Liberal party in Canada, 4 Sikhs are Federal Ministers, and 14 are MPs. In addition, Sikhs serve as policymakers and advocates. In 2019, the annual report⁶⁰ from the public-safety ministry documenting terrorist threats to Canada included a section on "Sikh (Khalistani) Extremism" for the first time, declaring "Sikh" extremism is a top-five threat to Canada – a blatant denial of the right of Sikh-Canadians to discuss the idea of an independent Sikh homeland.

Though there are Sikhs like Navdeep Singh Bains and Harjit Singh Sajjan (Lib), Jagmeet Singh (NDP), and Tim Singh Uppal (CPC) in Canadian politics, there has not been a proactive attempt to dismantle stigma rooted in the trauma and history of their Sikh constituents. Non-evidence-based propaganda against Sikhs from foreign governments has increased in the recent past, and Sikh policymakers ought to respond accordingly. Sikh policymakers are taking part in imperfect systems and attempting to deal with the grey area of reconciling allegiances and responsibilities they hold to the State and the Panth. It is evident that one cannot serve both the State and the Panth.

Sikhs in US Politics

Will Sikhs rise to positions of political influence to serve the State and the Panth?

Sikhs in the United States do not have as much sway in the political sphere as policymakers and politicians. However, an overarching struggle that has gained increased visibility in recent years is choosing to either identify with the state or fight against it. Some choose to identify with the state, flying American flags and playing into ideas of the "model minority." Others decide to organize at grassroots levels to fight the state's oppressive policies that have, in the past decade, caused more and more people to be without a home, fueled already-existing racial tensions, empowered white supremacists, and increased the wealth gap. Thus, there is a deep struggle to remove oneself from the American Myth and see things as they are.

The first Sikh Congressman, Dalip Singh Saund, served in Congress from 1957 to 1963. Before that, he served as the secretary at the first Gurduara in the US, Stockton Gurduara in California. The Stockton Gurduara was an important benefactor of the Ghadar Party, sponsoring the first Panjabi language newspaper in the United States, *The Ghadar*. The Gurduara also sponsored Saund's academic studies.



Stockton Gurduara
South Asians in North America Collection
Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley

Sikhs are running for local government positions on platforms that prioritize universal health care, climate change response, and student loan debt. There is a Sikh Mayor of New Jersey, Ravinder Singh Bhalla; there are Sikh and former Sikh politicians like Harmeet Kaur Dhillon and Nikki Haley (Nimrata Kaur Randhawa); there are Sikhs in policy positions like former executive Vice President of the Federal Reserve Bank of NY, Daleep Singh, great-grand-nephew of Dalip Singh Saund, who serves as President Joe Biden's Deputy National Security Advisor. Sabrina Singh, the granddaughter of Sardar Jagjit Singh, an Indian freedom fighter and the head of the India League of America, is a Special Assistant to the President and White House Deputy Press Secretary in the Joe Biden administration. The framing of "left" and "right" is not an issue unique to Sikhs living in the United States. These categories are prevalent worldwide, and Sikhs globally get caught up in those categories, having to navigate the political landscape based on their understanding of Miri-Piri.

Though there are Sikhs in US politics, some of whom spent time advocating for Sikhs experiencing discrimination, some choose to align more with othering and fear-based policy principles. In contrast, others prefer to align more with principles of equality and 1Ness. Regardless of the spectrum of alignment of Sikh politicians, there has not been extensive use of Gurduara spaces by Sikh *constituents* as political spaces and spaces in which to organize.

Sikhs in the United States are still in the early stages of political representation, where the question of serving the State or serving the Panth has not come up as much. Instead, there is a larger concern with representation and fitting into the American narrative, securing accommodations for Sikhs to serve in extensions of the State like the police and the army, and inclusion in curriculums. Amongst Sikhs who are more involved in grassroots organizing, the focus is on building community and solidarity, addressing immediate needs, and living out Miri-Piri through allyship and organizing. When Sikhs gain more national-level positions, then the question may come to that of navigating the tensions between serving the Panth and serving the State.

US Sikhs have the examples of Black Churches politically organizing through the Civil Rights Movement to the present day, asserting their Christian values in their politics, using their places of worship as organizing centers, using their organizing power to shift policy and enact change, and fighting for their rights while navigating being citizens of the state (sometimes working within the law, sometimes outside of it). The question here is one of primary allegiance to Sikhi values: to bring about change towards an ideal society, informed by Sikh paradigms and principles. The question to continue asking is whether this is possible *within* any party or system, and if not, how a Sikh can use the guidance of the Miri-Piri doctrine to engage in opposition *outside* of parties and systems.

Sikhs in UK Politics

Will Sikh political representation learn to develop consensus?

Sikh politicians in the UK also have to navigate the tensions that arise with the question of whether one can at once serve the State and the Panth. While some politicians like Member of Scottish Parliament Pam Gosal represent Conservative values, some Members of Parliament like Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi and Preet Kaur Gill

represent the more left-of-center values of the Labor Party. While Gosal is relatively new to her seat, Gill and Dhesi both have records of speaking out against racism and inequality. They have also spoken out in support of the Farmer’s protests, with Dhesi even calling out the “Khalistani Bogeyman” that the Indian government uses to suppress Sikh movements and those who support them.⁶¹

The Sikh Federation UK, an NGO, published the results of a comprehensive survey in 2016, which concluded that Sikhs in the United Kingdom, despite experiencing increased discrimination and hate crimes, have felt overlooked as constituents. According to the UK Sikh Survey 2016, almost one in five Sikhs has encountered discrimination in a public place over the past year, and one in seven has directly experienced workplace discrimination.⁶²

It seems that despite representation in Parliament, there is still a larger feeling that there has been a failure to represent British Sikhs and the issues that concern them properly.

In 2015, 82% of Sikhs voted compared to the national average of 66%. They are five times more likely to be members of a political party than the general population. However, only two Sikhs are sitting as MPs in the current parliament (Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi and Preet Kaur Gill) and two Sikhs in the House of Lords (Indarjit Singh and Ranbir Singh Suri). Members of the House of Lords are nominated. This is likely, in large part, due to a lack of numbers necessary to elect more Sikh politicians. Even without the required numbers, the alternative to get non-Sikh MPs to take up Sikh issues has been pursued by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Sikhs, chaired by Preet Kaur Gill. APPG is one model of how Sikhs can work with and stand for elections from different political parties.

