

Chapter 7

Shah Mohammed Punjab's Enlightened Patriot and War Poet of Jangnamah Hind-Punjab

The chapter 2 of this part comprises of some glimpses of Punjabyat to which many of us can relate even today. But about two hundred years back Punjab and specifically Lahore was witness to a universally accepted expression of Punjabyat that any patriot today would feel proud of. In the present environment of today, it is unbelievable. The source of that Punjabyat was history and exceptional men of the time related to us in more than one way under the command of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who himself shines like a bright star in India's and specifically Punjab's history.

He built up a kingdom and a powerful army and yet he disliked bloodshed. He abolished the death sentence when in England every petty pilferers had to face death. Except in actual warfare, he has never been known to take life. No doubt, he makes Lahore, Punjab, the subcontinent, and of course his ancestral place Gujranwala proud.

Shah Mohammed in reporting history of the time has done a tremendous job. He understood complex matters of people and nations. For me he is 'Punjab's Enlightened Patriot' and the 'War Poet of Jangnamah Hind-Punjab'.

The First Punjab War: Shah Mohammed's Jangnamah is a Punjabi language (Persian script) poetic account by Shah Mohammed of the First Punjab War of 1845 between Punjab and British India or between the Khalsa Darbar and the East India Company. Its original name by Shah Mohammed was '*Jangnamah* Hind-Punjab'. It was written in 1846 and consists of 105 stanzas of 8 lines each. Shah Mohammed belonged to the village Wadala Veeram in Amritsar district and the lineage of Sultan Mahmud, an artillery officer of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and was well educated. P. K. Nijhawan not only rendered it into Gurmukhi script but also gave it Poetic Rendition in English and Hindi languages. It was published in 2000 or after having all these four versions, Punjabi Persian script, Punjabi Gurmukhi script, Hindi, and English together under the title 'The First Punjab War'.

The introduction to this P. K. Nijhawan's work has been written by the author himself while the Foreword was written by Dr. Amrik Singh formerly Vice-Chancellor, Punjabi University, Patiala. And Prologue was contributed by Professor Prithipal Singh Kapoor, formerly Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and later Editor-in-Chief, Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Punjabi University, Patiala, 'who as a perceptive historian immediately accepted the idea that the first Anglo-Sikh War should more appropriately be called the First Punjab War as the spirit of Shah Mohammed so compellingly conveys and then agreed to get its publication sponsored by Maharaja Duleep Singh Foundation.'

Here I have taken from the Prologue, Foreword and the Introduction what time and space allowed me. I will use MAM for my name and the initial letters PKN of P. K. Nijhawan whose observations would be under discussion.

Prologue by Professor Prithipal Singh Kapoor, August, 2000

The decline of the Sikh Kingdom within a decade of the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh presents a saga of tragic events that touch the inner-most feelings of the Punjabis even today. No wonder, an account of the First Punjab War of 1845 presented by Shah Mohammed in his famous *Jangnamah* has been looked upon as the best requiem written on the fall of the Sikh Kingdom. Shah Mohammed's *Jangnamah* leaves no doubt that Ranjit Singh's regime as represented by the *Khalsa Darbar* had identified itself with the aspirations of the Punjabis as a whole and had thereby come to symbolise the Punjabi pride. ... The doyen of Punjab history, Professor Sita Ram Kohli cast a critical look on his *Jangnamah* in 1956, when he edited the text by appending a scholarly introduction to it. He accepted that Shah Mohammed belonged to the lineage of Sultan Mahmud, an artillery officer of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and was well educated. ... Sant Singh Sekhon, a celebrated Punjabi literary critic, looks at the *Jangnamah* as a literary piece. He Says: "... in *Jangnamah* Hind-Punjab (the original name of *Jangnamah* by Shah Mohammed) ... the overall felicity of expression comes more from nature than from art. Where nature sustains the expression, it is really perfect and such expressions are almost on the lips of a large number of Sikhs (Punjabis?) even to this day." (A History of Punjabi Literature, Voll, II, 128-129, P.U.P., 1996). ...

