



Gurta Gaddi celebrations would be incomplete without the talk of efforts to preserve the Word of the Guru in its pristine glory. The Nanakshahi Trust in Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar, near Chandigarh is engaged in doing just that and more. While millions are being spent on Langar, yatras, pilgrimage and decorations and we do not grudge that, let us also spare time, money and effort to boost the wonderful and path-breaking work of this team, Let us all, trust Nanakshahi.

Jagmohan Singh

As we go into the fourth centennial of revering Guru Granth Sahib as our Guru, one of the biggest challenges before us is the preservation of the original work of our Gurus and other contributors of the Granth Sahib.

We have lived through many a struggle during our chequered history of six centuries. The preservation of our heritage has suffered the vagaries of time, history and apathy. Of late, the opponents of the Sikh thought had brought the situation to such a passé that inimical academics and many other adversely inclined had started to question the authenticity and veracity of Sikh scriptures.

The Thanda Burj where the Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh were imprisoned, the tell-tale signs of the storming of Darbar Sahib in Amritsar in 1984, the environs of Takht Hazur Sahib Gurdwara, the house of the first Sikh –Bebe Nanaki, the precious manuscripts and artifacts in the Sikh Reference Library –all is lost. Nobody knows where is the hand-written Zafarnama which Guru Gobind Singh ji wrote to Aurangzeb?

Somehow the idea of preservation of legacy and priceless treasure did not seem to sink into our psyche. We used to take pride in the ‘creation of history’ and ‘not in its preservation’.

The demolition and destruction of heritage buildings in the name of Kar Sewa, the marble-layering of one Gurdwara after another without rhyme or reason was going on uninterrupted and is still happening with the blessings of the very custodians of the faith.

Someday, the custodians of this treasure of the community, essentially, the SGPC should be prosecuted for dereliction of duty. According to the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925, they are mandated to protect and preserve Sikhism, but in this aspect, they have not only failed but have taken deliberate steps to erase our historical and cultural legacy. The state government of Punjab and the government of India, not known for respect for heritage and culture are equally responsible and culpable for vandalizing our cultural inheritance.

Decades ago, UNICEF did carry out micro-filming of some Sikh scriptures. But that was not enough. Things had to change. The nation could not wait any longer. Wanton destruction had bestirred many but some took the first steps. Amandeep Singh Madra and Paramjit Singh in the UK took up the mantle to preserve the Art of the Sikh Kingdoms and have come out with remarkable books on the subject. They have documented Sikh heritage artifacts in a number of museums across the globe. Harbinder Singh’s Maharaja Duleep Singh Trust, has measured the length and breath of the Anglo-Sikh Heritage Trail. Gurmit Rai of Cultural Resource Conservation Initiative with her pioneering work almost secured us the World Heritage status for Darbar Sahib. The restoration of Guru-ki-Masit in Gurdaspur by her team is a classic and unparalleled achievement. The design work of Kanwal Parkash Singh in the US and the Sikh heritage paintings of the sister duo of UK- Amrita and Rabindra Kaur Singh are unique efforts at preservation. The Sikh arts collection of Narinder Singh Kapany of the Sikh Foundation is another major landmark in this field. Balvinder Singh of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar has ably documented the art and architecture in Amritsar city. The Nanakshahi Trust took upon the daunting, painstaking and severe task of preserving Sikh literature and art.

The Nanakshahi vision

The Nanakshahi vision is to bring the documentary history and artifacts of Punjab to life. This new digital life will increase awareness and access. Digitizing documents and preserving them is a tedious but sure way of preserving the heritage of humankind for posterity. Basically it is the capturing of data through advanced scanning and photographic tech-

niques, transforming it to easily searchable digital files on computers.

Embarking upon this challenging task, the Nanakshahi Trust initiated the Punjab Virsa Digitisation programme using advanced technology and the services of a team of dedicated professionals. They have managed what others would easily deem impossible.

Setting strict benchmarks for itself, the Nanakshahi team says that, “The real challenge is whether we can do better and last longer than the Alexandria Library, which was said to hold between 30-70% of the world’s knowledge.”

As is the case, cultural items reside in different areas of the state of Punjab, such as villages, private collections, libraries, archives and museums and are accessible only in person. Digital preservation has changed this. With the setting up of the Punjab Digital Library, it has become