The image shows a portion of the 2021 Census Paper Questionnaire. The header includes 'census 2021 Paper Questionnaire' and a note: 'Key questions and suggested answers in highlighted boxed'. The form is divided into several sections:

- What is your ethnic group?** (Question 15): The respondent has selected 'Sikh' under the 'E Other ethnic group' category. The 'Sikh' text is handwritten in the provided box.
- 16 What is your religion?** (Question 16): The respondent has selected 'Sikh' with a checkmark. The question is noted as 'voluntary'.
- 18 What is your main language?** (Question 18): The respondent has selected 'Other, write in (including British Sign Language)' with a checkmark and has handwritten 'Punjabi' in the box.

In 2019, Sikhs took the UK government to court over its failure to include “Sikh” to select an ethnic tick box in the census. The motivation behind asking for this inclusion was rooted in concerns about inequalities faced by Sikhs in the UK and a belief that having a distinct ethnic category would allow for a proper account of the wider population and thus more direct representation when seeking to have their concerns addressed. Ethnic coding is different in different countries, but it is used as a tool through which laws, funding, and representation can be allocated or leveraged. Without the separate ethnic tick box, Sikhs are grouped in with Indians at large, and thus funding, organizing, and representation are all harmed. Additionally, any collection of data on discrimination or prejudice disappears into the larger category of “Indian.” These things make the question of an ethnic tick box for Sikhs a major issue in the UK Sikh community’s assertion of Miri-Piri. 112 Gurduaras have expressed support for this inclusion as well.⁶³ However, the Network of Sikh Organizations, whose serving director is Lord Indarjit Singh, opposes the movement for the inclusion of “Sikh” as an ethnic tick box in the census, arguing that there is no need for it and that the Sikh community in the UK is fairly split on the matter.

In the 2021 census, a separate Sikh ethnic tick box was not included. Still, the acting Jathedar of the Akal Takht Sahib, Harpreet Singh, encouraged UK Sikhs to identify themselves as ethnically Sikh in the census, no matter what political party they identify with, even without a provided tick box. He also encouraged Sikhs worldwide to organize in asserting their separate identity, no matter what nation-state they live under.

Some Sikhs in the UK organized within the system to attempt to be more accurately represented. When this did not happen, a call for further organizing across all Sikh communities that make up the Panth came from the seat of temporal authority for all Sikhs. The attempt to assert Miri-Piri through a change in the census, to be represented and thus heard in the political sphere, did not play out as Sikhs hoped. In fact, the Sikh community anywhere is not monolithic, and there is disagreement on *how* to gain representation and power within political systems. Sikhs practice Miri-Piri in their individual capacities, as they see fit. This lack of consensus affects how Indian politics, Khalistani politics, and Panthic politics play out through Sikhs in the UK.

Sikhs in India — Current Farmer’s Movement

How do Sikhs navigate Sikh issues, Panjab issues, and Indian issues without involving political leaders as the center of their struggle to pressure the Center?

In September of 2020, the upper house of the Indian Parliament passed three farming bills related to the farm sector – the Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill. The bills introduced changes in the way agricultural produce is stocked, marketed, and sold. However, farmers in Panjab have been opposing the bills since they were first introduced as ordinances in June. Farmers’ organizations say the new rules will lead to corporate monopoly and fear that it will end the current system built around a government-guaranteed minimum support price, or MSP.

Several strikes and agitations led by farmers' unions in Panjab took place in September and October 2020. On November 26, thousands of farmers, primarily from Panjab and Haryana, marched to Delhi to protest the laws. As the farmers advanced from Panjab, police in Haryana and on the Delhi border barricaded roads and dug ditches to stop the farmers from reaching the capital. The police also attacked farmers with water cannons and teargas.

In September 2020, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, the leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD, an ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party), resigned from the union cabinet in protest over the farm bills. Initially, SAD supported the bills, but with increasing pressure from the rural vote bank and their organizing strategies, the party changed its position. SAD also announced a transportation blockade in protest of the bills, which took place on September 25.⁶⁴

However, the majority of the farmers' unions from Panjab are disillusioned with all mainstream political parties. As a result, farmers' unions have asked politicians and celebrities to stay away from their protest stages and instead have emphasized the importance of speaking for themselves and keeping a clear vision of their end goal.

In a video message released in January of 2021, Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Harpreet Singh stated that the matter pertained to Indian farmers and had nothing to do with Sikhi and the Sikh code of conduct. He said the Union Government should resolve it. He had appealed for the support of farmers in the past and sought bravery for them and wisdom for the government.⁶⁵ At the end of January, when protesters hoisted a *Nishan Sahib* (sovereign flag) at the Red Fort in Delhi and drew much backlash, Harpreet Singh stated that the hoisting of the Khalsa flag at the Red Fort on Republic Day was "not a crime" and it was "not a Khalistani symbol."⁶⁶

The SGPC also released an official statement, stating that the three laws are not in the farmers' interest and are disastrous. The SGPC said it would stand firmly with all sections, including the farmers involved in the struggle against the laws. It also demanded a probe into the violence on January 26 in New Delhi during the "tractor march," calling the role of government agencies "suspicious." It also demanded the release of the Sikh youth and farmers arrested following the incident.⁶⁷

Bibi Jagir Kaur announced in March that the SGPC would set up temporary tin sheds and provide fans for farmers protesting at the borders of Delhi. Senior BJP leader Harjit Singh Grewal responded to this by stating that the SGPC gave a "religious color" to the movement. Bibi Jagir Kaur, however, responded by saying the SGPC is aware of its duties and that Grewal should keep his advice to himself.⁶⁸



Day 31 of Indian Farmers' Protest, Singhu Border, December 2020. Photo by Sandeep Singh