He (P.K. Nijhawan) also tries to identify the rise of Sikhism with "revival of Punjabi Nationalism." But before making such a statement, one has to

perceive whether we can hear of any reference to Punjabi Nationalism from the chroniclers before Sikhism appeared on the scene. The idea of Punjabi Nationalism is only of recent origin. Nijhawan's references to Sikhism as a 'schism of Hinduism' and the so-called *Mona-Sehajdhari* tradition also deserve attention. My personal and family experience has been at variance with Nijhawan's. My grand-father was attracted to Sikhism under the influence of his wife who was a regular reciter of the *Granth*. The couple decided to initiate their sons into the Khalsa fold. The consequence was distancing of the entire Kapur *gotra* people from our family and my grandparents did not find themselves comfortable at that. None of their sons could get a bride from within the *Dhai Ghara* Khatri castes as per hierarchical tradition. On our part, we never looked back. In this way; the *Mona-Sehajdhari* tradition could hardly enable Sikhism to pass as a 'schism of Hinduism'. It is also not correct to aver that Ranjit Singh had declared Hinduism or for that matter even Sikhism as a state religion. His was not a theocratic state. He named his government; *Sarkar-i-Khalsa* because of the debt he owed to the **Khalsa** and the Guru whose century-old struggle and vision had catapulted him to the position of a sovereign ruler of the Punjab. Shah Mohammed himself takes note of the Sikh identity by using the word *Singh* frequently. His laudatory references to the *Khalsa* leave no doubt that *Khalsa* had come to symbolise the Punjabi pride during his period. His general reference to the existence of two communities in Punjab i.e. Hindu and Muslim in no way merges the Sikhs within the Hindu social order. We find references by the British chroniclers also wherein *Sarkar-i-Khalsa* is described as a *Hindu* state. Such references are casual and reflect only lack of knowledge about ground realities and unique position of the Sikhs in the Indian sub-continent. We need not refer to such things while looking around in search of a Punjabi identity as compared to Bengali, Tamil, Gujarati or Oriya identities. The only comparison that one can think of and that can sustain with the Punjabi-Sikh identity is Maharashtra-Maratha, Rajasthan-Rajput identities. Here also the references of the Sikhs in the Punjab as a distinct community, with an independent religious system of their own in their own right and identification of the Hindus with their majority co-religionists in the rest of India and the Muslims with the erstwhile ruling class makes the question of Punjabi regional identity altogether different and more complex. ...

Nijhawan refers to the role of the Arya Samaj in giving a separate consciousness to certain sections of Hindu population. That this phenomenon led to some confrontation between the Arya Samajists and the Sanatanists is a sub story. The more important part of the story is that confrontation developed between them and the Sikhs. Meanwhile the Sikhs had been energized by the Singh Sabha Movement

Confrontation between the Sikhs and the Arya Samajists became a prominent feature of the political reality. Till the end of nineteenth century, it was a different situation. It was not necessary for Nijhawan to refer to these details except that he refers specifically to the virulence of confrontation which developed in the late 20th century. What is of real relevance however is how there was absolute peace amongst the various communities under Ranjit Singh. Once the British set about the task of consolidating their empire, and many things flowed from the manner in which the British went about the job, the situation began to change.

Going further, one can perhaps say that **what happened under the British has continued to happen ever since then. We are still passing through that phase when the impact of those forces released by the British is still at work. This is true not only of India but equally of Pakistan and Bangladesh.** Economists and sociologists would choose to describe these various phenomena as the rise and spread of capitalism, the growth of ethnicity, the emergence of the nation state and various other terms which are popular amongst the social scientists.

The significance of Shah Mohammed's poem lies in that he captured that passing moment in Punjab history when there was no cleavage whatsoever amongst the various communities. The Muslims who had been dethroned, so to speak, by Ranjit Singh did not bemoan their fate as might have ordinarily happened. On the contrary, the brief interlude of half a century is still recalled in Pakistan with a certain feeling of nostalgia and warmth. (Emphasis above mine – mam).

