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Walking in the Footsteps of the Guru:

Sikhs and Seekers in the Indian Himalayas

by

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At where the Hem Kunt mount doth stand
Adorned by the Seven Peaks—all grand. 1.
The spot known as "*Sapat Sring*"
The place of penance of the Padav king.
There I practised severe discipline divine
Meditating on the Formless, the Causer of Time. 2.
It happened so, that absorbed in meditation
From entities two, me and God, became One.
I had no mind to come to the earth,
So rapt was I with the feet of the Lord.
But somehow He made me see His Mission.
And sent me here with this instruction. 5.

An excerpt from *Bachitar Natak*, the autobiography of Guru Gobind Singh, as translated in *Sri Hem Kunt Sahib: History and Guide*, 1967:2

Abstract

In one of the first empirical studies of Sikh religious beliefs and practices, the author examines the significance of sacred journeys and sacred places within the Sikh tradition and community. Pilgrimage is given no normative value in Sikhism yet it is given operative value by Sikhs. It is argued that this apparent contradiction is reconciled when considered from the perspective of pilgrims. To this end, one sacred journey to one sacred place—Hemkunt Sahib in the Indian Himalayas—is examined in detail. The author concludes that the role of pilgrimages to Gurdwaras within the Sikh community is consistent with the role of the Guru within the Sikh tradition. Further analysis suggests what it is about pilgrimage that is compelling for pilgrims even in religions with no formal doctrine of pilgrimage.

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On this journey, many have walked with me. I would like to express my thanks . . .

. . . to the scholars in whose work I have found guidance and inspiration. Special thanks to my supervisor and to the members of my defense committee who guided me through the final (and most formidable) phase of this project. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Department of Anthropology, the University of Calgary, and the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. Their generous assistantships, scholarships, and fellowships made this journey possible.

. . . to the members of the Sikh communities in India and North America who were the source of this project and its sustenance. I hope they will forgive me if, at times, my portrayal of their pilgrimage is insensitive or inaccurate. Thanks to my e-mail correspondents who took me along with them on virtual pilgrimages. Before I set foot at the sacred place, their vivid descriptions of Hemkunt Sahib brought the sacred journey to life for me. I am grateful for their encouragement and for their attention to my Sikh education. Thanks also to the pilgrims in the field who shared their pilgrimage with me, along with many cups of tea and many tales. Their openness and support of my work was touching and unforgettable. So was that of the villagers, workers, and *sevadars* who welcomed me into their midst and cared for me as their daughter and sister. The *gurduara* management likewise put their faith in me and opened many doors. When I returned home from the field I continued to find support among the Sikh *sangat* of my own city. Thanks to them for patient instruction in Punjabi language and for their contributions to a fund which enabled me to return to Punjab and my fieldsite for further studies.

. . . to my family in gratitude for their love, for inspiring in me the confidence to walk mountain paths far from home, and for always walking with me in spirit.

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Dedication

To the late Professor Puran Singh

whose poetry gives beautiful expression to the Sikh pilgrim's quest.

His words have been a source of inspiration.

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CHAPTER ONE

Sikhs and Seekers

> I am a pilgrim on an endless journey,
> Going for ever to Him.
> Puran Singh, *The Temple Tulips*, p. 110.

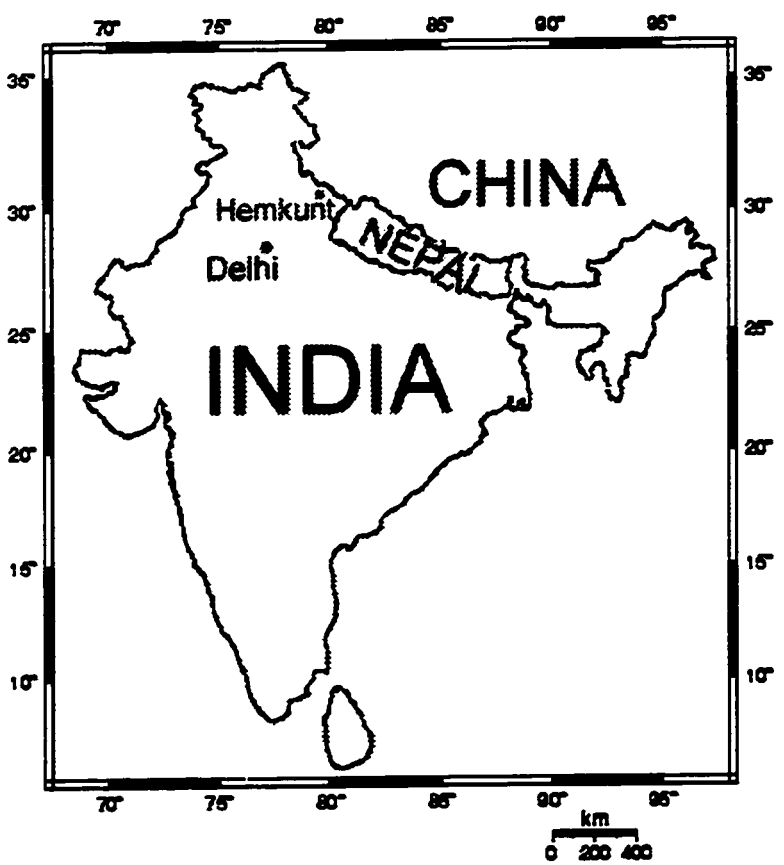
> "Whither are you going, mother?" ...
> "To the Guru's Temple," said she, "to-day assemble there the Guru's Khalsa, the holy ones, and I have come to bathe myself and my child in the current of *Nam*."
> Puran Singh, *The Temple Tulips*, p. 71.

In the Indian Himalayas, at the headwaters of the river Ganges, is a land of sacred mountains and waters. The contours of the valleys have been carved by the branches of the holy river. Paths, etched into the earth by the footfalls of pilgrims, follow them to their source. This is Uttarkhand, 'land of the North,' and Dev Bhoomi, 'abode of gods,' where temples mark the legendary dwelling places of deities whose tales are recounted in the vast Indian mythology. Pilgrims who come to these sacred places walk in the footsteps of the countless other seekers who have undertaken the sacred journey before them. Their devotion, it is said, has imbued the landscape itself with sacred qualities. In Uttarkhand, the beauty of nature is interwoven with the spirit of pilgrimage (Kaur 1985:92).

One shrine in Uttarkhand is unlike all the others. The steep stone footpath which leads to it, climbing through the valley of a small tributary of the Ganges, is not unique, nor is the lake at the stream's source. It is not distinguished by the stories of holy men and heroes whose acts of piety sanctified the water and land. Similar stories are told of many Himalayan landscapes. What sets this sacred place apart from all the others are the people who undertake the sacred journey. They are the Sikhs: adherents of a faith with no formal doctrine of pilgrimage. The Sikh Gurus taught that the spiritual ideal they seek—union with God—is within themselves. A path of internal remembrance leads to

this true place of pilgrimage. If pilgrims are empty of devotional love then their external pilgrimages are empty of spiritual value. Even so, the wearisome ascent to a remote holy place in the Himalayas is made by thousands of Sikhs each pilgrimage season.

Sikhs believe that Hemkunt Parbat Sapatsring ('lake of ice' 'mountain' with 'seven peaks') is the place where the tenth and final living Guru of the Sikhs meditated in his previous life and became one with God. From there, the Guru was called by God to be reborn into the world to teach the true path. A temple built on the shore of the lake commemorates his mission and also shelters the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the eternal scriptural Guru for the Sikh community. This community is itself recognized as a collective Guru, and pilgrims, as they walk the path towards Hemkunt Sahib, share the sacred journey with its members. In this way, all three forms of the Guru—the source of spiritual guidance—are understood to be present at Hemkunt Sahib. There, Sikh pilgrims feel closer to the Guru and, through the Guru, closer to God.[1]



It was along the path to this holy lake in Uttarkhand that I lived throughout one pilgrimage season to study the pilgrims. A year later I returned to travel with several organized pilgrim groups from the plains of Punjab into the hills and back again. In all, I made twenty sacred journeys to the shrine in two years, and spent many months in the company of Sikh pilgrims. This thesis is the product of that fieldwork and is, in one sense, an ethnography of a Sikh pilgrimage. In another sense it is more than that. In these pages, a description of the pilgrimage to Hemkunt Sahib takes the reader from its roots in myth and belief to its form and meaning as experienced by the pilgrims. Moving beyond these details of one sacred journey to one sacred place, I explore the significance of religiously-motivated travel within the wider Sikh tradition and community, seeking to understand what unifies all Sikh pilgrimages.

The Anthropologist's Journey

This is a study of pilgrims and pilgrimage. It is appropriate that the voices of pilgrims themselves express and interpret the meanings of their pilgrimage, and yet, another voice is ever-present in these pages: the voice of the anthropologist. The choices made by the anthropologist—choices about the subject, scope, site, and methods for the research, and about how to organize and write about the accounts collected—give final form to the pilgrims' expressions. For this reason, it is important that the anthropologist tell of her own journey: why she made it and what she experienced.

I had travelled to India twice before. On both trips I had left the heat and dust of the plains to pause for a while in a Himalayan valley. There, rising an impressive eight storeys above a churning river amid clouds of steam from the hot spring at its base, was a Sikh temple. Even though it was the first Sikh temple I had ever seen, I recognized it as a place of pilgrimage. Every day I watched as busloads of Sikh pilgrims arrived and departed. The pilgrims bathed in the hot water and then gathered to listen to hymns in the temple's inner sanctum. I recall asking myself questions about that remote sacred place. Why would Sikhs travel along treacherous mountain roads far from their homeland of

Punjab to visit it? What was its significance? These questions stayed in my mind. But beyond what I was able to observe as a casual interloper on the pilgrimage, I knew little about the meaning of the place, or the religion of the people who visited it.

Several months had passed by the time I returned to Canada to begin graduate studies in anthropology. I thought then of the questions about people and places I had asked myself as a traveller in India. Could I return to India as a researcher to answer them? The Sikhs and their pilgrimage came to mind. When I searched the literature I realized that my questions could not be answered by reading books: this aspect of Sikh religious belief and practice had never been studied. I determined then that I would go and live at a place like the one I had visited before, to watch the processes of the pilgrimage unfold with a more analytical eye, and to record the motives, meanings, and experiences expressed by the pilgrims.

In a tourist guidebook I read a short passage about Hemkunt Sahib, a significant Sikh shrine dedicated to the memory of the tenth Sikh Guru. Situated in a remote region of the Indian Himalayas, it is accessible for only four months of the year. During that time, according to the description in the guidebook, "the trail up to Hemkunt Sahib is crowded with Sikh pilgrims" (Finlay et al. 1993:383). Trekkers walk with the pilgrims, sharing the same path and infrastructure, on their way to the nearby Valley of Flowers National Park. On the basis of that guidebook excerpt, I decided on both a research subject and a fieldsite.

Normative and Operative

My research project, as first conceived, was a comparison of pilgrims and tourists. During two subsequent field trips I became fascinated by the pilgrimage itself and the subject of my study shifted, a change whose seeds had been planted before I first set out for the field. While doing readings from the Sikh studies literature, I recognized an intriguing contradiction between the position of pilgrimage in Sikh doctrine and my own observations of Sikh pilgrims. In the sacred texts at the core of the Sikh tradition,[2]

pilgrimage is given no value. And yet, in the Sikh community, pilgrimage is popular. The literature could not guide me to a resolution since it contained few studies of Sikh religious beliefs and practices, and these only touched on pilgrimage.[3] Likewise, pilgrimage studies only touched on Sikhs.[4]

Hoping for more information, I posted queries to Sikh newsgroups on the internet. I asked "Do Sikhs go on pilgrimage?" and received the reply "There is no such thing as a pilgrimage in Sikhism" (Anand 1995:e-mail correspondence). This sentiment confirmed what I had already read in books written from the faith perspective.[5] It was then that I realized that there was a difference between the questions "Do Sikhs go on pilgrimage?" and "Is there pilgrimage in Sikhism?" That difference was at the root of the apparent contradiction.

Although the distinction is seldom made, a religion has both a normative and an operative aspect (McMullen 1989:1). Normative beliefs and practices are those prescribed by scripture and sanctioned by recognized religious authorities. In contrast, operative beliefs and practices are those actually held and followed by adherents of the religion (McMullen 1978:2). The former are implicit within the religious tradition and can be known through the study of written sources. The latter are explicit within the religious community and can only be known through observation and interviews (Morinis 1984:277). Although the two are complementary, studies of religion generally emphasize the former. There can, of course, be substantial variation between what a religion says people should do and what they actually do. This tension between the ideal and the actual necessitates both textual and empirical study (McMullen 1978:2ff and 1989:1).

Pilgrimage and *Tirath*

If we return now to the first question about whether or not there is, in a normative sense, pilgrimage in Sikhism, we encounter a semantic difficulty. In the scriptures written by the Sikh Gurus which are the source of normative authority within the Sikh tradition,

the word used to describe places of pilgrimage is *tirath*. In the Hindu tradition, a *tirath* is a sacred ford, a place of crossing between the mundane and the divine usually located, symbolically or actually, along the bank of a river (Bhardwaj 1997:2). A *tirath yatra* is a journey to a *tirath*, but the concept carries with it connotations which the English word pilgrimage, its rough equivalent, does not.

A pilgrimage is, simply, a sacred journey to a sacred place (Webster's 1990:892). A *tirath*, on the other hand, is indelibly associated with a body of beliefs in the merit-giving efficacy of austerities, rituals, vows, purifications, and other practices. The word pilgrimage does not capture these qualities of *tirath*, but as no other English word more closely approximates the concept, I have substituted 'pilgrimage' wherever '*tirath*' is found in the Gurus' compositions. It is important to note, however, that all pilgrimages are not *tiraths* even if, in this thesis anyway, all *tiraths* are pilgrimages. A *tirath*, so the Sikh Gurus taught is an outer sacred journey whose beliefs and practices distract the seeker from the inner sacred journey. It is, therefore, empty of any utility. Because a pilgrimage is an outer sacred journey, it is, in and of itself, also empty. But such an outer journey may guide the seeker to the inner sacred journey. If it does, it is of some utility.

Because the Gurus' position on *tirath* in their compositions is the authoritative position within Sikh tradition, it is easy to conclude in answer to the first question that there is no doctrine of pilgrimage in Sikhism. It is also easy to conclude in answer to the second question that Sikhs go on pilgrimage. But this question is more difficult to answer than it first appears. Sikhs can be observed making outer sacred journeys, but in the absence of empirical studies of Sikh pilgrims, the resemblance of Sikh pilgrimage to *tirath* cannot be determined. Other authors have relied on Sikh tradition for answers to both questions, when they have asked them at all. Consequently, the conflict between normative and operative has remained largely unnoticed and, if noticed, unresolved.[6]

Hoping for a balanced understanding, I proposed to consider Sikh pilgrimage in both of its aspects. I drew methodological, theoretical, and analytical guidance from the sources outlined below,[7] and I speculated that insight into the nature of the conflict, and

even its resolution, might come from the study of the way Sikh pilgrims justify their pilgrimages, and even reconcile the contradiction for themselves. In the field this proved to be the most interesting area of inquiry.