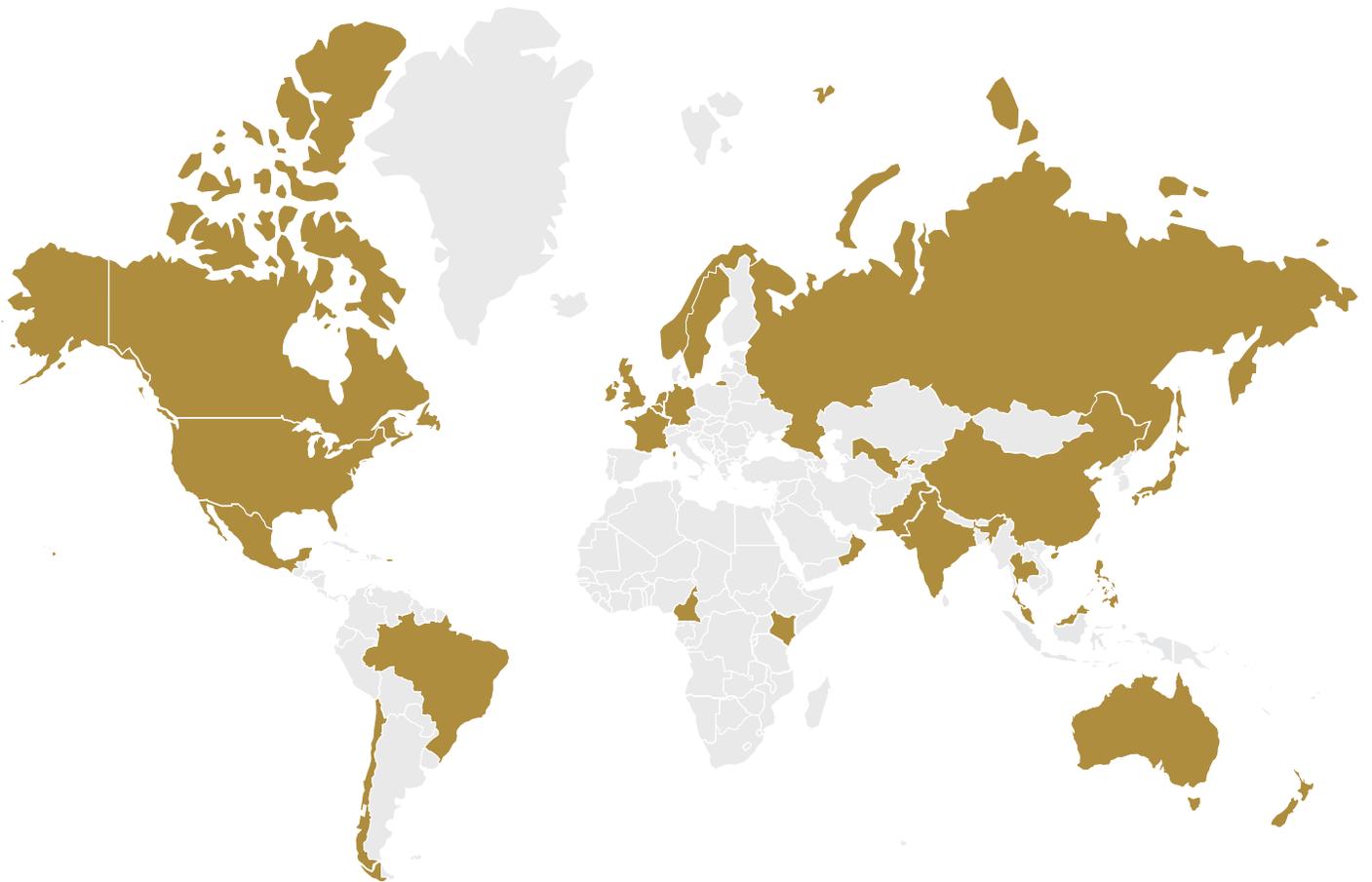
Throughout the movement and the ongoing protest, solidarity has been cultivated across religious, party, state, and caste lines. The farmers have set up tents, libraries, and schools. They feed each other and the local community, educate each other and the local community, sing songs, and articulate their requests with clear messaging despite state media narratives. Though the movement is not only a Sikh movement, many of those leading the movement are Sikhs. They draw upon Miri-Piri doctrine, Sikh history, and Bani in their organizing, in their resilience, and in their care for one another.

Kapur Singh writes:

In a democratic society, the Sikhs need not encounter any contradictions between their own collective convictions and the requirements of the state to which they owe allegiance. If, therefore, there are frictions, the fault must be found somewhere in the sphere of implementation of true democratic processes and the persons who implement them. A satisfied and properly integrated-to-the-nation Sikh people can be an invaluable and lasting asset to any state, more so to India in the soil and traditions of which they are rooted, just as a frustrated or suppressed Sikh people can be an obvious weakness in the strength of the nation.⁶⁹

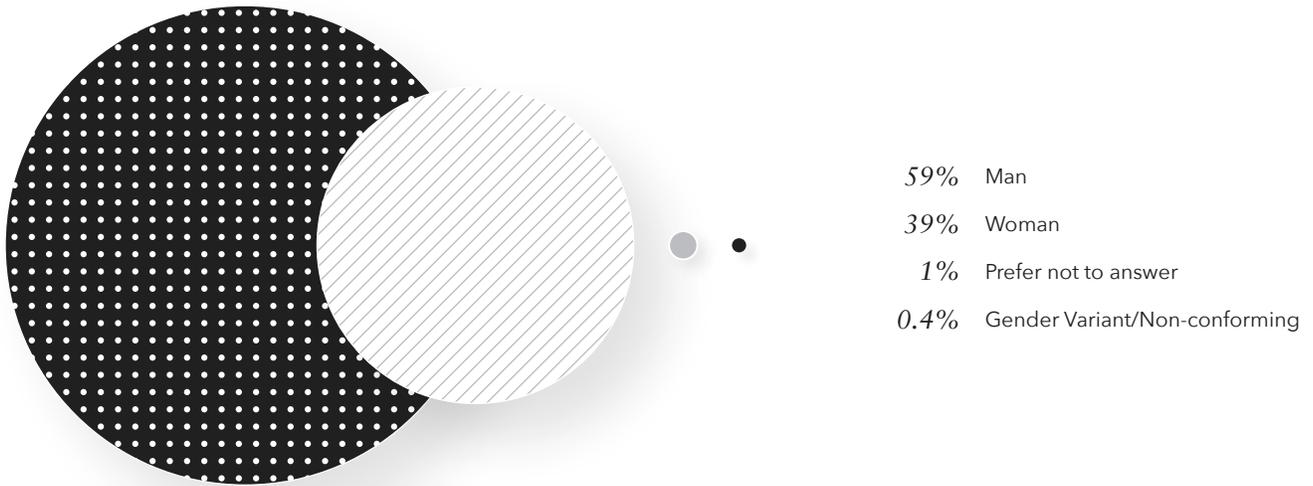
Survey / Opinion

An online survey was conducted, asking the global Sikh community about their understanding of Miri-Piri. A total of 548 self-identified Sikh voluntary respondents from 19 different countries participated in the survey. For the purpose of this research into the Sikh community, only respondents who identified as Sikhs were considered. The purpose of this survey was to gain insight into how Sikhs around the world conceive of Miri-Piri, especially in the context of nation-states.