Introduction by the author P. K. Nijhawan, May, 2000

PKN: 20 He is particularly relevant to the trifurcated Punjabi society today, which brought about the Partition of India. Most people can hardly appreciate that there is a Punjabi Muslim who shed tears of blood at the fall of *Sarkar-i-Khalsa*. To see this in the background of present day communal atmosphere underlines the point that is sought to be made.... Before describing the actual war, Shah Mohammed goes into the events of the six years after the death of Ranjit Singh. ... It appears that Ranjit Singh had failed to create any lasting

institution, which could sustain the state. Certainly, the British must have played their treacherous imperial game ... But that cannot be the whole explanation.

MAM: PKN seems to have written in or before 2000 and he finds the Punjabi society trifurcated. It was bifurcated in 1947. Can we say that the bifurcation of 1947 led to the trifurcation later? And now the future is unpredictable. Had there not been British in India what probable scenarios one can imagine after the death of Ranjit Singh? But why to think like that? If there had not been British in India, is it not reasonable to think that Ranjit Singh would have been a (or the?) claimant of Delhi's throne? When Ranjit Singh's Punjab was defeated by the British, the Mutiny was only 8 years away. This fact throws light on many possibilities. But right from the beginning had not Ranjit Singh's career been blocked in the east by the British? Had fate allowed him another 15 to 20 years' of healthy life, perhaps we would have been spared British occupation.

After I had written this, I happened to read 'Memoirs of Alexander Gardener', Colonel of Artillery in the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, edited by Maj Hugh Peaser, 1898. And this is what he says: 'The Maharaja was indeed one of those masterminds which only require opportunity to change the face of the globe. Ranjit Singh made a great and powerful nation from the disunited confederacies of the Sikhs, and would have carried his conquests to Delhi or even farther had it not been for the simultaneous rise and consolidation of the British empire in India.'

PKN: (p. 23) Perhaps, the most perceptive part of the poem is the concluding half a dozen stanzas. An ordinary mind and a lesser mortal could have easily succumbed to the lure of pleasing the way the masters and the poets as a class are generally known to turn sycophants at the drop of a hat, singing panegyrics of the victor. One such poet is our great Mirza Ghalib, who also wrote his Fatehnamah, running into 42 verses of high faulting Persian on one of the battles of this very war. But here what is important is how Shah Mohammed responded to the new masters. In this connection, stanza 98 is worth a close reading.

*In this way, the Feringhee became the protector of the Mai
They stationed their own contingents in Lahore
They assumed the overlordship of the trans-Satluj regions
Establishing their advanced post in Phillaur
They took over the control of Lahore and Ferozepur*

*Besides apportioning the revenues accruing from the trade route of Nanda Chor
O Shah Mohammed Kangra too was usurped
In short, they did everything a thief does 24*

The important part of this stanza is the courage of the poet in calling the British thieves. Not just that. In the very next stanza, Shah Mohammed says:

*The country now passed into the hands of company functionary
As well as the sons of men of means*

Almost in the same vein, the poet reiterates, in stanza 103 summing up in these words:

*O Shah Mohammed! All wealth is today garnered,
By the sons of moneylenders and gumashtas in the main*

Nothing can better describe how the sons of the lower middle classes, particularly constituting the *monas* i.e. those not keeping long hair, after learning a few words of English and skill in cajolery, became the errand boys of the Company bureaucrats. (p. 24)

Another great virtue of this poem is that it has been composed in the *baint* metre, the king of Punjabi folk metres, greatly popularized by Waris Shah. ... this ballad is sung along with Heer with almost equal effect, though the thought pattern and the subject matter are entirely different. ... **Even a man like me who remained far away from his Punjabi roots for the greater part of his life, used to respond patriotically to some of the lines that I happened to hear in my distant childhood.** (p. 26)

MAM: PKN was born in late nineteen-twenties. If this ballad was sung along with Heer with almost equal effect, Muslim children, too must have heard it. Therefore I should have heard and known Shah Mohammed, in particular, because of having rural background. I was born in mid nineteen-forties. I came to know Shah Mohammed only recently when I started work on Punjabi language. Was it because Muslim Punjab before and after Partition was less interested in Shah Mohammed and Ranjit Singh than Sikhs? And what about Hindus?