Methodology and Theory

Pilgrimage, writes Morinis, "is a sociocultural institution that bears analysis from whatever theoretical perspective an anthropologist chooses to bring to it ... Understanding of pilgrims and their pilgrimage, however, demands that social perspectives be supplemented by an appreciation for the direct experiences had by pilgrims" (Morinis 1992:9). Turnbull agrees:

> To the extent that pilgrimage is a personal experience, as well as being an important part of the social fabric, we cannot fully understand either the outer or the inner journey in isolation ... While thorough ethnographic description is, as always, the first prerequisite and a sound analytical framework the second, we should have an equally rigorous description of the personal aspirations of pilgrims and a thorough understanding of the nature and source of their inspiration (1992:261-262).

To date, however, researchers have concerned themselves more with the how, where, and why of pilgrimage and less with the who. Morinis affirms that "The anthropology of pilgrimage has given too little attention to the personal side of pilgrimage" (1992:20). It has concentrated on the traditions, types, functions, and patterns of pilgrimages at the expense of probing into the beliefs, images, meanings, feelings, and experiences that give shape to them from the perspective of pilgrims. For pilgrims, inner experience is the most salient aspect of pilgrimage; for researchers, pilgrims' expressions of inner experience communicate the meaning of pilgrimage. It is study of this subjective aspect "which still holds clues that will deepen our understanding of pilgrimage" (Aziz 1987:247).

The tools which anthropologists already bring to their work—interviews and participant observation—can be effectively applied to this subjective realm since,

> ... pilgrims know what they are doing. People on pilgrimage (as well as before and afterwards) can articulate their aspirations, their choices, feelings and assessments of that experience, and thereby assist us in recording and interpreting it. The onus is on us to develop better analytical tools and writing styles to convey the essence of those experiences (ibid.:260).

Morinis cautions, however, that this subjective realm is "a crucial facet of pilgrimage that contemporary anthropological theory is not well equipped to handle" (1992:9).

In the present study, in which Sikh pilgrimage has been considered in part from the point of view of Sikh pilgrims, theoretical guidance has come from the fledgling "religion as archetype" approach within the anthropology of religion (Morris 1987:174-181). This approach has been applied to pilgrimage in the work of Aziz (1987) and Clift and Clift (1996). Clift and Clift observe that "Like all archetypes, the archetype of pilgrimage is experienced as compelling" (1996:11). When applied to Sikh pilgrimage specifically, it allows sense to be made of the experiences of members of the Sikh community for whom pilgrimage is a compelling expression of spirituality even though it finds no sanction in Sikh tradition.

At the foundation of the pilgrimage as archetype model is the recognition that humans are seekers by nature. "Every culture has its archetypal quest," observes Morinis, "and in every age, this search has been given expression in journeys to places that embody the highest values of the culture" (Morinis 1984:4). Morinis describes pilgrimages as journeys made in search of the sacred, a term which he uses "to refer specifically to the valued ideals that are the image of perfection that a human being sets out to encounter or become on a pilgrimage" (1992:2). At pilgrimage places, ideals are given tangible expression, and pilgrims experience the intensification of ideals by becoming closer to them, even attaining them. Defined from the point of view of pilgrims, then, pilgrimages are sacred journeys towards connection with or realization of ideals which are embodied in a sacred place, or in a state of mind reached during the sacred journey (ibid.:4).

Turnbull agrees, noting that while pilgrimages are physical journeys to sacred places, they are also spiritual journeys to sacred ideals, if not to the Sacred itself. Because they are means for negotiating a connection with an ideal, pilgrims' experiences reflect this quest (Turnbull 1992:261). Further, Aziz suggests that when pilgrims set out on a pilgrimage, the particular ideal they are seeking shapes their experiences. More precisely, the ideal is symbolically incorporated into the geography, mythology, and history of the sacred place (Aziz 1987:256) where it gives form to the sacred journey (Morinis 1992:4). Pilgrims' sense of the sacred is not private; "it is a matter of objectified collective representations" (Turner 1973:214-215). The features of the pilgrimage together reinforce the message of the ideal (Morinis 1992:6); they define it and the structures and symbols for its enactment, forming a framework for experience of the ideal which pilgrims follow (Aziz 1987:256-257).

As Reader and Walter (1993) observe, heroic figures are commonly linked to pilgrimage sites. Journals, letters, memoirs, poetry, songs, and other personal accounts penned by visitors to such sites comprise a literature in their own right (Aziz 1987:249). Within pilgrims' stories, which chronicle pilgrims' emulation of heroes, Aziz identifies the ideal of "becoming the hero" (ibid.:257). Extended, the quest for this ideal can be used as a model to understand pilgrimage in one of its forms. It is particularly useful, as we will see, for understanding Sikh pilgrimage.

The hero Aziz refers to is a saint or spiritual exemplar who has attained the cultural ideal. In that sense, the hero is the ideal pilgrim—an image of the ideal itself. Pilgrimage, she argues, is the cultural idiom for becoming or achieving that ideal. Pilgrims, by retracing the footsteps of the ideal pilgrim, enact the quest for the ideal, hoping to attain it just as the hero did before them. "This idea of 'becoming the hero' through pilgrimage experience is a feature of the direct communication engendered by the sacred journey" (ibid.:257). Morinis (1992:20) agrees that the pilgrim's quest is "to become the ideal" by having direct insight, knowledge, or experience of it.

Who the hero is in the Sikh context, in what way pilgrims follow in his footsteps and to what end, will become clear in the chapters which follow. The application of this conceptual model will reconcile the contradictory levels of meaning described above by guiding us to the common ground between Sikhism, which does not give value to pilgrimages, and Sikh pilgrims who do.

Research and Analysis

To get at the significance of pilgrimage in Sikhism, and to Sikhs, I approached it from the point of view of the pilgrims. I listened to their explicit expressions of meaning, and then related their expressions to meanings implicit in the sacred tradition. The complementarity and conflict between these two levels of analysis was at the heart of this study which, accordingly, had both a field component and a textual component. I began my graduate program with library research, coursework in theory and methodology, and independent study of the Hindi and Punjabi languages. Then, when my research proposal was complete, I began my own journey to a Sikh pilgrimage centre in the Uttarkhand Himalayas.

In 1996, the pilgrimage and trekking route to Hemkunt Sahib and the Valley of Flowers opened for the season on June 1st. I arrived on June 6th and departed on October 6th after the route had closed. Throughout those four months of fieldwork, I lived in the village along the footpath where visitors stay at the midpoint of their journey. From there, I walked the path to Hemkunt Sahib fourteen times and the path to the Valley twelve times. I also travelled to four Hindu pilgrimage centres in the same region to compare them with the Sikh pilgrimage centre I was studying. After leaving the field, between June 6th and October 31st, I visited sixteen other Sikh pilgrimage centres[8] in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Punjab. The following year, between June 1st and October 15th, I made one more journey to the Valley, six more to Hemkunt, and visited thirty-four more historical Sikh shrines in other Indian states.

During my days of fieldwork, I travelled with groups of visitors to observe their practices and to interview them about their beliefs. Or I positioned myself at points along the trail—in tea shops and rain shelters, at flat places and steep places—to talk to passers-by when they stopped to rest. More interviews were conducted in the evenings when pilgrims gathered in restaurants and in the courtyards of the lodges and the *gurduara* (Sikh temple). I collected their expressions about the meaning of the sacred place and their experience of the sacred journey. I also sought out the impressions of villagers, religious personnel, shopkeepers, and workers about the wider significance of Hemkunt Sahib: its mythology and history, its form and processes.

Whenever I approached a group of Sikh pilgrims, I introduced myself and my research, then began my questioning with "Why have you come to Hemkunt Sahib?" Informal interviews in which I encouraged the natural flow of conversation yielded the richest descriptions. These echoed the colourful tellings of experience that characterized the stories I heard pilgrims share amongst themselves. When I had recorded reasons and experiences, I probed more deeply for meanings and justifications by engaging my interviewees in a dialogue about the significance of pilgrimage in Sikhism, and in their lives as Sikhs. In the process, I referred to the Gurus' teachings about *tirath* and asked interviewees how they interpreted them.

During my first field trip, I conducted one hundred thirty-four (134) interviews, fifty-four (54) with Sikhs and eighty (80) with non-Sikhs. During my second, I conducted fifty-eight (58) interviews, fifty-three (53) with Sikhs, and five (5) with non-Sikhs. In addition, I received fifty-eight (58) replies to questions about Hemkunt Sahib and Sikh pilgrimage which I posted on internet newsgroups before and after I first went to the field. Fifty-two (52) of these were from Sikhs, and six (6) were from non-Sikhs. A numbered, chronological list of the eighty-two (82) field interviews cited in this thesis appears on page 139.[9] Each citation in the text indicates that interview's number according to the list. Whenever an excerpt is taken from e-mail correspondence, the author, having given written consent to be quoted, is listed by name in the bibliography.

Several interviewees requested that I not publish their names. Their concern that they not receive credit for their part in this study is in keeping with the humility valued by members of their religious community.[10] Out of respect for their wishes, I have anonymized interviews. In the Interviews Cited list, I refer to them by the date and location of the interview, and the gender, marital status, religion, place of residence, education level, occupation, and travelling companions of the interviewee. Note is also made of the number of time each interviewee, with the exception of non-pilgrims and local residents and workers, has visited Hemkunt Sahib.

The strength of my interview data lies in the glimpse of the personal dimension of pilgrimage it affords. A few words must also be said about its limitations. My final sample of visitors to Hemkunt Sahib is not representative of all segments of the research population. Due to intervening social, economic, and language factors, it is biased towards females, families, and foreigners, and towards the educated, urban, and upper-class. As a result, I am unable to make statements about the proportion of visitors to Hemkunt Sahib who hold a belief or follow a practice. My field data is qualitative, not quantitative. From it, I have drawn the comments of pilgrims about what their pilgrimage means to them, arranged them thematically, and augmented them with ethnographic details and data from the diverse sources listed below.

Participant observation completed my image of the pilgrimage. In the field, being attentive to those elements in the environment that made the journey meaningful in the eyes of the travellers was part of this observation process. I asked pilgrims to translate the devotional messages on signs posted alongside the footpath. I learned the meanings of songs that pilgrims sang as they walked and questioned pilgrims about the contents of the prayer books they read. I recorded religious services and studied the words of the Sikh prayer as it was said at Hemkunt Sahib. I collected the guidebooks, memoirs, travelogues, articles, videos, cassettes, and memorabilia that visitors purchase in local shops. Finally, I documented the whole of the pilgrimage in notebooks and on film.

My field observations were limited to the present. For a glimpse into the past, I sought out other resources. Most important among them were the people who had themselves played a role in the discovery and development of the shrine. Their stories had not yet been recorded in books. Over time, I acquired a motley collection of textual resources as well, from books and articles, to old photographs and letters, to early manuscripts and pages from handwritten histories. Insights from the tradition itself, as it related to the pilgrimage I was observing, came from readings of scripture and history.

From all of this material, I have, following the example of Morinis, pieced together patterns of meaning which, while not the understanding of any one pilgrim or source, nonetheless accommodate the many views of these sources. "Ideally," Morinis writes,

> the generalizations that emerge in these discussions are sufficiently representative of actual categories of thought to approximate a model possessed (in varying parts and measure) by participants, yet, when taken as a whole, are sufficiently clear and encompassing to serve as ideal models useful to the investigator (Morinis 1984:7).

Informed by the pilgrimage as archetype approach outlined above, I arrived at a model which is possessed by Sikh pilgrims and which also reconciles the disparate normative and operative meanings of Sikh pilgrimage.

Through a process of qualitative analysis guided by Geertz (1974), I related the emic or experience-near concepts that the pilgrims themselves used to understand and interpret their own pilgrimage to more general, etic or experience-distant concepts.[11] This interpretive process was fruitful, allowing sense to be made of the myriad details of the pilgrimage by identifying the meaning which underlies them. That meaning, by extension, underlies all Sikh pilgrimages, and even the pilgrimages of other religious traditions and communities.

Organization and Significance

As my research had two components, this thesis, appropriately, has two components as well. A detailed ethnographic picture of one Sikh pilgrimage is presented

in chapters four, five, and six. It is complemented by an exploration, in chapters two and three, of the aspects of Sikh pilgrimage given expression in the religious tradition and community. Finally, the apparent contradiction between the normative significance of pilgrimage in Sikhism and its operative popularity among Sikhs is resolved when both aspects are considered together in chapter seven.

With the exception of the names of people and places, all Punjabi words used in this thesis are italicized. A brief definition of each word is included in parentheses the first time it appears in the text. More detailed definitions, together with a note about the transliteration system used here, are given in the glossary which appears after the final chapter. Where passages are excerpted from Sikh scripture, they are given in the original Gurmukhi, in Roman transliteration, and in English translation. Passages from the *Guru Granth Sahib* are taken from the English translation by Singh Sahib Sant Singh Khalsa which is listed in the bibliography. Other translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

Bhardwaj, in a recently-published overview of pilgrimage studies, observes that,

> By now some aspects of the pilgrimage process of Hindus, Jains, Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians have been examined in detail. A systematic study of the pilgrimage concepts and process of Sikhism, however, has generally been neglected (1997:17).

This neglect is surprising because, as he also observes, "there is an intensification of Sikh pilgrimages, contrary to the deemphasis on this institution in Sikh religious scriptures" (ibid.). The conclusion that must be drawn is that the sacred journeys of the Sikhs are a promising direction for new pilgrimage research. This study will contribute a systematic examination of Sikh pilgrimage, including empirical study of Sikh pilgrims, to the literature about Sikhism. To the literature about pilgrimage, it will contribute new ethnographic material and insights about the experiential dimension of pilgrimage.

Notes

[1] Maps included in the text are adapted from outlines drawn using Martin Weinelt's Online Map Creation site on the internet at http:// www.aquarius.geomar.de/omc.

[2] For an overview of the Sikh sacred literature—both scriptural and historical—see McLeod 1989:82-101 or 1993:47-68.

[3] The only *empirical* studies of Sikh religious beliefs and practices are Singh (1956), Sharma (1974), and McMullen (1978 and 1989).

[4] To date, Sikh pilgrimage is the subject of only three articles. The first, Cameron (1990), is a geographical study of the political significance of visits to Sikh *gurduaras* in California. The second, Khalsa (1996), contrasts the mountain pilgrimage to Hemkunt Sahib with visits to other historical *gurduaras* on the Indian plains. The third, Karan (1997), describes the socioeconomic characteristics and patterns of movement of pilgrims visiting a historical Sikh shrine in Patna. None of these studies treat the historical development of pilgrimage among the Sikhs.