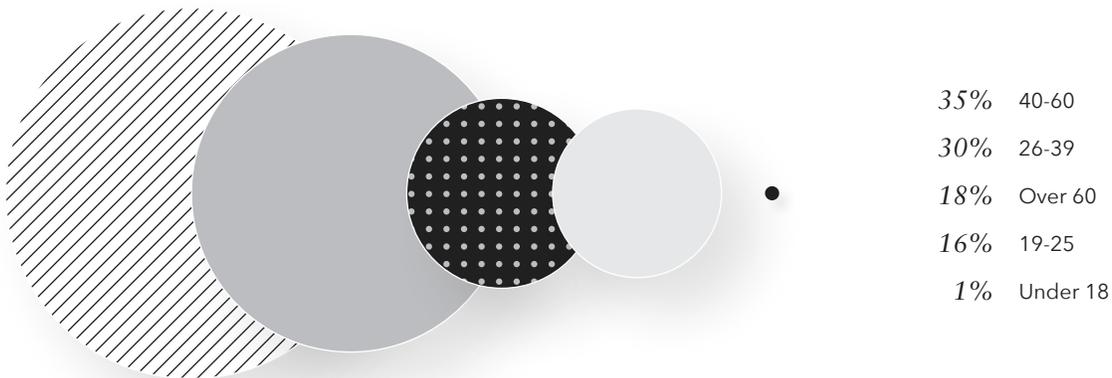
For the purpose of representing the Sikh community in this research, only respondents who identified as Sikhs were considered. The purpose of this survey was to gain insight into Sikh thoughts and feelings surrounding sexuality today. Sexuality was defined in the survey as encompassing both sexual preference and sexual activity.

What gender do you most identify with?



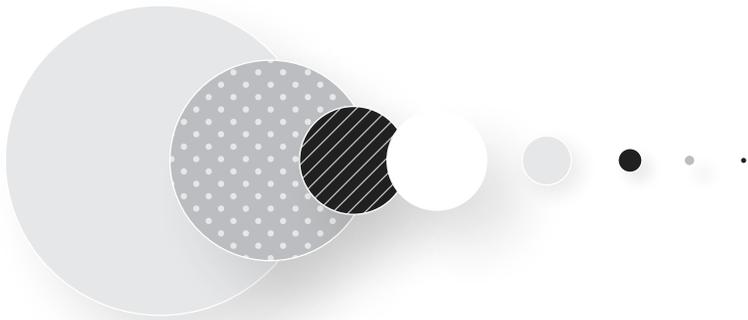
The majority of the responses were from Sikhs who identify as men.

What is your age group?



The majority of respondents were over 40 years old (52%), while the next largest percentage of respondents were between the ages of 26-39 (30%). This trend was similar even along gender-identification lines. Results may more accurately reflect an older Sikh generation perspective, and the lack of response from the younger age-range may point to a lack of interest or understanding in the principle of Miri-Piri and how it relates to political participation.

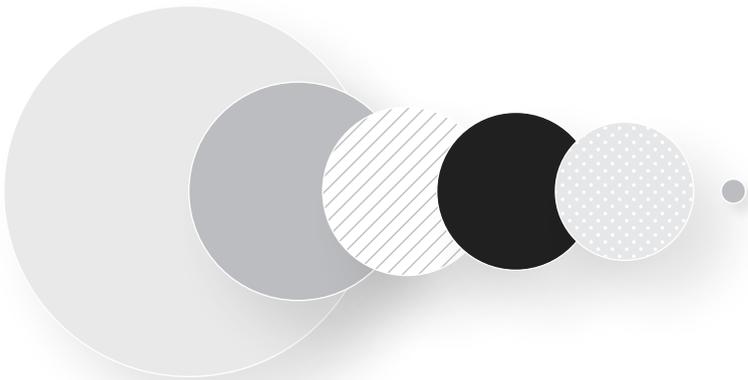
Where is your residence?



37%	United States
24%	Canada
13%	India
12%	United Kingdom
6%	Australia
3%	Malaysia
1%	New Zealand
0.7%	Singapore

There were 19 unique countries represented amongst Sikh respondents. All other countries represented only have one respondent per country: Bahrain, Belgium, China, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hong Kong (SAR China), Japan, Netherlands, Switzerland, United States Minor Outlying Islands. The majority of responses come from North America (United States and Canada, 62%), thus results may more accurately reflect a specifically North American Sikh perspective.

What informs your perspective on politics?



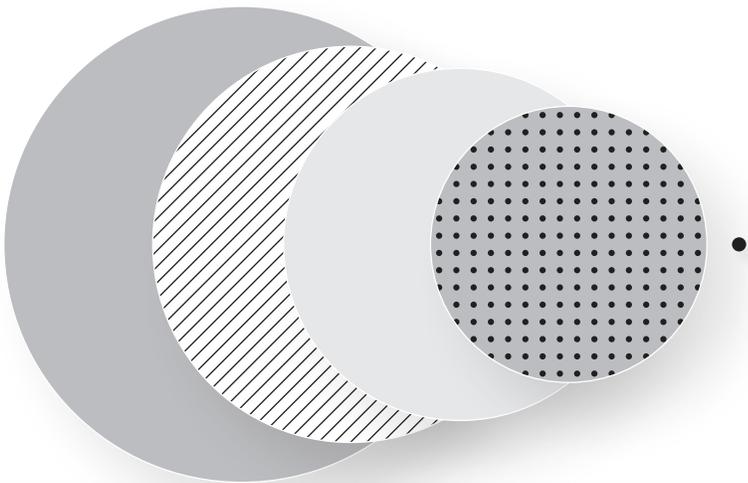
320	Spirituality/religion (Sikhi, Gurbani, etc.)
189	Traditional media (newspapers, television, books)
146	Friends and peers (perceptions, experiences, opinions)
137	Family or upbringing
120	Social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
22	Other

Summary of Other Fill in responses:

- Education
- Experiences
- History and values
- Work experience
- Nationalism
- Rebel mentality
- Own readings and/or research

Note: Responses referring to combinations of the above not recorded here.

What should be the relationship between the religious and the political?