PKN: However, for me the uniqueness of this poem lies elsewhere. **This is the only piece of literature or folk literature which is so full of Punjabi togetherness and even Punjabi nationalism.** It appears that the poet and his audience had reached a stage of identification with the *Khalsa Darbar* to such an extent that his poetry

seemed to completely reflect the aspirations of both the Hindus and the Muslims of the land of the five rivers.

MAM: This was Ranjit Singh's contribution to civilization. This happened in Punjab.

PKN: Having been born in late twenties and lived all my life in the communalized atmosphere of the mid-twentieth century, I must confess I never came across this type of expression of **Punjabi togetherness anywhere else**. In my present mood, **it is music to my ears**. But then it raises some very important questions of contemporary reality. For example, the amount of disinformation that our history books dish out on the communal question. **Whatever be the degree of regret, it has been constantly droned out into our ears that the Hindus and Muslims have always been hostile to each other which means that they were inveterate enemies and Panipat was perhaps the only possible meeting point.**

MAM: Yes, the history took that path. And those who did not want to take that path, the Indian National Congress and others, were weak, while practically throughout the full might of the British was against them.

PKN: It is this that led to the 'two nation' theory which formed the basis of the Partition of India.

MAM: I must add that Pakistan was not inevitable. But again when the Congress was not in the position to fight it out, history took the turn which it took.

PKN: Not just that, it is this kind of inexorable communal logic which is paving the way for the trifurcation of the Punjabi society in as much as the Hindus and the Sikhs of Punjab today are also in the processing of becoming two separate nations. For example, in the entire eighties, a virulent militant movement for creating a separate Sikh state of *Khalistan* in the Punjab on the lines of Pakistan, was fought with tears and blood. And if the tragedy has been averted for the time being, it is only because the silken bonds of shared Hindu-Sikh oneness have not yet been wholly snapped in spite of overt and covert machinations of several groups at several levels. Anyway, it is the greatest tragedy that could have hit Punjab, at least for the men and women of my generation. (p. 27)

MAM: It is very difficult to prepare people that they are not trapped. And for that we need leaders. And leaders are perhaps the rarest commodity in the world.

PKN: I once had the occasion of partaking the wisdom of the late Dr. M. S. Randhawa on this point. He told me that somehow we ourselves destroyed the human ecology of Punjab and, and therefore must now pay for it. When I asked him to elaborate, he said that he could not conceive of a Punjab in which the Punjabis were divided communally. According to him, no picture of a developed and prosperous Punjab could emerge without the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims forming one homogenous community. I was not too sure if such a state of togetherness ever existed until I read Shah Mohammed in 1995.

MAM: ‘We ourselves destroyed the human ecology of Punjab.’, very true. We have all gone wrong. Men of conscience of new generations must come forward. Everything cannot be left to the states and governments. If we persist truthfully and claim what has been lost, we will get even more than what had been lost but of course in a new form.

PKN: I placed my entire Hindu identity on the anvil so as to understand how and why communalism appeared in this form. And my pet subject has since been that the process began with the increasing alienation of the **Punjabi Hindu** from the collectivity that Ranjit Singh had forged. It is he who moved away from his organic roots, setting into motion a whole range of communally surcharged chain reactions. I wanted something more definite to prove myself correct. Going over the whole gamut of **political, social, cultural, economic and linguistic alienation of the Punjabi Hindu from the rest of the Punjabi community**, I found out that the Punjabi Hindu had done quite a bit to breed and promote communalism in Punjab. In fact, it made communal thinking among the other communities a more **rational, and more fashionable** way of projecting themselves. Yet, the third party which means the **British**, of course contributed no less to this process. Hence, I blame the **reform movements** that first affected the Hindus for authoring this kind of tragedy. How?