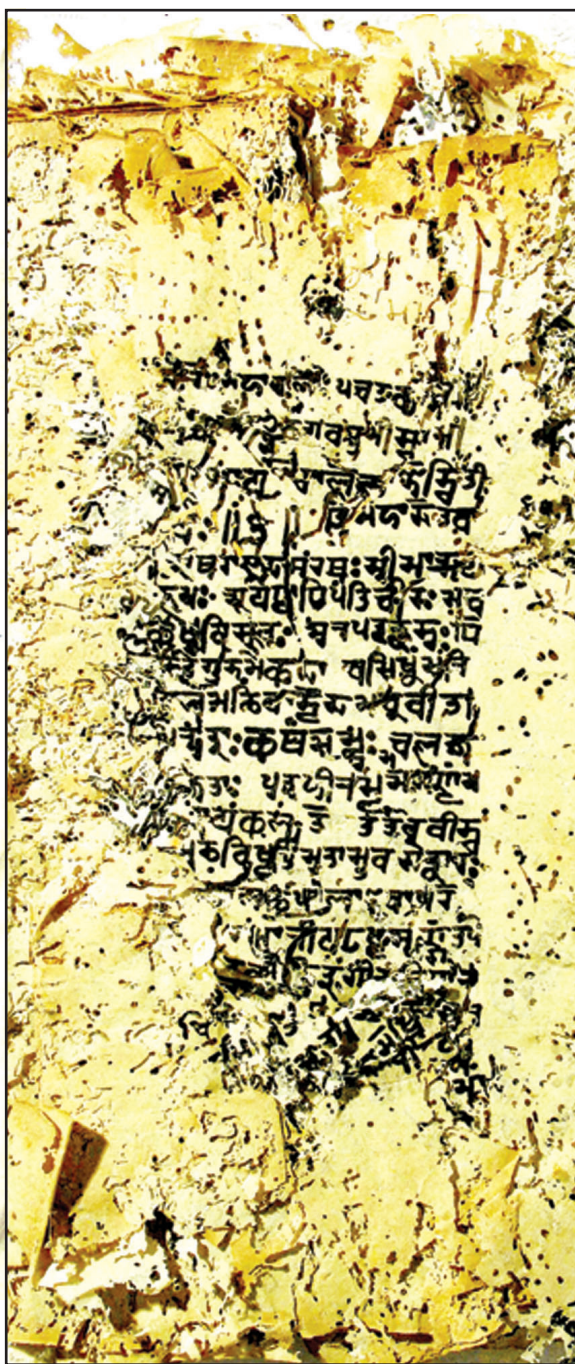


possible not only to preserve our cultural heritage but also to showcase the varied and fascinating history of the Punjab region.

The Panjab Digital Library initiative of the Nanakshahi Trust, while being the first such endeavour by a non-governmental

organization to work without a grant, has so far digitized 8,50,000 folios of manuscripts, rare books, pictures, magazines and newspapers.

The record of the trust is remarkable. It has so far digitized over 2,250 manuscripts including, copies of Guru Granth Sahib dated as early as 1653, inscriptions of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, a Granth bearing the mark of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, Bhagvat Gita (1866), Bhagvat Puran in Gurmukhi, Persian manuscripts, Arabic works such as Koran Sharif, and 328 manuscripts of Sharda Script, Gian Ratnavli by Bhai Mani Singh, Paire Mokhe Wali Janamsakhi with seventy eight illustrations, Safri Bir of Bhai Daya Singh and a hukamnama by Guru Gobind Singh Sahib. Also digitized are most of the issues of The Spokesman Weekly (1951-1993), Khalsa Akhbar (1893-1903), all issues of The Sikh Review



SPARE A TEAR

While we celebrate Gurta Gaddi, spare a tear for what we have lost forever in June 1984.

Housed in the precincts of Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, the Sikh Reference Library, set up in 1929, had hundreds of volumes of rare manuscripts, besides artifacts.

According to an estimate, we lost the following in the Indo-Sikh battle at Amritsar in June 1984:

Books	20,000
• Manuscripts of Guru Granth Sahib	2,500
• Manuscripts related to Sikh Gurus	500
• Newspapers since 1876	120 files

• Rare books and documents	200
• Hukamnamas and Sikh Relics	160
• Rare paintings	250

This biggest and richest treasure house was looted and torched. The Indian state is still non-committal about its responsibility.

Also, let us not forget the contribution and role of Dr. Devinder Singh Duggal, whose labour of love was the Sikh Reference Library, and who died of shock at what the Indian armed forces had done to it.

(1953-2008); printed works include the Map of Hindoostan (1783), Sketch of the Sikhs (1812) and over twenty books by Giani Ditt Singh.

The private collection of bibliophiles, archivists and scholars have also been digitized including those of the Sodhi family, Anandpur Sahib, Dera Mahant Mastan Singh, Dharamkot, Dr. Man Singh Nirankari, Chandigarh, Prof Pritam Singh, Patiala; Prof Madanjit Kaur, Gurtej Singh, ex-IAS. The archives of the Institute of Sikh Studies and the Government Museum, Chandigarh have also been digitized.

More than 200,000 pages from books, magazines and newspapers have been put up into a searchable format. Venturing into multimedia, the project has over 160 hours of historical interviews and 2000 rare photographs.

A number of individual and institutional archiving projects have been accomplished by the trust. Some of these are:

Guru Granth Sahib Manuscripts

The trust has collected 25 manuscripts including seven copies of Guru Granth Sahib from various sources; five manuscripts of Guru Granth Sahib were given by Mahant Mastan Singh and Mahant Shiv Rao Singh of Dharamkot.