- 239 The political and the religious should inform each other.
- 199 The political and the religious should hold each other accountable.
- 177 The political and the religious should be kept separate.
- 139 The religious should take precedence over the political.
- 5 The political should take precedence over the religious.

Options 1 and 2 are similar and may have been difficult to interpret. Men and Women answered similarly in their choices with the exception of:

The political and the religious should be kept separate.	26	Man	The religious should take precedence over the political.	32	Man
	41	Woman		15	Woman

This difference may be due to ideas about how religious hegemony (specifically Christian hegemony) plays a role in North American politics that often leads directly to the oppression of those who identify as women, especially when it comes to bodily autonomy.

Differences are also seen depending on the respondents' country. Looking at the top five countries of respondents (United States, Canada, India, United Kingdom, Australia):

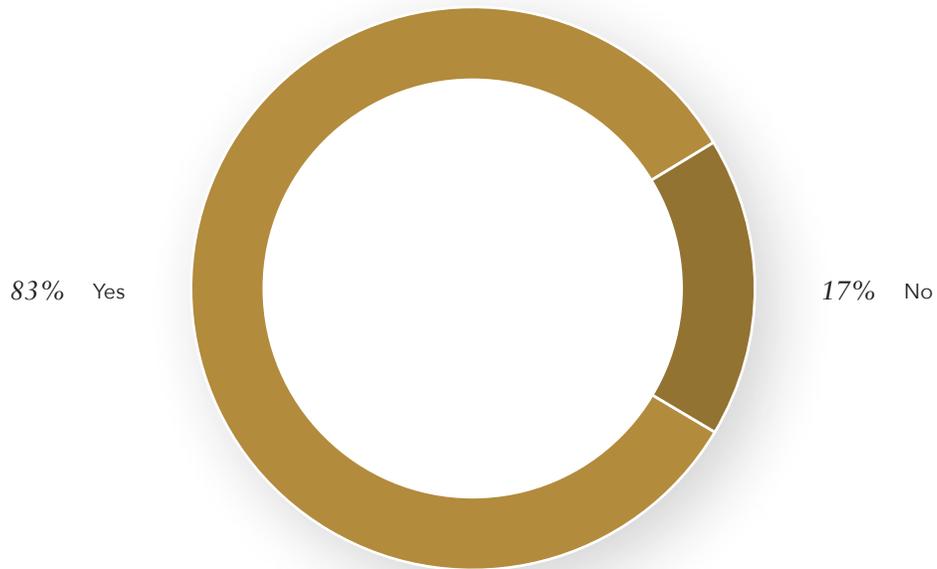
The religious should take precedence over the political.

Double the amount of respondents from India chose this option compared to the other four top countries.

The political and the religious should be kept separate.

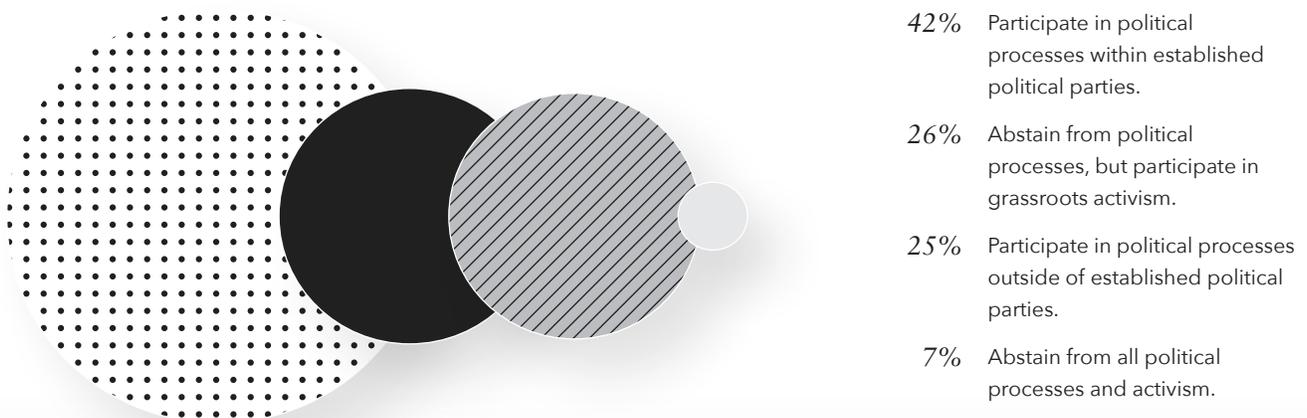
Half the amount of respondents from the United Kingdom chose the above option compared to the other four top countries.

Is it possible to honor the eternal Sovereignty of the Panth (beyond nation-states) while also living under the law of the land?



An overwhelming majority of respondents believe it is possible to honor the Sovereignty of the Panth while living under the law of the land. Ways that respondents do this were addressed in the following question:

Political systems are imperfect. Given that, my informed Miri-Piri influences me to:



93% of respondents engage politically in some way, despite understanding that political systems are imperfect. This includes activism at the grassroots level, and participating in politics outside of established political parties.

Top Five Countries Segmented

<i>Option</i>	<i>UN</i>	<i>CA</i>	<i>IN</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>AU</i>
A	49.27%	53.79%	13.70%	38.24%	31.25%
B	27.80%	15.15%	32.88%	30.88%	34.38%
C	19.51%	24.24%	36.99%	20.59%	31.25%
D	3.41%	6.82%	16.44%	10.29%	3.13%

Indian respondents were least likely to participate in political processes through established political parties, and most likely to participate in political processes outside of established political parties or through grassroots activism. This may be due to the corruption of politicians within the country as well as the sheer number of constituents, where grassroots activism is more effective in addressing immediate material needs. Frustration with established political parties could also be the reason why the highest percentage of respondents who said they abstain from all political processes came from India as well.

The United States, Canada, and the UK were fairly similar in terms of spread, though respondents from North America as a whole (US and Canada) were most likely to participate in politics through established parties. Australian respondents were more likely to participate in grassroots activism, but the spread across the various ways of participating in politics were pretty evenly distributed into thirds. These variations are likely due to each country's established political parties and systems and the trust that constituents have in those parties and systems, already-existing representation of Sikhs, and belief in what is most effective in meeting the immediate needs of constituents.

How can Sikh institutions (not limited to Gurduaras) address issues of political engagement with Sikh ethos?