In my kind of analysis, it is the ***Bhadra Lokas***, which means the Anglicised Hindus who found it God sent opportunity to ape the white sahibs in order to go up the ladder of life. On the part of the new rulers, there was also a clear reward and punishment policy set into motion. Those who adopted the European model of the Renaissance and the Reformation as the basis of progress, soon came to dominate the society. On the contrary, those who resisted this change were relegated to much lower positions, socially and economically. **Thus, the Anglicised Hindu immediately started reforming the Hindu religious traditions by making it into a competing religion.** The **churchlessness** of the traditional Hindu now began to appear to him as a sign of backwardness. This however took away the cementing base of Hindu pluralism that

kept the Punjabi society together for so long in spite of the pulls and pressure of Islamic domination.

After coming across the picture of the society thrown up by Shah Mohammed, it does appear that the Punjabi society had achieved that homogeneity which could have made the emergence of a **Punjabi nation** possible. And to this nation, both the Hindus and the Muslims would have gravitated with almost equal zeal. I, therefore, regard the forces of Renaissance and the **Reformation** unleashed both by **Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Dayanand** as the main reasons for the trifurcation of the Punjabi society.

MAM: There are many aspects and so much non-linearity in our affairs that they need the attention of our thought process. I should clarify that I have not felt inclined to contradict P. K. Nijhawan anywhere except once which follow in my next comments. The question is to reach the narrative which is right and within the possibility of acceptability, if not today, at least tomorrow. The matters are so serious. And the thrust, the direction of that thrust and the spirit behind his argument is just right. There is no doubt that Shah Mohammed is inspiring and P. K. Nijhawan seems to have found himself re-assured. Should we say that what he has written is a manifesto for the Punjab of the future? I myself believe we are somewhere near a major breakthrough.

PKN: The catholic Sanatanist ethos of the Hindus and Vaishnavism which was the religion of love, both came under attack from the reformed Hindus with unremitting fury. Instead, the new Hindus, whom I call *Namasteji* Hindus wanted the Muslims and later on the Sikhs to reach out to them to on their terms only. And the answer was a foregone conclusion. They, in turn, refused to oblige the pretenders, particularly when the British had started showing an olive-branch to them in preference to the Hindus. How sad that not a single Hindu in Punjab could read the writing on the wall. That is why I say that while the Punjabi Hindu threw up all kinds of professionals, he did not produce even one man from among them whom one could call a man of vision or destiny. It is this jilted Hindu who, as a reaction, became the first nationalist of India and filled the ranks of the Indian National Congress. But by the same token, this alienated the Muslims and later on the Sikhs from embracing the Congress brand of nationalism.

I, however, must clarify that the outline of the thesis presented above has emerged from a very complex historical thought the nature of which is almost civilizational. It is based on the presumption that Hinduism is a cyclic civilization which makes it that much more enduring, though incomprehensible. But, by the same token, it has survived

many a vicissitudes of history, keeping its own role fully well-defined as the final deliverer of the human race when the linearity of social experience of the western man ceases to be a factor in the destiny of man on this earth. It also presupposes that, time after time, in every crisis, Hinduism has the capacity, to renew and restate itself. 29

MAM: In the above paragraph PKN has gone into explaining Hinduism very comfortably. But one should fear treading into the territories of religion. If there is inspiration from that source, the right approach is to convert it into presentable wisdom. And the wisdom is that wisdom should stand by itself. The collective human experience should be able to do that. I believe Mahatma Gandhi's example is very conspicuous that being religions how to conduct yourself in public where all religions existed.