[5] E.g. Johar (1976 and 1977), Mansukhani (1977), *Sikh Religion* (1990), Brar (1996).

[6] Those scholars who have noted the contradiction include Archer (1971), Singh (1979), Cole (1984), McMullen (1989), Cameron (1990), Oberoi (1994), and McLeod (1996). They attribute the growth of Sikh pilgrimage to changing social conditions. They do not ask Sikhs themselves why they go on pilgrimages.

[7] They include Turner (1973), Geertz (1973 and 1974), Aziz (1987), Morinis (1984 and 1992), McMullen (1978 and 1989), Turnbull (1992), and Clift and Clift (1996).

[8] Sikh *gurduaras* with historical significance. See chapters two and three.

[9] Interpreters assisted me with the following interviews: Gurvinder Singh with Interviews 45 and 79, Gurinder Singh Mann with Interview 65, Gurdit Singh with Interviews 71 and 74, and Ravinder Singh and Arvinder Singh with Interview 75.

[10] The Sikh Gurus taught that effacement of ego is one step along the path to enlightenment. In the Sikh scriptures it is written that the humble servant of the Guru "is not to call attention to himself in any way ... One who performs selfless service, without thought of reward, shall attain his Lord and Master" *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 286. Accordingly, some Sikhs avoid taking credit for their actions, particularly actions made in the context of a religious mission like a pilgrimage.

[11] The emic concepts of Guru and *darshan* (sacred sight), for instance, can be understood using the etic concepts of ideal and direct experience.

CHAPTER TWO

Sacred Journeys and Sacred Places in the Sikh Tradition

> There are no rivers, mountains or places held sacred by the Sikh faith. 'To worship an image, to make a pilgrimage to a shrine, to remain in a desert, and yet have the heart impure is all in vain,' said Nanak. Although no places are sanctified by the Sikh faith, Sikhs do go on pilgrimage to temples associated with the Gurus.
> Kushwant Singh, *The Sikhs Today*, 1985:15

I. Introduction

The Sikh Gurus gave no value to pilgrimage. Their writings, which remain the principle source of religious authority for the Sikh community, are explicit on this point: pilgrimages to sacred places are of no use without true devotion to God, and for that one need not go to sacred places. This teaching has a central place within Sikh doctrine.

The Sikh Gurus travelled throughout their lifetimes. Wherever they went, they established places where their expanding community of followers could meet. As time passed, those followers erected shrines to commemorate the events of the Gurus' lifetimes. Today, hundreds of thousands of Sikhs from India and abroad travel to those sacred places.

These above paragraphs highlight the apparently disparate significance of pilgrimage within the Sikh tradition and the Sikh community. The task of this chapter and the next is to establish the relationship between them by exploring the content of the Sikh sacred scriptures and the nature of Sikh sacred places and sacred journeys.

Sikh Tradition

Five hundred years ago Guru Nanak laid the foundations for the Sikh religion. His message spread throughout his homeland, the North Indian region of Punjab, and beyond. Nanak urged his disciples to seek out the true religious path, a path of mystical devotion to the one God.[1] He was the first in a line of Gurus (spiritual teachers) which culminated in the passage of the guruship to the Sikh holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Tradition holds that the first verse of that scripture was Nanak's first sermon. It is known as the *mul mantar*, the 'root,' 'source,' or 'commencement' formula. Distilled within its few words is the essence of the first Guru's teachings (Cole 1984:80). It reads,

> *Ik Onkar Sat Nam Karta Purakh Nirbhau Nirvair*
> ੧ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ
> *Akal Murat Ajuni Saibhang Gur Parsad.*
> ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥
> *Jap.*
> ॥ ਜਪੁ ॥
> *Ad sach jugad sach. Hai bhi sach Nanak hosi bhi sach.*
> ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਚੁ ॥ ਹੈ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ॥
>
> One God. True *Nam*. Creator person. Without fear. Without enmity.
> Timeless form. Unborn. Self existent. By the grace of the Guru.
> Meditate.
> Truth in the primal beginning. Truth throughout the ages.
> Truth now. O Nanak, Truth forevermore.

The meaning of this expression is complex. It is said that all of the 1430 pages that follow only expound on the message contained in the few words of the *mul mantar* (Massey 1991:12). In it, the creator God (*Karta Purakh*) is described as transcendent (*On*) and at the same time immanent in creation (*Akar*). *Nam* (literally 'Name') is God's revelation—that essence or expression of God which is manifest in nature. It is the single (*Ik*), true (*Sat*) reality which underlies everything that is. Realization of *Nam* is achieved by the grace of the Guru[2] through meditation (Singh 1992_b, Singh 1995_c, McLeod 1989, Grewal 1995).

Guru Nanak's command to meditate (*Jap*) on the *Nam* of God finds expression in all Sikh devotional practices. Prominent among them are *kirtan*, the singing of devotional hymns, and *simran*, continuous remembrance. *Simran* often takes the form of disciplined recitation of appellations for God including, among others, *Ik Onkar*, *Sat Nam*, and *Vahiguru* (wondrous God)(McLeod 1989:50). The intent of these practices, together with prayer, reading, and reflection on the poetry contained in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, is to focus the heart and mind of the devotee on God. With the guidance of the Guru, the devotee can then harmonize with the *Nam*, realize oneness with it, and be freed thereby from the cycle of transmigration (McLeod 1984, Singh 1995_c, Doabia 1996).

The word Sikh means disciple. In his writings, Guru Nanak cast himself as a disciple of God, and before his death he conferred the light of his teachings to one of his own disciples. In all, Nanak was succeeded by nine living Gurus through whom the spirit of his mission was passed to an ever-expanding community of Sikhs (Singh 1995_c:17ff). According to a mystical doctrine, all of the Gurus were one in spirit (Talib 1982:25). But even as Nanak's essential spiritual teachings remained unchanged throughout their line, greater emphasis came to be placed on the temporal aspects of the faith under the leadership of the later Gurus (Singh 1995_c:24-25).[3]

The Sikh image was re-cast by the tenth Guru at a time when the community faced both internal dissension and external persecution from the Moghul rulers of India (Grewal 1995:62ff). In 1666, Gobind Rai was born into the home of the ninth Guru, and at a young age became Guru himself after his father's martyrdom (Cole and Sambhi 1994:34). Throughout his short lifetime,[4] he was respected as a charismatic leader, at once a scholar, a saint, and a soldier (Interview 04, Cole 1984:260). His legacies as the penultimate Guru of the Sikhs are many. He trained his expanding *panth* of followers in both martial skills and moral character and, most notably, he consolidated a new community identity based on the foundations laid by his predecessors (Grewal and Bal 1987:103 and 126).

In 1699, from out of the ranks of his Sikhs, the tenth Guru initiated an order of soldier-saints: the Khalsa, meaning 'the Guru's own' or 'those who are purified by God' (Hawley 1993:178). A code of disciplined conduct was instituted which reinforced members' purity, courage, and loyalty to Guru and God (Rai 1988:93). To remind them of their new identity and commitment, initiates were given new names and a distinct appearance said to be an image of the Guru's own (Singh 1997_c:117). Men were given the martial surname Singh, meaning 'lion,'[5] and they were enjoined to wear emblems of their faith.[6] These steps symbolically freed Khalsa Sikhs from inequalities of birth.

The Guru charged his Singhs with a divine mission of dedication to service and sacrifice, and to the fight against oppression (Rai 1988:92ff). He vested the leadership of the community in the collective, saying that his own spirit would be present wherever five Khalsa Sikhs gathered (Mahmood 1996:46, Dhillon 1997:224). Then, the Guru himself requested initiation at the hands of his disciples, and thereafter became known as Guru Gobind Singh, at once both Guru and disciple (Talib 1984:111-112, Singh and Singh 1989_c:65).

Known as a scholar of Persian and Sanskrit and a patron of the literary arts, Guru Gobind Singh is credited with writing masterful heroic and devotional poetic works (Dhillon 1997:198). These were compiled after his death into an anthology known as the *Dasam Granth* (the 'tenth book' or 'book of the tenth')(McLeod 1989:90). He is also credited with dictating a new recension of the *Adi Granth* (the 'first book'), a scriptural volume containing the devotional poetry of the first five Sikh Gurus and of saints and mystics from other traditions.[7] Guru Gobind Singh included the hymns and couplets of the ninth Guru and one couplet of his own in the new volume (McLeod 1990_a:75). In this way he gave final form to the Sikh scriptures (Singh 1985:8; Massey 1991:6). Together, the *Adi Granth* and the *Dasam Granth* comprise the sacred literature of the Sikhs (McLeod 1989:92).[8]

According to Sikh tradition, Guru Gobind Singh did not appoint a person as his successor. Rather, he bestowed the temporal aspect of guruship on the Sikh community

(the Guru *Panth*), and after his death the spiritual aspect of guruship was conferred to the Sikh scriptures (the Guru *Granth*)[9](McMullen 1978:20; Singh 1995_c:27) This new title of honour given to the *Adi Granth* bespoke its new role within the community as the recognized embodiment of the eternal Guru, source of spiritual guidance and inspiration (Singh 1994_b:17).

In the present-day community, it is this scriptural form of the Guru which plays the central role in all Sikh ceremonies. The holy book is accorded the same respect the first ten Gurus received during their lifetimes (McLeod 1989:88 and 1990_a:64). In Sikh places of worship, it is placed under an ornamented canopy and richly adorned with beautiful silks, brocades, and scent (Singh 1995_c:30). In the morning it is ceremonially awakened and installed in its *parkash* (literally 'brought to light')(ibid.). When the book is first opened, a verse is read at random which is understood to be the *hukamnama* (divine commandment) for the day. This procedure echoes that by which the living Gurus issued *hukamnamas* when they presided over their courts (Singh 1994_c:174). Appropriately, the inner sanctum of a Sikh *gurduara* (literally 'gateway to the Guru') is known as the *darbar sahib* (royal court). All who enter approach the Guru with head covered and feet bare (Dogra and Mansukhani 1996:179). There they bow and make an offering before seating themselves on the floor, always at a level lower than the platform on which the Guru sits. Throughout the day, an attendant waves a yak hair whisk over the Guru, and at night it is put to rest in a canopied bed (McLeod 1989:89, Singh 1995_c:29-30). These practices emphasize the Guru's position as spiritual guide and exemplar for the Sikh community.

Sources of Normative Authority in Sikh Tradition

Before our analysis of pilgrimage at the normative and operative levels of meaning can commence, we need to consider what constitutes normative authority in Sikhism.[10] Early authority rested with the line of ten living Gurus around whom the nucleus of the early Sikh community formed between 1500 and 1708 (Grewal 1995:7). A secondary level of authority was established through representatives designated by the Gurus to

oversee distant congregations (Mann 1993:145). What can be known about the exercise of authority is limited, however, because there is little reliable historical evidence from this Guru period (McLeod 1996$_a$:20). Available sources include fragmentary Persian and British chronicles and a body hagiographical writings (see Hans 1988 and McLeod 1993) which do little to clarify the normative position of pilgrimage.

Further, because history is where the normative flows into the operative, it can be difficult to demarcate where pilgrimage in the Sikh tradition ends and pilgrimage in the Sikh community begins (i.e. to establish which developments were made by the Gurus and their representatives, and which by their followers). But this task of sorting normative from operative is less difficult than it appears at first glance because another source of historical evidence from the Guru period outweighs all the others. It is the sacred volume in which the Gurus' teachings were preserved and in which, after their line ended, the Gurus' authority was vested. The *Guru Granth* is indisputably the most important resource to look to for the normative position of pilgrimage. It is not, however, the definitive resource, since the Gurus' authority was also vested in the *Guru Panth*, the corporate community of pious Sikhs.

The way in which the doctrine of the corporate Guru was put into practice will be the subject of a later section in this chapter. In general, patterns of religious authority in the post-Guru period, though fluid (see Fox 1990 and Oberoi 1994), remained consistent with the *Guru Panth*, *Guru Granth* dualism. An emphasis on the former in the eighteenth century was succeeded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by an emphasis on the latter (Grewal 1995:118, McLeod 1996:45). The historical works which document these developments in the post-Guru period, although more reliable than early accounts, offer no evidence of a normative shift away from the living Gurus' teachings about pilgrimage.

In short, throughout Sikh history, religious authority has remained with the Gurus, or, more precisely, with three manifestations of the Guru: living, textual, and corporate. The textual Guru is the most accessible to the scholar, and its role in determining pilgrimage doctrine (or lack of it) is clear. The role of the living and corporate Gurus in

determining pilgrimage belief and practice is less so. Of necessity I will rely on the image of pilgrimage presented in the scriptural Guru's pages as representative of the normative current in Sikhism. The primacy of the *Guru Granth* in present-day orthodoxy is such that, in the synchronic analysis presented in the next chapter, my reliance on it is not problematic. Because it *is* problematic in the diachronic analysis presented in this chapter, a summary of historical developments is included alongside a summary of doctrine, but with a cautionary note that history may not be an accurate reflection of normative authority.

II. Sikh Pilgrimage: The Normative

The Teachings of the Sikh Gurus about Pilgrimage

According to hagiographical narratives known as the *janam sakhis* (see McLeod 1980), Guru Nanak undertook five missionary journeys. On the first of these he went to the far Northeast and Northwest of India and into what is today Pakistan. On the second he travelled to the far south and to what is today Sri Lanka. His third, fourth, and fifth journeys took him north into Nepal, Tibet, and China, west into the Arab countries, and throughout northern India (Singh 1995_d:web page).

Wherever he travelled, Guru Nanak visited temples, mosques, and centres of pilgrimage (McLeod 1996_a:146). He taught that efforts to seek God in such places of worship were futile because their sanctity was marred by idolatry and ritual observances (Puri 1993:27, Grewal 1995:31). He regarded these, along with all outward forms of religiosity, as inherently empty:

> [Guru Nanak] defined the essence of the religious experience, as against the prevailing incrustations on it which had grown in all sects and denominations ... Ritual, the external form and husk of religion, he taught was hollow, and if practised without true devotion and an earnest attempt at securing purity of heart, is only so much waste of human effort (Talib 1982:9).

Nanak knew the true sacred place to be inward. He prescribed meditation and devotional love for God as a replacement for pilgrimage.

Guru Nanak's position on pilgrimage is stated clearly in his own writings. *Japji Sahib*, the opening hymn of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and his most celebrated work (Massey 1991:9), contains the substance of his revelation (McLeod 1996_b:70). This composition was recited during congregational worship in Guru Nanak's own lifetime (Grewal 1995:40), and is recited today by Sikhs as part of their daily personal devotions. Consequently, Sikhs in general are familiar with its message. The Guru's teachings about pilgrimage (*tirath*) appear at four places within its thirty-eight stanzas. First, Guru Nanak stated,

> *Tirath nava je tis bhava vine bhane ki nai kari.*
> ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਵਾ ਜੇ ਤਿਸੁ ਭਾਵਾ ਵਿਣੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਕਿ ਨਾਇ ਕਰੀ ॥
> (1st Guru, *Japji Sahib*, *Pauri* 6)
>
> I would bathe at places of pilgrimage if it were pleasing to God.
> If it is not pleasing to God, then what is the use?