Recommendations

Individual

1. Look to Bani for guidance in understanding the Sikh model of Miri-Piri as it is founded in primary and secondary texts. Understand how from Guru Nanak Sahib onwards, Miri and Piri's integration was eventually institutionalized, as made clear in Bani. Understand Raj-Jog and Bhakti-Shakti beyond commonly misplaced labels and continuously interpret them for current times in evolving political models. Revive the understanding that Guru is perfection that transcends the world's imagination and practice of the religious and the political.
2. Look to Sikh history for guidance on how to live out Miri-Piri under nation-states, understanding Sikh conceptions of sovereignty outside worldly rule. Use this history to continue to be critical of empire and voice dissent when you see policy that is opposed to the Sikh principles outlined by the Sikh raison d'être: working to establish an egalitarian society, challenging domination of any kind, and capturing political power for the common mission.
3. Understand that developing principle-centered political thinking is part of your civic duty. Draw on the rich legacy of Sikh political wisdom. Sikhs are one minority among others. Our goal ought to be to work for the nation's common good as a whole, not solely our interests. Organizing and coalition-building will help us further our Panthic and collective goals and ensure that the nation-states we live under move toward honoring the dignity of all people.
4. Hold politicians and policy-makers accountable – not just in the form of voting. Stay informed about policy, resist the urge to place politicians on pedestals, and think critically about how they govern. Engage in grassroots organizing and build community in small ways to address the Panth's immediate needs and the most vulnerable.



Recommendations

Institutional

1. Advance understanding of Miri-Piri doctrine, how its paradigm forms the Sikh culture of Nam (Identification with IkOankar), and how it is central to the Sikh community regardless of their geographical locale.
2. Train Sikhs to think from Miri-Piri perspective from an early age; nuance religious-political, spiritual-activism from Sikh ethos. Forewarn against a worldview that is just rooted in the spiritual or just rooted in the political.
3. Create spaces for political dialogue and literacy. Engage in educating the communities you serve on local, national, and international politics in both Panjabi and English (or local language) and encourage political engagement for all ages. Give communities tools to establish networks and feel empowered to voice their needs and their dissent.
4. Hold events with educational, human rights, political, and Sikh institutions that offer more chances for exposure to multiple perspectives and more opportunities to engage critically.

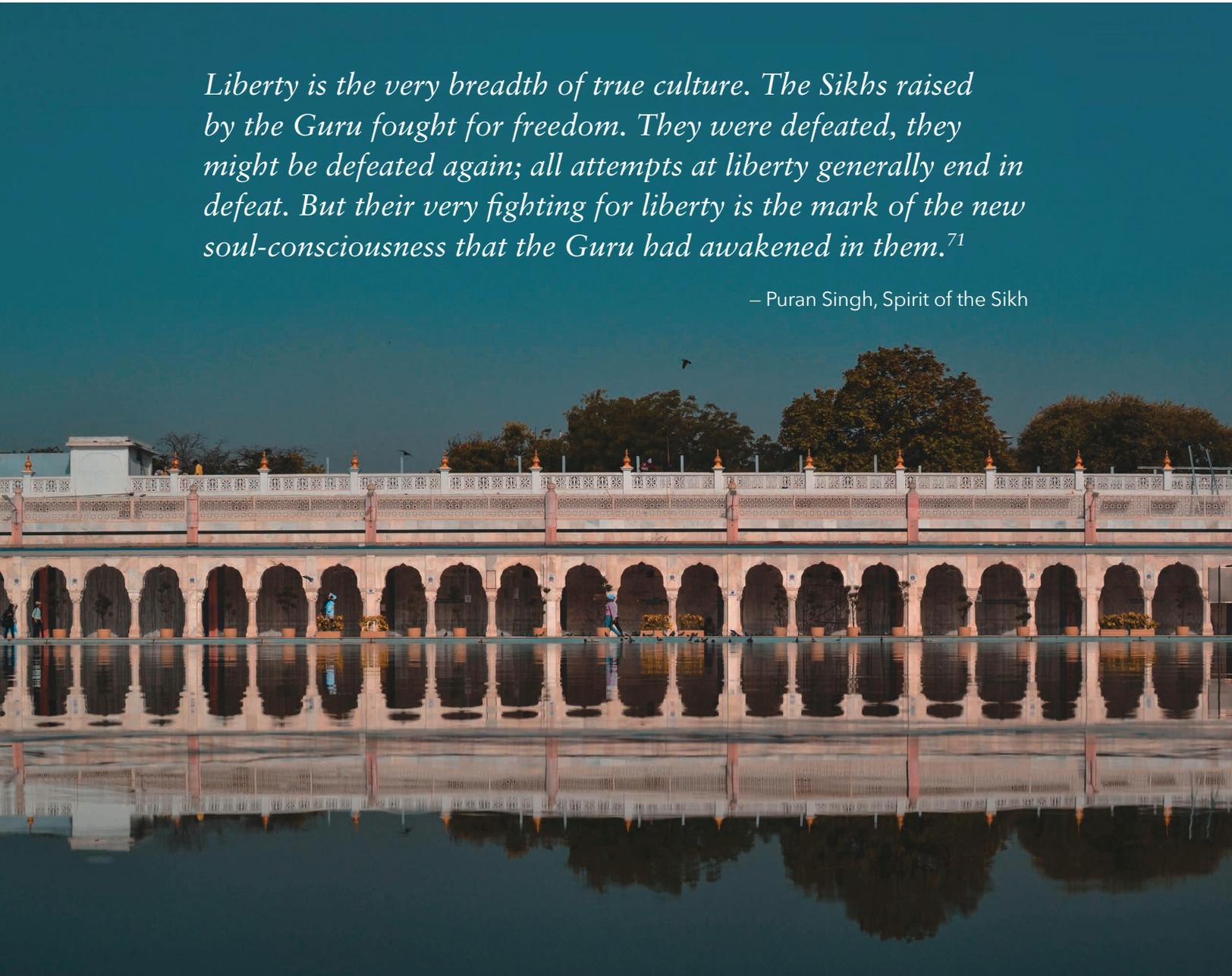


Is there a single Sikh view of party politics? The decision falls to individual Sikh voters, guided by their Sikhi, to decide what mix of principles, policies, or personalities they find compelling when marking their ballot and engaging in organizing. While it may not be possible to form a cohesive voting bloc with the same political views, it is possible to cultivate a more informed and engaged Sikh constituency and agree on certain principles founded on the 1Force-1Ness paradigm to guide that engagement and core understanding.