PKN: I personally believe that Sikhism is the last restatement of Hinduism that we know. It is, therefore, a higher and simpler form of Hinduism, brought into being to save *Dharma*. And since Sikhism is at this time Punjab-specific, it follows that the Punjab must stand in special relationship with the rest of the country. And what is that relationship? It is that overtime Sikhism will once again emerge as that broadbased form of Punjabi nationalism which will enable Pakistan to join back India in a confederation at some future date. I know that this is a digression of sorts but I do hope that it would be considered permissible in the light of what Shah Mohammed has to tell us. (p. 30)

MAM: PKN is really refreshing. And his intellectual flight over the territories of Sikhism I believe can put many in deep thought. I should not go beyond that. Wishing Pakistan joining back India in a confederation at some future date should be reciprocated with equally good wishes. But the challenges our language faces are of Himalayan proportions. Imagine the backlog. The best and energetic minds should assemble from the Punjabi world to lay the foundation of the future struggle.

PKN: Let us see where Shah Mohammed is absolutely unique. In our times which are obsessed with the so-called scientific secularism, his statement of a situation we can scarcely comprehend. He talks of Hindu-Muslim oneness not as something to be achieved but which is already an incontrovertible fact of life, nay, the highest value which is worshipped all around. In fact, Shah Mohammed thinks that anything likely to interfere with this oneness cannot but be a scourge.

In this connection, his third stanza is worth mulling over. This is a quintessential stanza – most crucial to understand as to why he sang his entire ballad. Imagine the scenario of his two pals, one a Hindu and another a Muslim asking him how the third caste (for

him the Hindus and Muslims are no less than two castes, always destined to live together) which means the *Feringhees* descended between them as a scourge of sorts. Now what is the dramatic irony? It is that soon their happy togetherness would become a thing of the past due to the machinations of this scourge. At that time, which means almost within months of the defeat of the *Khalsa Darbar* Forces, it could have been no more than a foreboding of something sinister to come which means which would hereafter not let them live happily together. How prophetic! The exact words conveying this prognostication are as under:

*One day I was
sitting in
Batala, wholly
lost The
'Feringhee'
became the
subject of our
talk
Hira Lal and Nur Khan, two
of my bosom friends –
Suddenly did they accost me,
asking;
How in the midst of Musalmans and
Hindus, living happily together Had a
scourge of sorts descended from
nowhere?
For, O Shah Mohammed! Never in the Punjab
Was a third caste ever known to have come* 31

Was this a mere instinctive reaction of a poet which means a highly sensitive mind in tune with reality or was he reading it as a writing on the wall? Well it could be both.

After going over all the ups and downs of the First Punjab War which leaves him almost broken, he finds an abiding ray of hope in this divinely-coordinated Hindu-Muslim togetherness. In a way, he rounds off his ballad on this very hopeful note. Says he, in stanza 103:

*God willing, good things shall happen again.
What if the soldiers have lost the luster of their mien?
Great commonality does exist between the Hindus and the Musalmans.*

*None should ever dare
break this common silken
bond. The new rulers have
no ear for anyone.*

*Drunk with themselves,
oblivious they're of our
pain O Shah Mohammed!
All wealth is today
garnered. By sons of
moneylenders and
'gumashtas' in the main.
31*

This happy togetherness peers out from each of his lines in the entire narrative of the ballad. The conduct of the Musalman armies and the public at large was that of the highest order. There was not even a remote suggestion that the *Feringhee* was the deliverer of the Muslims from the yoke of the Sikhs, something which became such a fact of life not long afterwards. Did the British not try this card? Yes, they did. Let us see how.

Here we must refer to the Wahabi movement which the British had engineered in India to cause disaffection among the Punjabi Muslims against the *Khalsa Darbar* which, to all intents and purposes, could be identified as a dangerous Hindu revival against the Muslims. This Wahabi movement had given a call for *Jehad* for all the Muslims to unite for a religious war so that the Sikhs did not subdue the Pathans. The British had allowed the fire-eating Maulvis to organize the Muslims of UP and Bihar and even pledged large funds, ammunition and volunteers at their disposal. It is enough to understand that the Wahabis were allowed to reach N.W.F.P. through Sind so as to be able to fight the advancing Sikhs. Not just that. They were able to incite many of the Pathan tribes to join them in the *jehad*. They were also fully supported by the Amir of Kabul. Now all this could not have come about without the active connivance of the British. For, this is how Sir Syed Ahmad Khan later on defends the Wahabis and the general Muslim disaffection for the British.