He then urged his followers to hear the *Shabad* (God's Word) and the *Nam* (God's Name) because,

> *Suniai athsath ka isnan.*
> ਸੁਣਿਐ ਅਠਸਠਿ ਕਾ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ॥
> (1st Guru, *Japji Sahib*, *Pauri* 10)
>
> Hearing is equivalent to bathing at the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage.

Guru Nanak's understanding of the value of pilgrimage was made explicit when he wrote,

> *Tirath tap daia dat dan.*
> ਤੀਰਥੁ ਤਪੁ ਦਇਆ ਦਤੁ ਦਾਨੁ ॥
> *Je ko pavai til ka man.*
> ਜੇ ਕੋ ਪਾਵੈ ਤਿਲ ਕਾ ਮਾਨੁ ॥

Sunia mannia man kita bhau.
ਸੁਣਿਆ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਮਨਿ ਕੀਤਾ ਭਾਉ ॥
Antargat tirath mal nau.
ਅੰਤਰਗਤਿ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਮਲਿ ਨਾਉ ॥
(1st Guru, *Japji Sahib*, *Pauri* 21)

Pilgrimage, austerity, compassion, and charity—
Any merit obtained from these is negligible.
Hearing, believing, and loving God in the mind
Is equivalent to bathing in the true place of pilgrimage within.

Finally, he described the myriad forms designed by God and sustained by God's will that sing God's praise. Among them,

Gavan ratan upae tere athsath tirath nale.
ਗਾਵਨਿ ਰਤਨ ਉਪਾਏ ਤੇਰੇ ਅਠਸਠਿ ਤੀਰਥ ਨਾਲੇ ॥
(1st Guru, *Japji Sahib*, *Pauri* 27)

Jewels created by You, together with the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage
made sacred by You, sing Your praise.

Here, Nanak indicated that God was the ultimate source of whatever transformative power the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage possessed.

Drawing from other passages written by Guru Nanak, Grewal concludes that, "Invariably he attached no importance to pilgrimage," "The true *tirath* is in the Name and the *shabad*," "There is no *tirath* like the Guru," and "The object of pilgrimage is within oneself" (1979:207-208). Cole asserts that, "It is possible to argue unqualified condemnation of the practice," and further that, "there can be no doubt that Guru Nanak regarded *Nam simran* as having removed any need for pilgrimages" (1984:60).

Nanak's succeeding Gurus continued to discourage ritualism, the worship of images and natural objects, and visits to waters, tombs, and temples held sacred by people of other faiths. As the following passages illustrate, it is a theme which runs throughout the *Guru Granth Sahib*. All of the Gurus whose poetry was included in the sacred

volume, and the tenth Guru whose writings were not, contrasted the merits of figurative internal pilgrimage with those of literal external pilgrimage:

Tirath navan jau tirath Nam hai.
ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਵਣ ਜਾਉ ਤੀਰਥੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਹੈ ॥
Tirath Sabad bichar antar gian hai.
ਤੀਰਥੁ ਸਬਦ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਹੈ ॥
Gur gian sacha than tirath ...
ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਸਾਚਾ ਥਾਨੁ ਤੀਰਥੁ ...
Nit sach tirath majna.
ਨਿਤ ਸਾਚੁ ਤੀਰਥੁ ਮਜਨਾ ॥

Why should I bathe at sacred shrines of pilgrimage?
The *Nam*, the Name of the Lord, is the sacred shrine of pilgrimage.
My sacred shrine of pilgrimage is spiritual wisdom within,
and contemplation on the Word of the *Shabad*.
The spiritual wisdom given by the Guru is the True sacred shrine of pilgrimage ...
Constantly bathe in such a true shrine of pilgrimage.
(1st Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 687)

Jap tap sabh kichh manniai avar kara sabh bad.
ਜਪੁ ਤਪੁ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਮੰਨਿਐ ਅਵਰਿ ਕਾਰਾ ਸਭਿ ਬਾਦਿ ॥

Meditation, austerity, and everything come through belief in the Lord's Name. All other actions are useless.
(2nd Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 954)

Har sar tirath jan manua naia.
ਹਰਿ ਸਰਿ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਜਾਣਿ ਮਨੂਆ ਨਾਇਆ ॥

The Lord is my sacred shrine of pilgrimage and pool of purification; I wash my mind in Him.
(3rd Guru, p. 1286)

Jap tap tirath sanjam kare mere Prabh bhaia.
ਜਪ ਤਪ ਤੀਰਥ ਸੰਜਮ ਕਰੇ ਮੇਰੇ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਭਾਇਆ ॥

Chanting and meditation, penance and self-discipline, and bathing at sacred shrines of pilgrimage—the merits of these come by pleasing my God.
(4th Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1244)

Ban ban phirti khojati hari bah avagah.
ਬਨੁ ਬਨੁ ਫਿਰਤੀ ਖੋਜਤੀ ਹਾਰੀ ਬਹੁ ਅਵਗਾਹਿ ॥
Nanak bhete sadh jab Har paia man mah.
ਨਾਨਕ ਭੇਟੇ ਸਾਧ ਜਬ ਹਰਿ ਪਾਇਆ ਮਨ ਮਾਹਿ ॥

From forest to forest, I wandered searching; I am so tired of taking baths at sacred shrines of pilgrimage.
O Nanak, when I met the Holy Saint, I found the Lord within my mind.
(5th Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 455)

Tirath barat ar dan kar man mai dharai guman.
ਤੀਰਥ ਬਰਤ ਅਰੁ ਦਾਨ ਕਰਿ ਮਨ ਮੈ ਧਰੈ ਗੁਮਾਨੁ ॥
Nanak nihphal jat tih jiu kunchar isnan.
ਨਾਨਕ ਨਿਹਫਲੁ ਜਾਤ ਤਿਹ ਜਿਉ ਕੁੰਚਰ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ॥

Those who make pilgrimages to sacred shrines, observe ritualistic fasts and make donations to charity while still taking pride in their minds,
O Nanak, their actions are useless, like the elephant, who takes a bath, and then rolls in the dust.
(9th Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1428)

Tirath nan daia dam dan su sanjam nem anek bisekhe.
ਤੀਰਥ ਨਾਨ ਦਇਆ ਦਮ ਦਾਨ ਸੁ ਸੰਜਮ ਨੇਮ ਅਨੇਕ ਬਿਸੇਖੇ ॥
Bed Puran Kateb Kuran jamin jaman ke pekhe.
ਬੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਕਤੇਬ ਕੁਰਾਨ ਜਮੀਨ ਜਮਾਨ ਕੇ ਪੇਖੇ ॥
Paun ahar jati jat dhar sabai su bichar hajar ka dekhe.
ਪਉਨ ਅਹਾਰ ਜਤੀ ਜਤ ਧਾਰ ਸਬੈ ਸੁ ਬਿਚਾਰ ਹਜਾਰ ਕ ਦੇਖੇ ॥
Sri Bhagwan bhaje bin bhupat ek rati bin ek na lekhe.
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਭਜੇ ਬਿਨੁ ਭੂਪਤਿ ਏਕ ਰਤੀ ਬਿਨੁ ਏਕ ਨ ਲੇਖੇ ॥

Men may take baths at places of pilgrimage, exercise acts of mercy, control their passions, perform acts of charity, practise continence and perform many more special rituals;
Men may study the *Vedas*, the *Purans*, the Holy *Quran* and other books of the religions of all times, countries and places;

> Men may live only on the air and practise continence and thousands of such other rituals and ceremonies;
> Even then all these methods are worthless and of no account, without the meditation upon and Love for God.
> (10th Guru, *Savaiye*, in Doabia 1996:149)

Many Sikhs, a number of my own interviewees among them, feel that it is the *Guru Granth Sahib* which contains the final word about the significance of pilgrimage within Sikh tradition because it is "the sole ideological guide of the Sikhs. We have to test any idea, doctrine, or practice on the touchstone of *gurbani*" (Singh 1994_a:81). The above verses composed by the Gurus are a source for those implicit understandings of pilgrimage which reside in the sacred tradition. But the picture of Sikh pilgrimage which emerges from scrutiny of the Sikh scriptures is not yet complete. We have covered belief but not practice. Both are part of the tradition. A comprehensive survey needs to take both doctrinal and historical evidence into account (Mann 1997_b:lecture).

Throughout Sikh history, the sole normative authority that has resided with the three recognized forms of the Guru has remained unchanged at the centre, despite operative changes at the periphery. Above I have considered traditional pilgrimage belief: the position of the I *Guru Granth*. To complete the picture, I will consider traditional pilgrimage practice below: developments made by the living Gurus and, later, by the *Guru Panth*. In my portrayal, which is drawn from admittedly sketchy evidence, operative currents intermingle with the normative ones and indicate where diverse influences and differing interpretations entered Sikhism. Tracing them is difficult because pilgrimage, as an expression of popular folk culture and not, in the case of Sikhism, of doctrine, has received little historical or theological consideration since the time of the Gurus.

The Development of Places of Pilgrimage in the Guru Period

"In Nanak's paradigm of interior religiosity there was no place for austerities, penances, pilgrimages or necessary formal worship at established religious centres such as mosques and temples" (Oberoi 1994:4). However, "His successors, faced with a rapidly

expanding constituency and changed social forces, found it hard to sustain his minimalist teaching" (ibid.). By the time Guru Nanak's mandate passed to the third Sikh Guru, the second-generation Sikh community was growing beyond the size at which personal and immediate contact with the Guru could provide it with coherence (McLeod 1996_a:8).

In these changed circumstances, the need for organization and a distinct and unitary Sikh identity was met in part by establishing uniquely Sikh sacred space and rituals (Singh 1979:93). These institutions gave concrete form to the ideals within Guru Nanak's original message (McLeod 1989:42) since, as Oberoi (1994:68) points out, "It is hard to sustain a separate religious identity without a distinctive sacred space." The creation of sacred space was an expression of the sociological concerns of the Gurus, giving tangible form to their ideological message (Mann 1993:147) and, in turn, contributing to the consolidation of the Sikh movement (McLeod 1996a:47).

The first Guru himself established *dharamsalas* (literally 'abodes of religion') where his followers could gather for communal worship. In his verses, the second Guru described these early morning gatherings in which his Sikhs would meditate and worship God through song (Grewal 1995:48). His succeeding Gurus continued, deliberately and systematically, to found new *dharamsalas* (Mann 1997_b:lecture). "The frequency with which the *dharamsala* is mentioned in the *janam-sakhis* indicates that for the Sikhs of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries it occupied a central position in the life of the community" (McLeod 1996a:47) These communal centres from which Sikh doctrine could be disseminated were the nucleus of Sikh life. They provided the community with coherence and over time became preeminent corporate symbols, sources of both integration and inspiration (Interview 68, Cole 1984:235, McMullen 1989:48, Singh 1989_b:102, Oberoi 1994:328).

Notable among these centres was a well constructed by the third Guru in 1571 "with eighty-four steps to reach the water for bathing, which became sacred for the Sikhs" (Grewal 1995:51). It was the first formal structure built by the Gurus, and "In a sense, [it was] the first pilgrimage centre for the Sikhs" (ibid.). Notice that Grewal qualifies his

statement with the words "in a sense." In a sense, the well *was* a pilgrimage centre because Sikhs journeyed to it for religious reasons. But was it a pilgrimage centre in the same sense as a Hindu *tirath*?[11] McLeod (1990_a:8) makes note of its obvious similarities: "The significance of this well," he writes, "lies in its relation to the teachings of Guru Nanak on the one hand; and to other such watering-places on the other."

The design of the well made use of religious symbolism in currency within the Hindu fold (Mann 1997_b:lecture). Each of the eighty-four steps leading down to such a tank corresponded to one hundred thousand of the possible rebirths in the total cycle of transmigration. A practice came into currency whereby those visiting the new Sikh centre would recite *Japji Sahib* on every step before bathing. They believed that by so doing they would be freed from further births and deaths (Dogra and Mansukhani 1996:65). Although the origin of this tradition cannot be traced to the Guru, that it emerged at all suggests "that the purpose of the well was more than the mere provision of drinking-water. If we set this new well against the teachings of Guru Nanak we find an apparent contradiction" (McLeod 1996_a:8).

If McLeod is correct, it may be significant that the first Sikh centre of pilgrimage was a tank of water and not a temple. The third Guru was perhaps drawing precedent from Hindu tradition, in which places of pilgrimage are *tiraths*, sacred crossings at riverbanks and other bodies of water. The construction of the well may have been a formal expression of the pan-Indian custom of purifying the body and spirit with water before worship. Or perhaps the Guru had more practical ends in mind: providing his followers with water for drinking and washing near the place, already established, at which they gathered for communal worship (Mann 1996_b:lecture). Only interpretations, not firm conclusions, can be drawn from these speculations about the Guru's intentions. Because of the diverse influences that entered the *panth* along with the newly joined members who swelled its ranks (McLeod 1989:6), it is difficult to demarcate where the Guru's role in shaping the emerging traditions left off, and where the role of members began.

McLeod points out that one feature of the well—its location—distinguished it from other *tiraths*. It was constructed at a new site that was not near to any of the prominent *tiraths* (among them, Hardwar and Kurukshetra) that people might otherwise have visited (McLeod 1996_a:9). Cole speculates that by providing his followers with an alternative pilgrimage centre, the third Guru was discouraging them from engaging in practices common at the pilgrimage centres of other faiths—practices which went against the tenets of the Sikh faith (Cole 1984:236). In support of this position, the words of the third Guru on the subject of pilgrimage were consistent with those of the first. But even as the doctrine of interior religiosity remained unchanged, concludes McLeod (1996_a:8), the third Guru was compelled by changed circumstance to adopt the traditional Indian institution of pilgrimages which had been rejected by the first Guru.

Mann (1997_b) contributes to the debate when he asserts that Guru Nanak had not rejected anything.[12] He had taught, rather, that "*tiraths* are fine but you have forgotten their meaning" (Mann 1997_b:lecture).[13] The creation of a uniquely Sikh *tirath*, therefore, did not go against the teachings of Guru Nanak, so long as the pilgrims who bathed externally did so with internal love for God. In one sense, what Mann says is correct. The Gurus did not reject *tiraths*. They regarded them, together with the beliefs and practices of *tirath yatra*, as empty, having nothing to do with spiritual attainment. There is nothing wrong with bathing at a *tirath*, but the true means of spiritual attainment, love for God, need have nothing to do with sacred wells and river crossings. In another sense, Mann's use of the word *tirath* is problematic. Other than the symbolism of the eighty-four steps, there is no evidence that the Guru considered the well to be a *tirath*, at least not with the attendant Hindu connotations of the word.