Bani, Tavarikh, and Rahit offer examples of the Miri-Piri doctrine lived out and furthered in various contexts. Sovereignty means strength in fighting for egalitarianism no matter the country, no matter the system of government, and that strengthening sovereignty is rooted in the establishment of Sikh institutions and centering in the Gurmat perspective. This means that any sovereign state in which Sikhs reside as citizens must be challenged in its oppressive policies and held accountable to the standard of true egalitarianism for all. Sikhs must imbibe the founding principle of dual sovereignty – owing to our primary allegiance to truth and mortality, and never submitting “to the exclusive claim of the secular state to govern the bodies and minds of men.”⁷⁰

*Liberty is the very breadth of true culture. The Sikhs raised by the Guru fought for freedom. They were defeated, they might be defeated again; all attempts at liberty generally end in defeat. But their very fighting for liberty is the mark of the new soul-consciousness that the Guru had awakened in them.*⁷¹

– Puran Singh, Spirit of the Sikh



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ਦੇ ਗੁਨਾ ਸਤਿ ਭੈਣ ਭਰਾਵ ਹੈ ਪਾਰੰਗਤਿ ਦਾਨੁ ਪੜੀਵੈ ॥
ਨਾਨਕਿ ਰਾਜੁ ਚਲਾਇਆ ਸਚੁ ਕੋਟੁ ਸਤਾਣੀ ਨੀਵੈ ॥
ਲਹਣੇ ਧਰਿਓਨੁ ਛਤੁ ਸਿਰਿ ਕਰਿ ਸਿਫਤੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਪੀਵੈ ॥
ਮਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਆਤਮ ਦੇਵ ਦੀ ਖੜਗਿ ਜੋਰਿ ਪਰਾਕੁਇ ਜੀਅੈ ॥
ਗੁਰਿ ਚੇਲੇ ਰਹਰਾਸਿ ਕੀਈ ਨਾਨਕਿ ਸਲਾਮਤਿ ਥੀਵੈ ॥
ਸਹਿ ਟਿਕਾ ਦਿਤੋਸੁ ਜੀਵੈ ॥੧॥
- ii. ਰਾਜੁ ਜੋਗੁ ਮਾਣਿਓ ਬਸਿਓ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਰਿਦੰਤਰਿ ॥
ਸ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਸਗਲ ਉਧਰੀ ਨਾਮਿ ਲੇ ਤਰਿਓ ਨਿਰੰਤਰਿ ॥
ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵਹਿ ਸਨਕਾਦਿ ਆਦਿ ਜਨਕਾਦਿ ਜੁਗਹ ਲਗਿ ॥
ਧੰਨਿ ਧੰਨਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਧੰਨਿ ਜਨਮੁ ਸਕਯਥੁ ਭਲੋ ਜਗਿ ॥
ਪਾਤਾਲ ਪੁਰੀ ਜੈਕਾਰ ਧੁਨਿ ਕਥਿ ਜਨ ਕਲ ਵਖਾਣਿਓ ॥
ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮ ਰਸਿਕ ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰ ਰਾਜੁ ਜੋਗੁ ਤੈ ਮਾਣਿਓ ॥੬॥
- iii. ਸਤਜੁਗਿ ਤੈ ਮਾਣਿਓ ਛਲਿਓ ਬਲਿ ਬਾਵਨ ਭਾਇਓ ॥
ਤ੍ਰੇਤੈ ਤੈ ਮਾਣਿਓ ਰਾਮੁ ਰਾਘਵੰਸੁ ਕਹਾਇਓ ॥
ਦੁਆਪੁਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿਸਨ ਮੁਰਾਰਿ ਕੰਸੁ ਕਿਰਤਾਰਥੁ ਕੀਓ ॥
ਉਗ੍ਰਸੈਣ ਕਉ ਰਾਜੁ ਅਭੈ ਭਗਤਹ ਜਨ ਦੀਓ ॥
ਕਲਿਜੁਗਿ ਪ੍ਰਮਾਣੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰੁ ਅੰਗਦੁ ਅਮਰੁ ਕਹਾਇਓ ॥
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੁ ਰਾਜੁ ਅਬਿਚਲੁ ਅਟਲੁ ਆਦਿ ਪੁਰਖਿ ਫੁਰਮਾਇਓ ॥੭॥
- iv. ਕੋਟੀ ਹੂ ਪੀਰ ਵਰਜਿ ਰਹਾਏ ਜਾ ਮੀਰੁ ਸੁਣਿਆ ਧਾਇਆ ॥
ਥਾਨ ਮੁਕਾਮ ਜਲੇ ਬਿਜ ਮੰਦਰ ਮੁਛਿ ਮੁਛਿ ਕੁਇਰ ਰੁਲਾਇਆ ॥
ਕੋਈ ਮੁਗਲੁ ਨ ਹੋਆ ਅੰਧਾ ਕਿਨੈ ਨ ਪਰਚਾ ਲਾਇਆ ॥੪॥
- v. ਮਕਾ ਮਿਹਰ ਰੋਜਾ ਪੈ ਖਾਕਾ ॥
ਭਿਸਤੁ ਪੀਰ ਲਫਜ ਕਮਾਇ ਅੰਦਾਜਾ ॥
ਹੂਰ ਨੂਰ ਮੁਸਕੁ ਖੁਦਾਇਆ ਬੰਦਗੀ ਅਲਹ ਆਲਾ ਹੁਜਰਾ ॥੫॥
- vi. ਦਿਲ ਮਹਿ ਜਾਨਹੁ ਸਭ ਫਿਲਹਾਲਾ ॥
ਖਿਲਖਾਨਾ ਬਿਰਾਦਰ ਹਮੂ ਜੰਜਾਲਾ ॥
ਮੀਰ ਮਲਕ ਉਮਰੇ ਫਾਨਾਇਆ ਏਕ ਮੁਕਾਮ ਖੁਦਾਇ ਦਰਾ ॥੮॥
- vii. ਸਿਵ ਸਕਤਿ ਆਪਿ ਉਪਾਇ ਕੈ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਵਰਤਾਏ ॥
ਹੁਕਮੁ ਵਰਤਾਏ ਆਪਿ ਵੇਖੇ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਕਿਸੈ ਬੁਝਾਏ ॥
ਤੇੜੇ ਬੰਧਨ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਮੰਨਿ ਵਸਾਏ ॥
ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਜਿਸ ਨੇ ਆਪਿ ਕਰੇ ਸੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਏਕਸ ਸਿਉ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਏ ॥
ਕਹੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਆਪਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਬੁਝਾਏ ॥੨੬॥
- viii. ਭਾਈ ਰੇ ਗੁਰ ਬਿਨੁ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਬਿਨੁ ਗੁਰ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਪਾਈਐ ਜੇ ਲੋਚੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋਇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
- ix. ਫਰੀਦਾ ਬਾਰਿ ਪਰਾਇਐ ਬੈਸਣਾ ਸਾਂਈ ਮੁਝੈ ਨ ਦੇਹਿ ॥
ਜੇ ਤੂ ਏਵੈ ਰਖਸੀ ਜੀਉ ਸਰੀਰਹੁ ਲੇਹਿ ॥੪੨॥