But then it is remarkable that not a single Muslim chief of any standing from the Punjab joined them. Not just that. This movement did not disturb the even tenor of life in Punjab even a small bit. What does this mean? It just means that the Muslims at large had not only fully reconciled themselves with the Sikh overlordship of the Punjab but also believed that they were, in fact, equal partners in the Lahore government. ... But then we proved to be unworthy sons of the Punjabis inhabiting the land of the five

rivers only a hundred years ago. ... The Hindus organizing themselves as a nation and the Sikhs under the Akalis doing likewise and that too in a theocratic manner which means with the aim of cutting the Muslims to size, must have finally driven them into the arms of Mr. Jinnah. And it happened because the British also wanted it to be so. (p. 33)

Otherwise, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan was no less a protector of the Hindus. It was he who not only banned the Khaksar movement in Punjab, but also brutally rained bullets on it, unmindful of how the Muslims in general might react. He defended the police action of invading the Bhati Gate mosque in Lahore and killing the Khaksars inside it because they had taken refuge there by creating lawlessness through an engineered communal fracas. ...

During the later years of the Second World War, some Yanky soldiers who had forcibly lifted a girl of the Fateh Chand College, were killed right on the Nicholson Road in Lahore by some Hindu and Muslim college boys who were playing a hockey match in the University grounds at that time. There was great panic and consternation in the air. No one knew how the military authorities might react. The Defence of India rules were still in force. But Sir Sikandar stood his ground manfully. He refused to take action against the boys because he said right on the floor of Punjab Assembly that in the face of such a provocation, even he would have done the same thing. What I mean to say that he was not against the common Hindu of Punjab. All he was against was the money-worshipping Hindu trader who exploited the poor Muslim in so many ways. But alas! The Arya Samaj Hindu who dominated the media and Punjab Congress with the help of the Akalis who had long resiled from the Ranjit Singh kind of secularism, not only ditched the Unionists but also destroyed the country in general and the Punjab in particular. ...

But by far the most conspicuous aspect of this kind of Hindu-Muslim oneness as described by Shah Mohammed is that he has as yet no consciousness that the Hindus and the Sikhs are two. It appears that right until the end of the reign of the Sikhs, the Sikh identity was a part of the larger Hindu identity; perhaps till then they were politically, socially, culturally and religiously one. Perhaps the rise of the Sikhs was in actual practice seen as an organic aspect of the revival of Hinduism. ... (p. 36)

The Sikhism was a schism of the Hindus or reformed Hinduism or even a new religion, was as yet not so well appreciated, particularly among those who were non-Hindus. For, in all situations of a communal nature, the Sikhs always acquitted themselves as much better Hindus. This was so right until my childhood, for, ours

being a *Mona*-Sikh family, the common supposition among all our relatives was that even the *Monas* were Sikhs i.e., the *Sehajdhari* Sikhs, while the Sikhs and the *Monas* were Hindus only, yet, in an overall sense.

Our general belief was that every *Sehajdhari* family should baptize the first born son into the Khalsa as the protector of the *Dharma*. Even as late as the sixties, one of my Sikh uncles specially brought for me the *Parasadam* from Rameshwaram for, he had gone thither on a pilgrimage. When I asked if he still believed in it, he said that in his youth, he had done pilgrimage to all the other *Dhams*. Now this alone was left. So he felt that let it also be completed before he breathed his last. ‘Was it necessary to do so in this old age?’ He said he had done so because he knew it would give solace to the soul of his late mother. I asked him. He was related to us through his mother. ... (p. 39)

The *Mona*-Sikh oneness ... was a special feature of Punjab’s sociology not so long ago ... 39 40 Now let us turn to the second caste which means Musalmans of Punjab. We have discussed them at length in respect of how they had joined the Hindus including the Sikhs to weld all the Punjabis into one nation much before the idea of a nation-state could be conceived of or projected in India. What was their contemporary role in the battle? Under the normal communal reflex, the Muslims should have gained much by ditching the *Khalsa Darbar*. But that’s what we think after the ‘two nation’ theory divided India.