The well was, more probably, a venue for the transmission of the Guru's message about the true means of spiritual attainment. Its construction was a continuation (not a contradiction) of the extant tradition of building communal institutions that began with the first Guru (Mann 1997_b:lecture, Grewal 1997:personal communication). Subsequently, distinct religious practices, ceremonies, and festivals were also adopted which, together

with the creation of a network of places where Sikhs could congregate, supplemented and strengthened bonds of allegiance to the Gurus and their teachings. These steps were "instrumental in developing the sense of brotherhood among the faithful" (Tak 1979:123) and indicate that that the Gurus were striving to create a distinct community identity.

In 1574, excavation of a second formal structure, a *sarovar* (sacred pond), began. Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru, founded it expressly as a spiritual centre for the Sikh community (Grewal 1995:51). Even while it was under construction, word of the new site spread and "it became a place of pilgrimage. Thousands of people came from all parts of the country" (Johar 1976:160). Note that the word pilgrimage as used here to connote religiously-motivated travel may have a more general application that the word *tirath*. Tradition holds, however, that the Guru imparted a *tirath*-like quality to the new centre when he encouraged his followers to bathe in the pond. Those that did so while meditating on the Name of God, so the tradition goes, would receive spiritual blessings and be purified of sins (Kaur 1983:9).

In support of this tradition, a verse of the fifth Guru under whom work on the sacred *sarovar* continued, apparently condones belief in the purificatory powers of the *sarovar*:

Ramdas sarovar nave.
ਰਾਮਦਾਸ ਸਰੋਵਰਿ ਨਾਤੇ ॥
Sabh utare pap kamate.
ਸਭਿ ਉਤਰੇ ਪਾਪ ਕਮਾਤੇ ॥
Nirmal hoe kar isnana.
ਨਿਰਮਲ ਹੋਏ ਕਰਿ ਇਸਨਾਨਾ ॥
Gur Purai kine dana ...
ਗੁਰਿ ਪੂਰੈ ਕੀਨੇ ਦਾਨਾ ...
Sadhsang mal lathi.
ਸਾਧਸੰਗਿ ਮਲੁ ਲਾਥੀ ॥

Bathing in the nectar tank of Ramdas,
the residues of all sins are erased.
One becomes immaculately pure, taking this cleansing bath.
The Perfect Guru has bestowed this gift ...

> In the *Sadh Sangat*, the Company of the Holy, filth is washed off.
> (5th Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 625)

At the same time, the fifth Guru's verses do not condone the formal modes of worship and pilgrimage of the received Muslim and Hindu traditions (Oberoi 1994:58). Of himself he wrote:

> *Haj kabai jau na tirath puja.*
> ਹਜ ਕਾਬੈ ਜਾਉ ਨ ਤੀਰਥ ਪੂਜਾ ॥
> *Eko sevi avar na duja.*
> ਏਕੋ ਸੇਵੀ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਦੂਜਾ ॥
> *Puja karau na nivaj gujarau.*
> ਪੂਜਾ ਕਰਉ ਨ ਨਿਵਾਜ ਗੁਜਾਰਉ ॥
> *Ek Nirankar le ridai namaskarau.*
> ਏਕ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰ ਲੇ ਰਿਦੈ ਨਮਸਕਾਰਉ ॥
>
> I do not make pilgrimages to Mecca, nor do I worship at Hindu sacred shrines.
> I serve the One Lord, and not any other.
> I do not perform Hindu worship services, nor do I offer the Muslim prayers.
> I have taken the One Formless Lord into my heart;
> I humbly worship him there.
> (5th Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1136)

One interpretation of the first passage brings its message in line with the second. *Ramdas* literally means 'servant of God'. If the Guru was writing metaphorically, his reference to *Ramdas sarovar* may have meant the sacred pond within the heart of the servant of God (Interview 56). If, in an alternative interpretation of the passage, the Guru was writing literally, he may have meant the actual tank built by Guru Ram Das. This latter interpretation of the verse, if it is correct, indicates that the practice of external bathing for internal purification goes back at least to the time of the fifth Guru. The message at the end of same verse, however, significantly favours the first interpretation. Its reference to the filth washed off in the company of the holy is obviously metaphorical.

In Sikh congregational gatherings of the time, three religious practices were emphasized: *Nam* (remembering God's Name for internal purity), *Dan* (contributing to the community), and *Ishnan* (bathing in a sacred *sarovar* for external purity)[14] (Mann 1997$_b$:lecture). Among these three, *ishnan* was regarded as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Sikhs recognized that there was no pilgrimage bath like meeting the Guru:

> *Gur tirath dariau.*
> ਗੁਰੁ ਤੀਰਥੁ ਦਰੀਆਉ ॥
> *Je tis bhavai ujali sat sar navan jau.*
> ਜੇ ਤਿਸੁ ਭਾਵੈ ਉਜਲੀ ਸਤ ਸਰਿ ਨਾਵਣ ਜਾਉ ॥
>
> The Guru is the Sacred Shrine of Pilgrimage, the Guru is the Holy River. If it pleases Him, I bathe in the Pool of Truth, and become radiant and pure.
> (1st Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 17)

But, because pilgrims were expected to wash themselves in the water of a *sarovar* before approaching the Guru, bathing became one step *towards* meeting the Guru; the external bath became a prerequisite for the internal bath (Mann 1997$_b$:lecture).

Over time, *ishnan* came to have both mundane and sacred connotations, implying both physical and spiritual purity. Both receive mention in the Sikh scriptures. The following words of the first Guru seem to support the latter meaning:

> Nai nivaja natai puja navan sada sujani.
> ਨਾਇ ਨਿਵਾਜਾ ਨਾਤੈ ਪੂਜਾ ਨਾਵਨਿ ਸਦਾ ਸੁਜਾਣੀ ॥
>
> After bathing, the Muslims recite their prayers, and after bathing, the Hindus perform their worship services. The wise always take cleansing baths.
> (1st Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 150)

But by the end of the same verse, it becomes clear that the references to bathing in water were metaphorical:

Guru samund nadi sabh sikhi natai jit vadiai.
ਗੁਰੂ ਸਮੁੰਦੁ ਨਦੀ ਸਭਿ ਸਿਖੀ ਨਾਤੈ ਜਿਤੁ ਵਡਿਆਈ ॥

The Guru is the ocean, and all His teachings are the river.
Bathing within it, glorious greatness is obtained.
(ibid.)

By itself, the external purity that comes from bathing in water is insufficient:

Suche eh na akhiah bahan ji pinda dhoi.
ਸੂਚੇ ਏਹਿ ਨ ਆਖੀਅਹਿ ਬਹਨਿ ਜਿ ਪਿੰਡਾ ਧੋਇ ॥
Suche soi Nanaka jin man vasia soi.
ਸੂਚੇ ਸੋਈ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਜਿਨ ਮਨਿ ਵਸਿਆ ਸੋਇ ॥

They are not called pure, who sit down after merely washing their bodies.
Only they are pure, O Nanak, within whose minds the Lord abides
(1st Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 474).

When the well and the *sarovar* were built, Mann argues (1997_b:lecture), the Gurus encouraged people to take *ishnan* for external purification. The usage of the word to connote internal purification came later as people justified their own beliefs so that they would be consistent with what the Guru's taught.

When the Ram Das *sarovar* had been completed, the fifth Guru built the Harmandir Sahib (temple of God) in its centre and, in 1604, installed the newly-compiled *Adi Granth* (Singh 1994_b:17). The pond became known as the *amrit sarovar* (pond of nectar) and the town that grew around it as Amritsar. Bathing there before entering the *darbar sahib* (Guru's court) has retained its dual significance to this day.[15] The temple, now known as the Golden Temple, is the sanctum sanctorum of the Sikhs, both "a source of inspiration" and "their chief place of pilgrimage" (Brar 1996:web page). One scholar speculates that, "Probably, it is on account of the custom of constant singing of God's name that an exception seems to have been made in the case of this temple, otherwise the Sikh Scripture looks askance at the whole system of pilgrimages" (Singh 1983:ii).

As the following of the Gurus continued to grow, more and more shrines were established at places throughout Punjab and beyond which had been visited (and hence, in

the eyes of the Sikhs, sanctified) by a Guru. Bhai Gurdas, poet, theologian, and scribe for the fifth Guru during the compilation of the *Adi Granth* (Talib 1982:24) observed in his own compositions that wherever the Guru placed his foot was established as a place of worship: "Sacred shrines mark every place sanctified by the presence of Baba Nanak" (*Vars* 1:27 in McLeod, trans. 1984:65). This development found sanction in the Sikh scriptures. The fourth Guru wrote,

> Jithai jai bahai mera Satguru so than suhava Ram Raje.
> ਜਿਥੈ ਜਾਇ ਬਹੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸੋ ਥਾਨੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਜੇ ॥
> Gursikhi so than bhalia lai dhur mukh lava.
> ਗੁਰਸਿਖੀ ਸੋ ਥਾਨੁ ਭਾਲਿਆ ਲੈ ਧੂਰਿ ਮੁਖਿ ਲਾਵਾ ॥
>
> Wherever my True Guru goes and sits, that place is beautiful, O Lord King. The Guru's Sikhs seek out that place; they take the dust and apply it to their faces.
> (4th Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 450)

Again, there is an interesting interplay between literal meaning and metaphor in this passage.

One of my interviewees told me his interpretation of what has become a common justification among Sikhs for going to places visited by Gurus and saints:

> My feeling is that bathing at places of pilgrimage per se aren't considered of much use. However since these places have the privilege of being associated with the dust of the feet of saints and holy people, these places can have a purifying or inspirational role ... The expression 'dust of the feet of saints and holy people' is a metaphor and doesn't necessarily involve the physical act of showing respect to the dust. The path of accomplishment by simply our own efforts is fraught with ego. We need the blessings of *sangat* and those who serve the *sangat*. Inspiration and blessings from spiritual humans are important and spiritual humans are more likely to be found at a place of pilgrimage (Interview 60).

Over time, wherever direct contact with the living Guru was no longer possible, direct contact with these sacred places representing the Guru became a substitute. After the death of the last living Guru, the *dharamsalas* in which the eternal Guru, the *Guru*

Granth Sahib, was installed took on even more importance. They became *gurduaras*, literally 'gateways to the Guru' (McLeod 1989:57). New *gurduaras* continued to be founded at places blessed by the Gurus' presence and at which spiritual people (*sangat*) congregated to sing the Gurus' hymns in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Pilgrimage in the Post-Guru Period: Normative and Operative Currents

"The *Panth* or the community is sanctified in Sikh religion as the Guru himself is believed to abide in it" (McMullen 1989:69). During the eighteenth century, this doctrine of *Guru Panth* rose to primacy. In currency was the belief that,

> The Guru, though absent in the body, is very much present in spirit wherever his words are devoutly sung. They who with genuine devotion participate in this *kirtan* (communal singing) manifest in their assembly the Guru's own presence, and when they speak as an assembly they speak as the Guru (McLeod 1996_a:47).

This emphasis is evidenced by the institution of *sarbatt khalsa* (whole Khalsa) which convened in Amritsar, on the battlefield, or anywhere the *Guru Granth Sahib* was present, to decide matters of religious, economic, and political importance to the entire Sikh community (Grewal 1995:93).

> Sikhs who assembled on the occasion of these biannual gatherings passed resolutions called *gurmatas*, literally 'resolutions endorsed by the Guru,' for the Guru was thought to be present among the faithful when they deliberated in the presence of the *Adi Granth* (Oberoi 1994:73-74).

Sarbatt khalsa decisions, made by consensus, were binding on the entire *panth*. Decisions made by Sikh leaders in their own autonomous areas of influence were not (Mann 1993:148). To my knowledge, pilgrimage was not the subject of any *gurmata* resolutions, although it is likely that the historical *gurduaras* to which Sikhs travelled were. Also, there is no evidence that that the normative significance of pilgrimage changed during this period even though its operative significance assuredly did. Below I

will summarize the historical developments which, even though they did not have the mark of normative authority, influenced patterns of Sikh pilgrimage in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries.

"In early nineteenth-century Punjab," Oberoi (1994:3) asserts, "hundreds of thousands of Hindus regularly undertook pilgrimages to what were apparently Muslim shrines; vast numbers of Muslims conducted part of their life-cycle rituals as if they were Hindus, and equally Sikhs attended Muslim shrines and Hindu sacred spots." Oberoi's thesis is that nineteenth century Punjabi culture was characterized by an interpenetration of communal identities. There was no clear boundary between great traditions and little traditions (ibid.:24); the Sikhism of the Gurus mingled with folk Sikhism and popular culture (ibid.:254).

The reconstruction of these developments is, Oberoi admits, an arduous task (ibid.:141). Available sources suggest that there was no single Sikh identity; rather, this period saw the emergence or crystallization of competing models of Sikhism which included Nanak-panthi, Khalsa, Udasi, Nirmala, Nirankari, Namdhari, and Nihang, among others. As the influence of the Gurus became more diffuse, more and more developments took place outside of the domain of normative authority. Changes in pilgrimage belief and practice tended to occur within Sikh sects like these, rather than within the entire *panth*.

For example, members of the ascetic Udasi orders which descended from the leadership of Guru Nanak's eldest son, played a key role in managing historical Sikh shrines and encouraged pilgrimages to them (Oberoi 1994:79). Another assimilationist ascetic order known as the Nirmalas were notable as scholars of the Sikh tradition, and also of the Hindu tradition. They studied the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Shastras*, and epics in addition to the *Adi Granth*, and gave Vedantic interpretations to the Gurus' teachings (ibid.:124).

Both orders set up establishments at Hindu *tiraths* as well as at Sikh *gurduaras*. According to a Nirmala code of conduct, one objective of these establishments was to "instruct the public in the merit to be earned through pilgrimage" (ibid.:125). Their

influence as the custodians of the Sikh literary heritage[16] and as recipients of patronage from Sikh rulers was such that pilgrimages to historical *gurduaras* took on the flavour of Hindu *tirath yatras*. In *gurduaras*, Hindu rituals were performed, Hindu festivals were celebrated, and Hindu idols were enshrined alongside the *Guru Granth Sahib* (Fox 1990:82 and 174). Consequently, the line separating a *gurduara* from a *mandir* became less distinct. So, too, did the line between Hinduism and Sikhism as large numbers of Hindus converted to the faith (Mann 1993:152).

There is, at the same time, early nineteenth century textual evidence of a movement against popular pilgrimages to non-Sikh sacred places. The author of one source (see Oberoi 1994:422) admonished Sikhs to visit only Sikh shrines. Eventually, "a growing body of Sikhs took part in a systematic campaign to purge their faith of religious diversity, as well as what they saw as Hindu accretions and a Brahmanical stranglehold over their rituals" (ibid.:420-421).