Kurukshetra University

In a rare achievement, 430 manuscripts lying with the Kurukshetra University were digitized prompting the dean of the University, Dr. G. Khurana “...hamari university ke upar Nanak sahai ho gae hain”. The University celebrated Manuscript Day and has further requested the Nanakshahi Trust to digitize an additional 6500 manuscripts and 1500 rare books lying with the University, which awaits allocation of funds. A grateful Kurukshetra University has acknowledged the efforts of the Nanakshahi Trust on its official website.

Panjab Languages Department

The Trust has digitized the entire collection of 604 manuscripts of the Panjab Languages Department running into 2,70,000 folios.

Chief Khalsa Divan

29 manuscripts of Guru Granth Sahib in nearly 37,000 folios have been digitised. The Trust has further plans to digitize more records of the Divan. Jathedar Dalip Singh Malu Nangal:

135 manuscripts, amounting to 45,000 folios of this collection, including rare manuscripts have been digitized.

Panjab Virasat Charitable Trust

Navjot Pal Singh Randhawa’s Punjab Virasat Charitable Trust has a fabulous treasure chest of over 800 manuscripts and about 200 rare books in the fields of literature, medicine, religion and history, running into some 58,000 folios, which are under the scanners of the Nanakshahi team and this project too will soon be completed.

November 1984 legal documents

All historic documents running into 200,000 pages, which will some day be part of the Nuremberg-like trials of the anti-Sikh pogrom, from the records of advocate-activist Harvinder Singh Phoolka have been digitally preserved. Old Newspapers and Magazines

The Trust has acquired a huge newspaper collection from different sources, which includes The Indian Express, Tribune, Akali Patrika, Ajit, Hind Samachar and Jag Bani from 1961 to 2006, all the issues of The Sikh Review since 1953, Sant Sipahi and some other rare magazines since 1946. Even the SGPC resolutions since 1932 form part of the enormous collection.

Digitization of Books

Going the whole hog and using the latest technology to the hilt, the team has so far digitized 1453 books, most of them are rare or out of print and have an exclusive tie-up with publishers Singh Brothers to present all their publications online.

Full fledged parallel digitization of books has already commenced. The trust has priorities in this regard. ‘Orphan’ and ‘out-of-print’ works are given preference. If you are an author or

nation. Through the good offices of the Nanakshahi Trust, the Sikh nation has 9000 GB of data so far and it is increasing at the rate of 30 GB and more every day!

While established Sikh organizations are yet to recognize the work of the Trust, the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh has appreciated the services of the Nanakshahi trust for digitizing the Gallery’s manuscript collection and with the conferring of the India’s Best e-Content-2007 award by Manthan Awards, the Punjab Virsa Digitisation Initiative has bagged many new projects.

With the launch of online digital library website slated at the end of this year, searching and researching Sikh archives will only be a mouse click away.

On the occasion of the worldwide Tercentenary celebrations, Davinder Pal Singh, Director of



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even a collector, do not hesitate to get in touch with the affable team of Nanakshahi.

Future Projects

With miles to go, the team of 22 at Mohali is garnering 30 GB of data every 24 hours. The formalities to document the collection of Dr. Trilochan Singh, twenty eight manuscripts of Guru Granth Sahib, six of Dasam Granth and thirteen others in Banaras and the private collection of Baba Sarabjot Singh Bedi have been completed. The trust has submitted proposals to SGPC, Khalsa College, Amritsar, Panjabi Sahit Academy- Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi and Panjab Archives, Patiala.

The work of archiving is a living habit of the proponents. They have introduced annual memberships for individuals and the trust also organizes awareness activities to underline the need for heritage preservation. Training volunteers and young contributors is part of their domain.

Archiving is not second nature, but first to the Nanakshahi team. They have built a vast reservoir of resources, leading to the building up of a virtual library of Sikh resources, the kind of which will make the Nanakshahi Team -the UNICEF of the Sikh

operations and co-founder of the trust reiterates, “Nanakshahi needs your invaluable time and monetary assistance to advance towards realizing its vision and seeks inputs on the perceptions, possibilities, and practicalities of our mission. Nanakshahi wishes to write new chapters in the coming years, in its effort to preserve our heritage.”

If Hewlett Packard can provide online access to the Vatican’s Apostolic Library, then why can’t SGPC or DSGMC or Takht Hazur Sahib Committee or philanthropic and concerned Sikh business tycoons spare a few millions to enlarge the scope, area and spheres of the Nanakshahi Trust?

With sheer dedication and minimal resources, this team has made us proud. In the true sense of having the original manuscript by our side, we can say, Guru de Naal. So, if you love your Guru, if you respect your Guru and you want the future generations to celebrate Guru de Naal, trust Nanakshahi. They have a long way to go and so have you. Take the first step. Today. Log on to www.Nanakshahi.org.

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