However, the fact remains that that while the Sikh commanders, particularly Tej Singh, the Commander-in-Chief, and Lal Singh, the personal adviser of the Maharani both had sold their conscience to the British, not one Muslim of any standing backed out of the battle. And mind you! They occupied a very crucial position on the battlefield. They had almost the entire artillery under them. They were perhaps the best gunners on this side of the Suez. Besides they were so trustworthy that, during the war, Rani Jindan handed over Lahore to the care of the Muslim forces only. Can anyone imagine such a thing happening today? Anyway, in this context, it would be appropriate to reproduce stanza 60 which is as under: (p. 41)

*Mahmud Ali marched out from his Majha county
Taking awesome artillery pieces out of the city
The Brigade of Sultan Mahmud also came out
With invincible Imam Shahi guns in tow
Elahi Buksh brought out his guns after polishing them
And showing them worshipful burning incense sticks
O Shah Mohammed! In such a way did the guns shine*

As if there were the flashes of lightening out to dispel darkness

...

Now let us see the depth of this belief that it was Punjab at war with Hind or India as under the East India Company and not the Sikhs. The title of the ballad itself leaves nothing to chance and underlines the point that it was a war as between two sovereign countries, viz. India under the East India Company and Punjab as symbolized by the *Khalsa Darbar*. However, a few illustrations of a telltale nature of this kind of Punjabi nationalism appear to be called for in order to buttress this claim. Hence I reproduce below four stanzas to prove what I say. For example, stanza 63 says:

*All over Hindustan were heard great explosions of the battles to come
Which rocked Delhi and Agra Hansi and Hissar
Bikaner and Lucknow and Ajmer and Jaipur
People across the Yamuna started running in panic
The entire Punjab appeared to be on the offensive
As no count was possible of those joining action
O Shah Mohammed ! None could be stopped in that blinding storm
The Singhs now appeared determined to conquer Delhi*

The next illustration is from stanza 72. It says:

*Regrouping the troops the Tunda Lat appealed
The honour of England is in your hands
The Singhs have destroyed before them
They've not even spared Hindustani units whether from South or East
The British Isles are full of sorrow today
Full four thousand soldiers have perished in action
O Shah Mohammed ! The Lat roared
Its our turn now to taste the blood of Singhs*

Stanza 88 is much more telling illustration in this respect. It goes like this:

*In the meanwhile, the Sardars met, and passed a Gurmata
O friends ! have your senses examined
It's the doings of the Vandals that have cost us the battle
Now the question is: How best to save your honour*

*The Punjab was strong as long as the fist was closed
 Now they (the uncouth soldiers) have opened it and exposed
 O Shah Mohammed ! We shall die here fighting
 So that the cause of Punjab remains undefeated*

But it is the stanza 90 which must take the cake. It says:

*The Feringhee once again attacked after heavy bombardment
 But the Singhs repulsed them with very heavy losses
 Both Mewa Singh and Meghe Khan took them head on
 Three attacks of the Feringhee were broken and beaten back
 Sham Singh the honourable Sardar of Attari
 Was resplendent in the battlefield despite his years
 O Shah Mohammed ! In that blinding action
 The Singhs spilled the Feringhee blood like squeezing ripe lime*

Shah Mohammed summed up the entire battle just in one line in the Stanza 92, Says he:

*O Shah Mohammed! But for one Sardar,
 The forces lost the battle they, in fact, had won.*

MAM: Thus I conclude Shah Mohammed's historical and poetic statement. I feel the powerful spirituality I feel in Shah Mohammed's verses had a destined purpose. P. K. Nijhawan's labour of love has put Shah Mohammed's work close to that destined purpose – Punjab, Punjabiya and Punjabi. ■