> These presumed corruptions and heresies often betokened something other than moral turpitude and religious backsliding. They existed in many cases because the temple officiants adhered to a different sect of Sikhism, which led them to reject the strong Singh identity of the protesters (Fox 1990:82).

Both the protesters and the officiants of the *gurduaras* "portrayed their version of Sikhism and Sikh identity as original and hegemonic, quite against historical reality" (ibid.:113). The ascendancy of the Khalsa identity, however, succeeded in casting out pluralism and asserting a unitary, orthodox identity. In the process, non-Khalsa groups became marginalized, and boundaries around the Sikh religious tradition—the lines separating Sikhs from Hindus that had become blurred during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—were re-drawn by the reformers.

In this upsurge of fundamentalism at the close of the nineteenth century, what Oberoi (1994:141) calls the "project of modern Sikhism," Singh (Khalsa Sikh) protesters known as Akalis wrested control over Sikh shrines away from hereditary Udasi officiants, and consolidated them under a central religious and temporal authority. Sacred space,

which had been diffuse, became concentrated exclusively in Sikh shrines (Oberoi 1994:328). Practices reminiscent of Brahmanical ones, including pilgrimages, rituals, ceremonies, and festivals, were cast out in favour of distinctly Sikh institutions. In the process, a new definition of Sikh shrine was crafted where previously there had been no consensus between Hindus, Khalsa Sikhs, and Sikhs of other sects about which shrines belonged to whom (Fox 1990:113).

In 1905, Hindu icons were removed from Golden Temple precincts (Fox 1990:87). In 1920, Khalsa Sikhs took over the management of the Golden Temple and an elected body known as the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.) was founded to oversee the management of it and other Sikh shrines (ibid.:87-88). The Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925 granted the S.G.P.C. legal authority to do so (Grewal 1990:162), and most of the historical *gurduaras* came under their central governance. In a shift of normative authority away from the *sarbatt khalsa*, the S.G.P.C., together with the Akali Dal—a party also founded in 1920 to represent the political wing of the movement—began to make decisions on behalf of the *panth* (Dogra and Mansukhani 1996:418). The S.G.P.C. wrote into the *Reht Maryada*, the Sikh Code of Conduct which lays down the outlines of orthodox Sikhism, that "Not owning up or regarding as hallowed any place other than the Guru's place—such, for instance, as sacred spots or places of pilgrimage of other faiths," is part of living in consonance with the Guru's tenets (1994 edition, article XVI:23).

The significant historical events that next altered the role of *gurduaras* in the Sikh community were those culminating in the Indian army invasion of the Golden Temple in 1984. Khalsa Sikhs had continued to assert a distinct and unitary identity. A violent confrontation in 1978 between a group of Khalsa activists and members of the heretical Nirankari sect sparked the beginnings of Sikh militancy (Pettigrew 1995:32). In the years that followed, socio-economic grievances against the Indian state translated into escalating militancy and terrorism. The build-up of a resistance force worried Indira Gandhi's government so much that the army was sent into the Sikh stronghold within the Golden

Temple precincts. The sanctum sanctorum of the Sikhs was damaged and the surrounding buildings desecrated in the crossfire, and thousands of pilgrims were left dead (Mahmood 1996:87ff).

In the aftermath of the invasion, a mounting upsurge of fundamentalism saw the orthodox Sikh identity established in the in the late nineteenth century vigorously re-asserted. The popularity of *gurduaras* as centres of Sikh history and identity, grew.[17] The role of *gurduaras* as centres of anti-government sentiment and protest also grew, as Fox (1990:xiv) observed when, reflecting on the invasion just months after it had occurred, he noted how much Sikh shrines have changed in character over the last half-century. That the political role of *gurduaras* in the community has altered is certain, but that their spiritual role has altered is less so. *Gurduaras* continue to be centres of communal worship where the verses of the *Guru Granth Sahib* are sung in the company of the *Guru Panth*.

The regard which the *gurduara*, as the Guru's place, receives within the present-day Sikh community is amply illustrated by the following passage:

> To the good Sikh the *Gurduara* is more than a mere place of worship and the *Granth Sahib* more than a book of spiritual guidance. Both are associated more intimately than we can imagine with the social, political and spiritual life and growth of the whole movement from start to finish. To the Sikhs the *Granth Sahib* represents the body and soul of the lives and teachings of the Gurus, while the *Gurduaras* are not only the living embodiment of the struggles, spiritual and political of the *Panth* but they also stand for the social and religious day-to-day life of the whole community (Sahni n.d.:1).

That community has grown to an estimated thirteen to sixteen million Sikhs within India and abroad, and has established Sikhism as a world religion (Barrier and Dusenbery 1989:1). New shrines which commemorate events within the community continue to be established at sites associated with the dwelling place or passage of a Guru or of a saint or martyr. Other sites associated with political movements are being developed in Diaspora communities.

III. Conclusion

In Sikh doctrine, pilgrimage receives no sanction, yet places of pilgrimage were established by those who established the doctrine: the Sikh Gurus. Their writings suggest that the Gurus did not conceive of these places as *tiraths*, and history suggests that, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their were notable differences between these Sikh holy places and nearby Muslim and Hindu holy places. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, pilgrimages to Sikh places took on more and more *tirath*-like qualities. This growing operative popularity of *tirath* beliefs and practices did not, however, reflect normative changes in the position of pilgrimage in Sikh doctrine.

At the close of the nineteenth century, normative authority was strongly re-asserted. Pilgrimages continued to be made to Sikh holy places, but their resemblances to *tiraths* lessened, and their meaning was brought into line with Sikh doctrine. That meaning gave the *gurduara*—the collective institution that enshrines the *Guru Granth* and shelters the *Guru Panth*—the same central role within the contemporary Sikh community as the Guru had within the early Sikh community. This chapter has taken us from the Gurus' teachings, through the period of the Gurus' lifetimes, to the period of the *gurduara*. In the next chapter, this consideration of the Guru's role in shaping normative pilgrimage belief and practice will be complemented by consideration of the *gurduara's* role as the focus of operative pilgrimage belief and practice.

Notes

[1] For a summary of Guru Nanak's teachings see Grewal (1979) or Talib (1982).

[2] Here and throughout the writings of Guru Nanak, the word Guru does not necessarily refer to a spiritual teacher in human form. Often, the word Guru is used in reference to God or an attribute or manifestation of God that can bring the seeker to enlightenment (e.g. the *nam* or the *shabad*). This motif "underwent a definite evolution as subsequent Gurus were invested with Guru Nanak's spiritual authority" (Mann 1993: 144). Even then, however, it was not the mortal form of the human Guru which was regarded as the enlightener; rather, it was his capacity to bring the seeker to a realization of God (Singh 1992_a:47). The sense of the word Guru in common usage among Sikhs today has undergone a further evolution. It now

refers to any of the line of human spiritual teachers to whom Nanak's mandate passed, to the *Guru Granth*, and, in some instances, to the *Guru Panth* (Singh 1995_a:32-33).

[3] For a concise summary of the early history of the Sikhs see McLeod (1989); for a comprehensive survey see Grewal (1995).

[4] Gobind became Guru in 1675 at the age of nine and died in 1708 at the age of forty-two (Grewal 1995:237).

[5] It is not clear that women were initiated at the time of Guru Gobind Singh (Grewal 1997:personal communication), but at least since the nineteenth century women have taken the surname Kaur (meaning 'princess') at the time of their initiation into the Khalsa.

[6] Tradition dates the adoption of all five 'K's (articles beginning with the Gurmukhi letter kakka (ਕ)) to the time of the creation of the Khalsa (McLeod 1996:51 and 1989:72). The 'K's are uncut hair and beard (*kes*), a steel or iron bangle (*kirpan*), a comb (*kangha*), undershorts (*kachhihra*), and a curved sword or dagger (*kirpan*).

[7] The *Adi Granth* was compiled by the fifth Guru and his scribe Bhai Gurdas. It was first installed in Harmandir Sahib (now known as the Golden Temple) in 1604 (Talib 1982:3). Guru Gobind Singh worked with the scholar Bhai Mani Singh on a new recension in 1705 which became the standard from which all successive printed copies were made (Massey 1991:7, McLeod 1990_a:75).

[8] There are three volumes considered by some groups of Sikhs to be scriptural: the *Adi Granth*, the *Dasam Granth*, and the *Sarab Loh Granth*. Among them, only the former comprises the authenticated writings of the Gurus. The authorship of the latter two is disputed. Some attribute both to the tenth Guru and consider both, together with the *Adi Granth*, as the embodiment of the Guru, but current orthodoxy holds only the *Adi Granth* to be Guru (for an in-depth discussion of the *Granths*, see Oberoi 1994:93ff).

[9] For further details about the way in which the succession was passed, see Singh (1995_a:31-42), Singh (1966:73), and McLeod (1979:103).

[10] For a synopsis of religious authority within the Sikh *panth* throughout history, consult chapter three in McLeod 1996_a.

[11] Consult the glossary or chapter one for a definition of *tirath*.

[12] An interviewee shared this understanding of Guru Nanak's teachings. He said, "It's nowhere that he's discouraged, that whatever is being preached by the other religions is wrong. He's never done that. But he's just reformed it" (Interview 35).

[13] Another interviewee affirmed that Guru Nanak "said 'what is the sense of visiting if you can't be true to your faith and to your God?' ... But he never asked anybody not to go. He went to Haridwar and he found that people were following certain rituals which were not contributing to actual life, and he condemned those things, that these things should not be done, they have no meaning. Please do something which is good for humanity. Fight the oppressor, sing the hymns of the God ..." (Interview 48).

[14] The *Nam Dan Ishnan* formula was later written into the Khalsa code of conduct in the *Tanakhah-nama* attributed to Bhai Nand Lal (McLeod 1984:77).

[15] One line of the standard Sikh prayer (the *Ardas*) illustrates the contemporary importance of bathing in the *sarovar* which surrounds the Golden Temple. It reads: "Grant Your Sikhs ... the gift of gifts, devotion to the Name, and a bath in the sacred pool of Amritsar" (Singh 1995_c:134).

[16] For a discussion of the import that eighteenth and nineteenth century Udasi and Nirmala ascendancy has for our understanding of Sikh history, see Mann (1993:149).

[17] As evidenced by the dramatic increase in the number of pilgrims visiting the shrine of Hemkunt Sahib (see page 101 of this thesis) in the 1980s.

CHAPTER THREE

Sacred Journeys and Sacred Places in the Sikh Community

> Although we Sikhs are not required or even encouraged to go on pilgrimage, as Muslims are required to take a *hajj* to Mecca at least once in their lives, many Sikhs (this one included) love to go to *Gurduaras* and other holy sites. Just the thought of going back to India and treading upon the same ground and buildings in which our Gurus trod, fills me, thrills me, with shivers of spiritual delight.
> Gurpreet Singh Jawa, *e-mail correspondence*, 1996

I. Introduction

For Sikhs, any place where the eternal Guru, the *Guru Granth Sahib* is installed is a sacred place (Dhanjal 1994:152). Even a prayer room in the home, if the Guru is present, is considered to be a *gurduara* (McLeod 1996$_a$:64, Interview 35); its sanctity is not greater or lesser than that of any other *gurduara*. In this sense, all *gurduaras* are equivalent, making it unnecessary for Sikhs go on pilgrimages to distant sacred places (Brar 1996:web page). But in another sense they are not equivalent. Those *gurduaras* with historical significance receive great numbers of visitors from afar.

Wherever in the Catholic world the Holy Mother manifested herself, a shrine marks the place where the devout can still access her spirit (Westwood 1997:20). Similarly, wherever in the Sikh world a Guru dwelt, a historical *gurduara* commemorates his presence there. Punjab, the land where the Gurus lived, is both homeland and holy land to the Sikhs,[1] and if you travel through the Punjab countryside, chances are you will be treading in the footsteps of the Sikh Gurus. Certainly, you will see *nishan sahibs* standing in the hazy distance. These tall flagpoles wrapped in saffron or royal blue cloth signify the presence of the Guru (Interview 04). From their bases, ornate buildings topped

with white-tiled or gold-plated domes rise against the horizon. All of these *gurduaras* enshrine the scriptural Guru, and many commemorate the visit of a living Guru.

Over the length and breadth of Punjab and beyond, there is a network of these historical shrines to which Sikhs travel. To assist the pilgrims, a road—Guru Gobind Singh Marg—connects all of the places visited by the tenth Guru during his own travels in 1705 (Randhir 1990:103). As I travelled along this road, and along other, less formal pilgrimage routes, I spoke to Sikhs about their reasons for going to historical *gurduaras*. I observed that, when they follow in the literal or figurative footsteps of the Guru, their journeys resemble the pilgrimages of other religious communities in form, but not necessarily in meaning. In this chapter I will explore the nature of Sikhs' sacred journeys: the forms they take, whether or not they are pilgrimages, and whether or not they go against the grain of the Gurus' teachings.

II. Sikh Pilgrimage: The Operative

As noted in the previous chapter, from a theological point of view there is no pilgrimage in Sikhism. However, as Cameron observes, "the sociological reality is different" (1990:193). McMullen conducted the first major empirical study of the religious beliefs and practices operative among Punjabi Sikhs villagers. He observed "considerable deviation and in most cases even contradictions between the normative and operative beliefs of the Sikhs" (McMullen 1989:4). Pilgrimage was no exception.

Of the 500 Sikhs he interviewed in six rural villages, all had visited a place of pilgrimage (ibid.:47). Fully Sixty-four (64.0) per cent had done so to acquire religious merit. A further seventeen point eight (17.8) per cent had travelled to Sikh shrines for their historical value, eight (8.0) per cent because they happened to be there, and seven point four (7.4) per cent to attend a festival. More females than males had gone to shrines for religious reasons, and more males than females for sociological ones (ibid.:49).

Important as this empirical contribution to Sikh studies is, what McMullen's findings can tell us about the operative significance of pilgrimage suffers from a significant

limitation. As one aspect of Sikh religiosity among many surveyed, pilgrimage was the subject of only two questions in the survey instrument McMullen designed to collect data. The first question was used to determine whether the respondent had visited any of several historical *gurduaras*. Respondents were then asked to rank three possible answers to the second question, "Why have you visited these places?" The options were: "1. To seek religious merit; 2. Due to their historical importance; 3. I happened to be in the vicinity" (ibid.:119).

McMullen's formal interview technique did not allow him to probe into the subtleties of meaning expressed by his respondents. Given other alternatives, or an open-ended question format, respondents may have answered the second question quite differently. On the basis of the responses given, McMullen concluded that the majority of Sikhs visit historical *gurduaras* for religious reasons, and that "The idea of religious merit in visiting these places, though not part of normative Sikhism, seems to be popular at the operative level" (ibid.:48). What he did not explore was how Sikhs conceive of religious merit.