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 ਸਚ ਸਬਦੁ ਟਕਸਾਲ ਸਚੁ ਅਸਟਧਾਤੁ ਇਕ ਪਾਰਸ ਮੇਲਾ।
 ਸਚਾ ਅਬਿਚਲੁ ਰਾਜੁ ਹੈ ਸਚੁ ਮਹਲੁ ਨਵਹਾਣੁ ਨਵੇਲਾ।
 ਸਚਾ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਵਰਤਦਾ ਸਚਾ ਅਮਰੁ ਸਚੇ ਰਸ ਕੇਲਾ।
 ਸਚੀ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਲਾਹ ਸਚੁ ਸਚੁ ਸਲਾਹਣੁ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲਾ।
 ਸਚਾ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪੰਥੁ ਹੈ ਸਚੁ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ ਨ ਗਰਬਿ ਗਹੇਲਾ।
 ਆਸਾ ਵਿਚਿ ਨਿਰਾਸ ਗਤਿ ਸਚਾ ਖੇਲੁ ਮੇਲੁ ਸਚੁ ਖੇਲਾ।
 ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸਿਖੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਗੁਰ ਚੇਲਾ ॥੨੦॥

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 ਤਬ ਸਹਿਜੇ ਰਚਿਓ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਸਾਬਤ ਮਰਦਾਨਾ॥
 ਇਉਂ ਉਠੇ ਸਿੰਘ ਭਬਕਾਰਿ ਕੈ ਸਭ ਜਗ ਡਰਪਾਨਾ॥
 ਮੜੀ ਦੇਵਲ ਗੋਰ ਮਸੀਤ ਢਹਿ ਕੀਏ ਮੈਦਾਨਾ॥
 ਬੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਖਟ ਸ਼ਾਸਤ੍ਰਾ ਫੁਨ ਮਿਟੇ ਕੁਰਾਨਾ॥
 ਬਾਂਗ ਸਲਾਤ ਮਿਟਾਇ ਕਰਿ ਮਾਰੇ ਸੁਲਤਾਨਾ॥
 ਮੀਰ ਪੀਰ ਸਭ ਛਪਿ ਗਏ ਮਜ੍ਹਬੇ ਉਲਟਾਨਾ॥
 ਮਲਵਾਨੇ ਕਾਜੀ ਫਿੜਿ ਥਕੇ ਕਛ ਮਰਮ ਨ ਜਾਨਾ॥
 ਲਖ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਨ ਜੋਤਕੀ ਬਿਖ ਰਸ ਉਰਝਾਨਾ॥
 ਫੁਨ ਪਾਥਰ ਦੇਵਲ ਪੂਜ ਕੈ ਅਤਿ ਹੀ ਭਰਮਾਨਾ॥
 ਇਉਂ ਦੋਨੇ ਫਿਰਕੇ ਕਪਟ ਮੈਂ ਰਚ ਰਹੇ ਨਿਦਾਨਾ॥
 ਇਹ ਤੀਸਰ ਮਜ਼ਹਬ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਉਪਜਿਓ ਪਰਧਾਨਾ॥
 ਜਿਨਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਕੇ ਹੁਕਮ ਸੋ ਗਹਿ ਖੜਗ ਦਿਖਾਨਾ॥
 ਤਿਹ ਸਭ ਦੁਸਟਨ ਕਉ ਛੇਦਿ ਕੈ ਅਕਾਲ ਜਪਾਨਾ॥
 ਫਿਰ ਐਸਾ ਹੁਕਮ ਅਕਾਲ ਕਾ ਜਗ ਮੈਂ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਾਨਾ॥
 ਤਬ ਸੁੰਨਤ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਕਰ ਸਕੈ ਕਾਪਿਓ ਤੁਰਕਾਨਾ॥
 ਇਉਂ ਉਮਤ ਸਭ ਮੁਹੰਮਦੀ ਖਪਿ ਗਈ ਨਿਦਾਨਾ॥
 ਤਬ ਫਤੇ ਡੰਕ ਜਗ ਮੈਂ ਘੁਰੇ ਦੁਖ ਦੁੰਦ ਮਿਟਾਨਾ॥
 ਇਉਂ ਤੀਸਰ ਪੰਥ ਚਲਾਇਅਨ ਵਡ ਸੂਰ ਗਹੇਲਾ॥
 ਵਾਹ ਵਾਹ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਆਪੇ ਗੁਰੁ ਚੇਲਾ ॥੧੬॥

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 ਸਚੈ ਤਬਤਿ ਨਿਵਾਸੁ ਹੈ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਸਚ ਖੰਡਿ ਵਸੰਦਾ ॥
 ਸਚੁ ਫੁਰਮਾਣੁ ਨੀਸਾਣੁ ਸਚੁ ਸਚਾ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਮੂਲਿ ਫਿਰੰਦਾ ॥
 ਸਚੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਟਕਸਾਲ ਸਚੁ ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਗੁਰ ਹੁਇ ਸਬਦ ਮਿਲੁਦਾ ॥
 ਸਚੀ ਭਗਤਿ ਭੰਡਾਰ ਸਚੁ ਰਾਗ ਰਤਨ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਭਾਵੰਦਾ ॥
 ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸਚਾ ਪੰਥੁ ਹੈ ਸਚੁ ਦੇਹੀ ਸਚੁ ਰਾਜੁ ਕਰੰਦਾ ॥
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 ਥਾਪਿਆ ਲਹਿਣਾ ਜੀਵਦੇ ਗੁਰਿਆਈ ਸਿਰ ਛੜ ਫਿਰਾਯਾ ॥

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