My own data indicate that, while Sikhs' journeys to sacred places are religiously motivated, their benefits are stated in terms other than merit. In fact, sacred journeys are described in terms other than pilgrimage. By exploring these differing interpretations of what pilgrimage is, we will come to understand how it is that "Sikhs go on pilgrimage" even though, as observed in chapter one, "there is no pilgrimage in Sikhism."

Pilgrimage in the Sikh Community?

Hinduism and Islam dominated India at the time of Sikhism's genesis and continue to do so five hundred years later. For adherents of both religions, pilgrimages are one step along the path of spiritual attainment. In every Muslim's life, the *hajj*, one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith, is a sacred duty. Performance of this obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca secures divine favour and forgiveness from sins. Its practices were performed and sanctioned by the prophet Mohammed himself (Combs-Schilling 1989:73). For those

Muslims unable to make the journey to Mecca, visits to the shrines and tombs of Muslim saints can be undertaken "to heal illness, procure a son, cure cattle of disease, and quite often make propitiatory village rites" (Oberoi 1994:198).

Likewise, Hindu journeys to bathe along the banks of sacred rivers or to worship in temples are made in fulfilment of vows, to obtain spiritual and worldly boons, and for purification from sins (Morinis1984:312ff). Although not strictly obligatory, these pilgrimages find sanction in ancient religious texts. Ritual ablutions and offerings, audience with a deity, austerities, elaborate ceremonies and prayers, charity, and other practices performed at pilgrimage centres are believed to be pleasing to the gods. As such, they are a mechanism for the accumulation of religious merit (ibid.:281). If they are performed in the present, they ensure rewards in the future (ibid.:62). A pilgrim's accumulated merit pays dividends in the form of fulfillment of wishes, healing of disease, and even liberation from the transmigratory cycle.

We return now to the problematic semantics of the word pilgrimage which were mentioned briefly in chapter one. If they are asked about the role of merit in their travels to historical *gurduaras*, Sikhs will often admit that they are uncomfortable with the term merit. So with the term pilgrimage and its equivalent in Indian languages, *tirath yatra*. Both have connotations Sikhs may not intend when they refer to their own religiously-motivated travel, because both bring to mind beliefs and practices de-emphasized by the Sikh Gurus:

> *Tirath varat such sanjam nahi karam dharam nahi puja.*
> ਥੀਰਥ ਵਰਤ ਸੁਚਿ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਰਮੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਨਹੀ ਪੂਜਾ ॥
> *Nanak bhai bhagat nistara.*
> ਨਾਨਕ ਭਾਇ ਭਗਤਿ ਨਿਸਤਾਰਾ ॥
>
> Pilgrimages, fasts, purification and self-discipline are of no use, nor are rituals, religious ceremonies or empty worship.
> O Nanak, emancipation comes only by loving devotional worship.
> (1st Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 75)

For the Gurus, grace replaced merit, and devotion replaced all of the practices believed to bring merit. They taught, in short, that it is not what God can do for you (bestow boons), but what you can do for God (offer worship). In line with this teaching and in contrast to the Islamic and Hindu communities in which pilgrimage is often instrumental in nature, sacred journeys in the Sikh community are more appropriately devotional, communal, customary, even recreational.

A Sikh correspondent interpreted his own journey to historical *gurduaras* as a pilgrimage, but noted that "the idea of a pilgrimage seems anti-*Sikhi* so maybe a pilgrimage is not the right word." (Chhokar 1997:e-mail correspondence). Another was more certain: "I would not use the word pilgrimage, or *tirath yatra*, to describe my visit to a *gurduara*" (Singh 1995_e:e-mail correspondence). A third, still more forcefully, wrote:

> If you were to ask even the most ignorant Sikh whether *tirath yatra* is allowed in Sikhism, he or she will instantly say, "No!" So we face a cultural gap when using the word pilgrimage, for it is used in English for a visit to any holy place, without taking the intent into account. The words *tirath yatra* take into account the intent, which has no place in the Sikh school of thought (Anand 1995:e-mail correspondence).

"The *Yatra* has no place as such in Sikhism," affirmed another,

> Really *Yatra* is the term used for Hindus when they visit their places of pilgrimage of which there are sixty-eight predefined ones. A Sikh is under no such obligation to visit shrines. For a Sikh, God is to be found within oneself through selfless service of the Guru in the Society of Saints (*Sat Sangat*). A Sikh does not gain any 'extra brownie points' for having visited a particular *gurduara* although he/she may very well feel spiritually uplifted by the experience (Singh 1997_a: e-mail correspondence).

"My reading," writes Khalsa in a study of a Sikh pilgrimage, "is that *yatra* as a Sikh spiritual practice is distinguishable from the Hindu goal of *tirtha* which Guru Nanak criticized. The Sikhs do not believe that they will achieve liberation through pilgrimage or that their sins will be erased" (1996:29). If the seeker remembers God, there *are* recognized benefits to undertaking *yatras* to sacred places in the company of the *sangat*

(Sikh community), but the purification, spiritual merit, or salvation implied in Hindu *tirath yatra* and Muslim *hajj* are not among them (ibid.).

When I questioned Sikhs about whether their travels to historical *gurduaras* were pilgrimages, their replies varied. For some, such travels were not pilgrimages at all. For others, such pilgrimages had no formal significance. They were a part of the tradition that has been passed down to them, more cultural than religious. Or they were opportunities to get away from routine, to see the sights. For still others, visits to *gurduaras* were affirmations of ties to history and community. But for the vast majority of Sikhs I spoke to, travels to historical *gurduaras* were made for religious reasons. They expressed feelings of expectancy and devotion, of spiritual seeking. Theirs was a language of divinity, faith, miracles, and mysticism more often than it was a language of leisure and sightseeing.[2]

According to Pfaffenberger (1983:72), the spiritual significance of travel is the indicator of whether it is pilgrimage or not. Evidence is found in the "culturally-supplied language of symbols in which travellers are obliged to express their peregrinations" (ibid.). Sikhs' travels to historical *gurduaras* have spiritual significance, and therefore fall into a category of religious beliefs and practices that, in the context of other religions, are identified as pilgrimages. Accordingly, in this thesis I refer them as pilgrimages, and to the travellers as pilgrims. Within the context of the Sikh religion, however, the normative meaning of travels to historical *gurduaras* is subtly different.

In and of themselves, so the Sikh Gurus taught, outer sacred journeys are futile if they are not simultaneously inner journeys. Inner journeys can be made anywhere since their source, God, is everywhere. This is not to say that outer journeys that are at the same time inner journeys—as journeys to Sikh *gurduaras* ideally are—are also futile. The Gurus, through their practice of founding communal centres, attached some utility to journeys to *gurduaras*, and drew a distinction between them and journeys to Hindu *tiraths* and Muslim tombs. The word pilgrimage as it is used here in reference to the former

connotes their unique quality. But the word pilgrimage is used here in another sense as well: as a direct translation of *tirath yatra*. This is where the semantic difficulty arises.

Pilgrimage Belief Meets Pilgrimage Practice

With this cautionary note about differing definitions of pilgrimage aside, we can go on to consider just what Sikh pilgrimage is. But first, there is one further qualification that needs to be placed on all of the above assertions about what it is not. Like members of all religious communities, Sikhs do not always practice what they preach, or what their Gurus preached before them. For example, bathing in sacred waters has lost most of its purificatory associations among Sikhs generally, but belief in healing baths and washing away sins still persists among some members of the Sikh community. Similarly, while most Sikhs go to shrines out of faith or devotion, there are other Sikhs who go to fulfil vows, to request blessings at special times, or to seek particular spiritual or material ends. The former reasons are orthodox. The latter are not.

The persistence of merit-seeking and other heterodox instrumental practices at Sikh sacred places points to the roots of Sikh tradition and Punjabi culture. The religious milieu from which Guru Nanak's teachings emerged was the Sant tradition of North India. The Sants were influenced by devotionalism of Hindu Vaisnavas and the mysticism of Muslim Sufis, among others (McLeod 1996_b:151ff). Despite the subsequent adoption of uniquely Sikh ceremonies, places of worship, and religious identity, there is an ongoing parity between Sikhism and the wider Indian culture and from which it was born. Journalist and historian Khushwant Singh affirms that,

> ... even after the Sikhs became a separate community, their relationship with Hinduism remained as close as that of parents to their offspring. And the Sikhs never really freed themselves from the dominance of Hindu customs and practices—including some which were in direct contravention of the teachings of the Gurus ... This very close affinity with Hinduism explains many of the present complexities and contradictions of the Sikh community (1985:23-24).

There is a "general religious feeling in India," said one of my non-Sikh interviewees, which makes it acceptable for Sikhs to share Hindu beliefs and participate in Hindu practices (Interview 08). A Sikh interviewee agreed, stating that,

> There is such a close affinity between Sikhism and Hinduism, between Sikhs and the rest of Indian culture, that there is no surprise that many apparently Hindu practices have come into Sikhism. There is no contradiction in most people's minds between pilgrimage and Guru Nanak's teachings (Interview 31).

Unlike instrumental pilgrimage practices (e.g. seeking for spiritual merit or worldly boons through ritual, austerity, or ceremony) which are considered heterodox, devotional pilgrimage practices (e.g. seeking for communion with God through prayer, song, or meditation), even if Hindu in origin, are considered orthodox. As Khalsa suggests, "on the level of popular belief, theological distinctions between the Hindu concept of *yatra*, *darshan* and *ishnan* and the corresponding Sikh views have little relevance for the pilgrim" (1996:30). Indeed, *yatra* (making a sacred journey), *darshan* (having sacred sight), *ishnan* (taking a sacred bath), *parikarma* (circumambulating a shrine), *parshad* (taking consecrated offerings), and *kirtan* (singing devotional hymns) are popular at both Hindu *mandirs* and Sikh *gurduaras*.

Morinis' description of what a follower of a devotional Hindu tradition does when he or she enters a shrine mirrors the actions of a Sikh visitor to a *gurduara*: "The *bhakta*-pilgrim will visit the holy place, prostrate to the deity, touch the image and circumambulate it, perhaps bathe in holy waters, participate in devotional singing, listen to sacred discourse or make an offering to his Guru" (Morinis 1984:72). In both Sikhism and *bhakti* Hinduism, it is the inner state of the devotee that is significant. These external practices are meant to reflect internal devotion. "For most pilgrims, the place of pilgrimage is an arena for the acting out of devotional ideals which are meant to permeate all aspects of the devotee's life, only perhaps here in a more rigorous or intensified form" (ibid.:265).

Pilgrimage in the Sikh Tradition Meets Pilgrimage in the Sikh Community

One Punjabi family I interviewed (Interview 02, Interview 46) admitted to skepticism about the value of going to pilgrimage shrines: "You don't achieve anything by going to such places" they said, because the path to God is through *simran* and *Nam*. "That you can do anywhere. There is no need to make difficult journeys to holy places." This sentiment, however, did not stop them from travelling to historical *gurduaras* throughout Punjab and even in other Indian states. They told me that it is not out of obligation or for merit that they go. It is for contact: with history, with the community, with the Gurus, with God.

Even though pilgrimages are not encouraged in the Sikh tradition, Sikh community members are able to justify going on them in two ways: by asserting first that pilgrimages are not *discouraged* in the Sikh tradition either, and second that they are of a particular kind of spiritual value intrinsic to the Sikh faith. The first part of the argument goes as follows:

> You see [Guru Nanak] himself visited all the holy places in India, and abroad ... He merely observed that people go there to do a ritual without meaning, without being involved in it, without sacrificing their bad habits, and leaving them behind. He said "what is the sense of visiting if you can't be true to your faith and to your God?" That's what he said ... But he never asked anybody not to go (Interview 48).

Rather than discouraging people from going to pilgrimage places, Guru Nanak discouraged the rituals being performed at them. Likewise, he never said that pilgrimages were wrong, just unnecessary.

As one correspondent argued, "Giving in charity, performing service, or being accomplished in singing *shabads* is useless if you do them with ego in the heart, but that does not mean those things are bad or undesirable. The same probably applies to pilgrimages" (Jawa 1997:e-mail correspondence). What connects Sikhs with God and Guru—devotion, humility, service, and so on—may even be reinforced by going on

pilgrimages, as long as pilgrims remain conscious the Gurus' spiritual teachings. So, even if Sikhs are not 'supposed' to go on pilgrimages, "God is not going to disregard anything that is good, for example chanting *Vahiguru* as you walk" (Interview 20).

Here, an operative understanding of the meaning of pilgrimages that is subtly different from the normative becomes apparent. It is the basis for the second part of the argument, and it is arrived at by means of a subtly different interpretation of the Gurus' words than I have made in the previous chapter. According to Sikh tradition, journeying to a sacred place is an expression of religiosity which, like all such external expressions, does not bring the devotee closer to God and Guru. According to members of the Sikh community, such a journey, if it is undertaken with internal love for God and Guru, is of some value. This value does not, however, take the form of religious merit. Because it does not, there is no contradiction between such a journey and Sikh doctrine.

In fact, Sikhs believe that if they go to the place of the Guru with love for God, they affirm the most cherished aspect of the faith. The comment of one interviewee, who is certain that pilgrimage is a good thing for the Sikhs, captures the reasons for visiting historical *gurduaras* which were most often expressed to me by pilgrims: "By visiting sacred places with love for God in your heart," she said, "you learn about the faith, about its history, and you feel a greater sense of community with your fellow Sikhs. Most importantly, you grow both personally and spiritually from the experience" (Interview 28).

In Buddhism, before the Buddha nature can be sought within through meditation, seekers must approach the Buddha in the external world by walking pilgrimage paths:

> The internal pilgrimage brings one closer to the goal of *nirvana* than does external pilgrimage, but the turning toward the Buddha who is iconically represented in the marks of his presence on earth or in relics constitutes an important preliminary step along the path to enlightenment. That the Buddha actually existed in the world, and continues to exist through traces, must be acknowledged before one begins to follow his teachings ... The pilgrimage that begins by turning toward the Buddha in this world finds its culmination in an inner pilgrimage that leads to a true understanding of the Dharma (Keyes 1987:347-349).

Sikh devotees, likewise, must orient themselves toward the Guru (become *Gurmukh*) before they can orient themselves toward God. Sikh pilgrimages bring seekers to the historical place of the Guru just as Buddhist pilgrimages bring them to the historical place of the Buddha. Since, for Sikhs, the path to God can only be walked with the Guru's guidance, contact with the Guru is integral to Sikh spirituality, just as, in Buddhism, seekers can only reach inner realization through the Buddha. This meaning of pilgrimage is also shared with *bhakti* Hinduism, described above. Pilgrimages in these religious communities, then, are not an end in themselves as they would be if made for instrumental reasons. Sikhs go to *gurduaras* for the same devotional reasons they went to the *dharamsalas* established by the Guru.

Pilgrimage for the Communal, Textual, and Historical Guru

For Sikhs, the inherent emptiness of external pilgrimages is mitigated by the internal contact that the pilgrim has with the Guru, and through the Guru with God, at sacred places. "In Sikhism the absolute necessity of the Guru is well emphasized. At the empirical level only 9.4 per cent of the Sikhs stated that one can find God and the true path without the help of a Guru" (McMullen 1989:58). For the first of the Sikh Gurus, whose conception of the Guru extended to God and any of several attributes of God, the Guru could be accessed anywhere. For Sikhs in the present-day Sikh community, the Guru's presence is concentrated in *gurduaras*. Sikhs remember the Guru in three forms: in the ten persons of the living Sikh Gurus, in the holy *Granth*, and in some contexts, in the communal *Panth*. The latter two forms of the Guru can be accessed in all *gurduaras*, and all three in historical *gurduaras*. Consequently, historical *gurduaras* have taken on a special sanctity over and above that of 'ordinary' *gurduaras*. They have become places of pilgrimage. Given that contact with the Guru is a spiritual necessity, the centrality of visits to the Guru's temporal abode in the lives of Sikhs is not surprising:

> The Sikhs feel that wherever there is a holy hymn, a holy saying, that wherever the Guru has visited, that place has been sanctified by his visit, by his staying there, by his prayers there. So they must visit that place. In

> fact, in the early morning *Ardas*, the holy prayer which is done after each ceremony and ritual, they request the Almighty that we should be given the strength and chance to visit the place which has been visited by a Guru or where the Guru resides in the form of the holy book. They pray for it. They request for it. They want it as a grant, they want it as a bestowing, a privilege to them, that they can visit such a place (Interview 48).

Sikhs are reminded of the significance of historical *gurduaras* at three places in the standard Sikh prayer known as the *Ardas*, which is said during daily personal devotions and at the conclusion of religious services in the *gurduaras*. They are first urged to remember the heroic men and women "Who sacrificed their lives to serve the *gurduaras*," and then to "Remember the five *takhts*, and all *gurduaras*." Finally, they pray, "May the Khalsa freely behold and serve Nankana Sahib and the other *gurduaras* and all sacred places from which we have been exiled" (Singh 1995_c:134-135).

Since the partition of India, most Indian Sikhs have had no access to the historical shrines which are on the other side of the border with Pakistan. Pre-arranged pilgrim groups of primarily non-resident Indians are given permits to visit shrines like Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, on the anniversary of his birth. The five *takhts*, important shrines which serve as the centres for religious and temporal authority for the Sikh community, are all within Indian borders. Of them, one was raised over the site where the tenth Guru was born, one where he initiated the first members of the Khalsa, one where he held his court, and another where he died (Singh 1985:86).

"Most of the Sikh shrines are historical," affirms Kapoor. "They were built by their Gurus. Thus a pilgrimage to such shrines is an ambition of every Sikh. On visiting these *gurduaras* a Sikh feels the presence of the Guru himself who actually built it" (Kapoor 1990:25). Among the reasons for visiting historical *gurduaras* given by Sikhs in my interviews with them, it was history, not surprisingly—the presence of the historical Guru—that was the most frequently cited reason of all.[3] Said one: "Sikhs feel compelled—by the Gurus and by the prayer—to visit places associated with the historical

events leading their community to the present day. These 'pilgrimages' are a vital part of being a Sikh, whether in India or abroad" (Interview 50).

The Guru, symbolically enshrined in a sacred place, is a concept unique to Sikhism. But what sacred journeys to the place of the Guru represent for the Sikhs has parallels for adherents of other religions, particularly other religions in which there is some tension between the normative and the operative. In Christianity, both Calvin and Luther discouraged pilgrimages, calling them wasteful after recognizing, as Guru Nanak did, that they did not aid salvation. Yet the popularity of pilgrimages within Christianity did not ebb (Turner 1973:209-210). In Islam, popular pilgrimages to the tombs of Sufi saints have been discouraged by the representatives of Muslim orthodoxy (Pannke 1997:3), just as they were discouraged by the Sikh Gurus, yet such shrines draw hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from the Muslim populous each year. In Mormonism, as in Sikhism, there is no formal doctrine of pilgrimage, yet visits to sacred sites are incorporated into vacation plans. "Thus one concludes that even in religions with no formal policy or encouragement of pilgrimages, travel associated with sacred sites and places is important and significant" (Hudman and Jackson 1992:120). The argument will be made in subsequent chapters that such travel reinforces ideals at the centre of each sacred tradition. For Sikhs, the most important ideal is the union with God achieved by and through the Guru.

IV. Conclusion

The previous chapter answered questions about why there is Sikh pilgrimage and when it developed, and this one has answered another about what Sikh pilgrimage is. In the next chapter, the specific whys and whens and whats of one Sikh pilgrimage will also answer questions about how and who. In the process, the reader will gain a sense of how the normative and operative are given practical expression. But first, some conclusions must be drawn about the relationship between the normative and operative that started us on this quest for answers.

Is there pilgrimage in Sikhism? In a normative sense no. There is no doctrine of pilgrimage in Sikhism. Do Sikhs go on pilgrimage? Yes. But why, in light of the absence of pilgrimage doctrine, do they go? I argued in the introduction that the apparently contradictory significance of pilgrimage at the two levels would be reconciled if considered from the perspective of pilgrims. That consideration has revealed that what makes outward pilgrimages to the place of the Guru justifiable is the continuing presence of the Guru, the spiritual teacher essential on the path to liberation, without whom the true inward pilgrimage could not begin.

In the Sikh community, then, there is an operative current towards pilgrimage, while in the Sikh tradition there is an normative current against it. But in both there is a current *toward the Guru*. Because he is at the centre of both tradition and community, the Guru gives significance to pilgrimage at both normative and operative levels of analysis, underlying and hence unifying them.

Notes

[1] "For every twenty Sikhs in the Punjab," writes Grewal (1995:1), "there are no more than four in the rest of India and not more than one in the rest of the world; among those who live outside, there are not many who do not have their roots in the Punjab."

[2] Pleas see chapter six for the comments of my interviewees.

[3] Interviews 04, 05, 07, 10, 18, 30, 35, 37, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 63, 64, 68, 71, and others not listed in the Interviews Cited section of this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Sacred Journey

> There is a place known as Hemkunt Sapt Sring. Of the many rocky peaks of the earth, seven are distinctive. Impressive in appearance, they rise gracefully from amidst the snows like silver spires above the forest ... Among these snow-laden peaks, in a depression at their base, is a pond of water. Behold—by the power of the Almighty the lake is not frozen even here in the abode of snow. A small stream emerges from it then flows for several miles until it meets the Alaknanda below.
> Bhai Vir Singh, *Sri Kalgidhar Chamatkar*, 1925:1

I. Introduction

In the region of northern Uttar Pradesh state which borders Nepal and Tibet, pilgrimage centres adorn landscapes made sacred by the passage of the holy river Ganges. Among these sacred places, one small lake is unique. It is nestled among rocky peaks, high above the tree line. On its bank, near a stream which issues from the lake to flow down to join the Ganges, are two temples. One is a large Sikh *gurduara*. The other is a small Hindu *mandir*. At 4,329 metres above sea level, these are perhaps the highest temples in India (*Garhwal* 1990:20).

The Sikhs know this place as Hemkunt Sapatsring. For eight months of the year this 'lake of ice' surrounded by 'seven peaks' is inaccessible, its water frozen beneath deep snow. When the monsoon rains begin, the snow and ice melt, and meadows of ferns and moss and wildflowers colour its banks. Then, in their thousands, Sikhs climb a steep stone path and bathe in its waters. They come in remembrance and prayer to see the place where their tenth Guru meditated in his previous life and became one with God. To local Hindus the place is known as Lokpal, and the temple there is dedicated to the god Lakshman. On festival days they journey to it from nearby Himalayan valleys to make offerings and give thanks. To these visitors, Sikh and Hindu alike, the lake and its

environs are sacred. To other visitors, trekkers from India and from abroad, the natural beauty of Uttarkhand draws them to Hemkunt/Lokpal, and to the nearby Valley of Flowers National Park.

II. The Sacred Journey

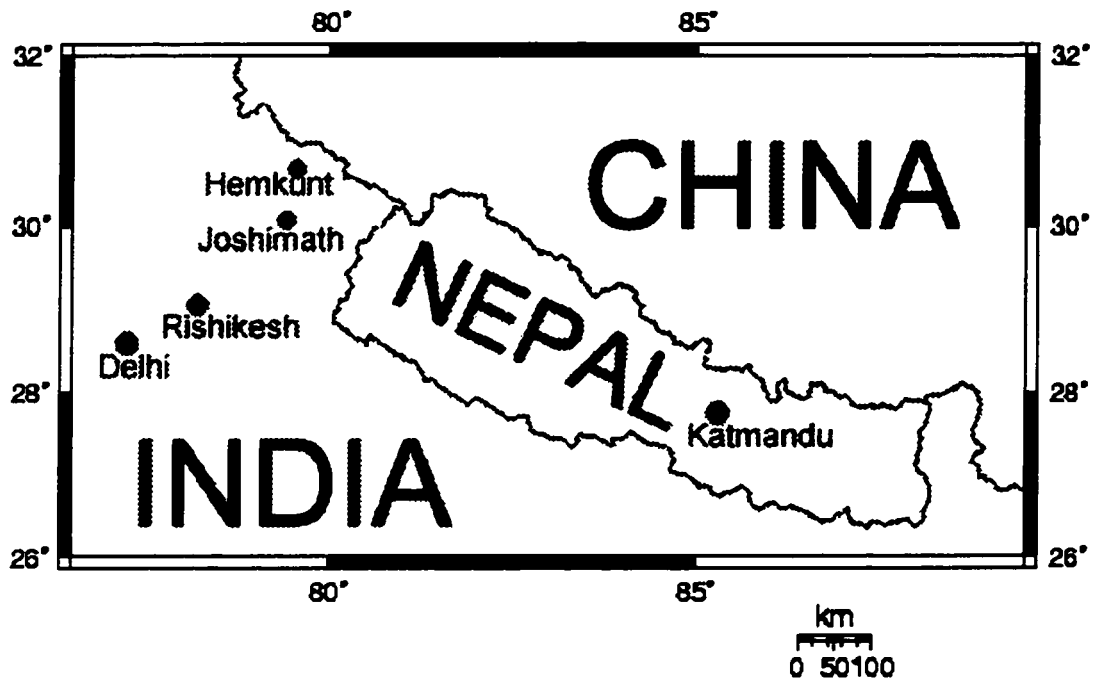
The sacred journey to Hemkunt Sahib begins from the pilgrim's home, perhaps in Punjab, perhaps elsewhere in India, and perhaps in another country. After travelling to the place where the Indian plains and foothills rise to meet the Himalayas it is, for most, a two day journey to the base of the pilgrimage route. Some travel by bus, some by car, and others by truck, by scooter, by bicycle, even by foot.[1] For another two days, some walk, some are carried, and some ride mules along a mountain footpath to reach the shrine. An equal number of days are required to return home.

> In all a pilgrim travels a minimum of nine days for that one precious hour or two at the lake of Hemkunt Sahib. This fact points to the importance of the journey itself as an integral part of the pilgrim's overall purpose. Pilgrims are motivated by the thought of the final destination, but the experience is shaped and remembered primarily as a journey, as passage to the sacred place. The step-by-step advance symbolizes the devotee's focused intent towards unity with or perhaps proximity to the divine (Khalsa 1996:24).

The road into the Uttarkhand Himalayas begins along the banks of the Ganges at Hardwar, the 'gateway to God'. From there the road passes through Rishikesh and into the hills. It winds northward through the valley in which the Ganges flows, past the Panch Prayag, the five sacred confluences where major tributaries join the river. Sikh *gurduaras*, managed by the same trust that oversees the operation of the pilgrimage to Hemkunt Sahib, offer food and lodging in Hardwar, Rishikesh, Srinagar, and Joshimath.

Past Joshimath, the road continues alongside the Alaknanda river, tracing the ancient *paidal yatra* (walking pilgrimage) route to Badrinath. Located near the river's source, Badrinath is the most important Hindu shrine in the Indian Himalayas. Because of

its proximity to the Chinese border, the Indian army has gradually extended the motorable road, easing pilgrims' journeys. Thirty kilometres before Badrinath, and more than 250 kilometres beyond Rishikesh, the road reaches Gobind Ghat at the base of the footpath to Hemkunt Sahib and the Valley of Flowers.



Gobind Ghat

Gobind Ghat is situated at an altitude of 1,828 metres on the west bank of the Alaknanda (*Garhwal* 1990:20). There, *ghats* (steps down to the water) have been built for those who wish to bathe in the sacred river. Together with the name of the Guru in whose memory pilgrims undertake the journey, they are the village's namesake. Before the fist Sikhs came to Hemkunt Sahib, the area was known as Simtway. There was no permanent village there, and to this day Gobind Ghat is little more than a cluster of buildings housing hotels, tea shops, and stalls which sell running shoes, plastic raincoats, walking sticks, and souvenirs. They are open seasonally between June and October when the weather is warm and the path to Hemkunt Sahib is clear of snow. The narrow stretch of pavement into the main part of the village descends from a small upper bazaar along the

main motor road to Badrinath. The buses stop there, letting off pilgrims, workers, and supplies amid several tea shops. All walk down towards the river.

Near a suspension bridge which crosses the Alaknanda, the *gurduara* complex looms large on both sides of the path. The buildings are white, and their corrugated steel roofs, painted red and green, sport saffron coloured flags which flutter atop storey after storey of blue-shuttered rooms and halls. Pilgrims are accommodated inside. Other visitors, regardless of their religion or country of origin, are also granted accommodation. They sleep side by side with the Sikhs on the stone floors. The *gurduara* offers simple meals and luggage storage facilities to all travellers at no cost. Of those who stay overnight at Gurdwara Gobind Ghat, or in nearby hotels, many attend an evening *Ardas* (prayer service) in which requests are made and thanks is given for successful journeys.

A few visitors make their journeys individually, and more come in small groups with friends and family. Most Sikh pilgrims travel as members of even larger, organized groups known as *jathas* which are comprised of related families, of club members, of people from the same neighbourhood or from the congregation of the same *gurduara*. *Jathas* resemble guided tour groups. Organizers set itineraries, sell tickets, make travel arrangements, and charter tour buses. For many pilgrims, especially those who would otherwise have no travelling companions, this kind of group travel is more convenient and less expensive than independent travel (Interview 30).

Jatha buses are decorated with banners and saffron coloured flags printed with Sikh insignia. During the bus ride, announcements are made, stories are told, and *kirtan* (devotional music) is sung over loudspeakers. By the time the buses reach Gobind Ghat, *jatha* members have a sense of the meaning and spirit of the pilgrimage. All are accommodated together in the large rooms and halls of the *gurduaras*. When they wake together in the early hours of morning, members participate in group prayers and recitations from scripture and then they begin their day's journey.

Before setting out, travellers can hire mules, porters, and sedan chairs. The porters come from Nepal each visitor season to work along pilgrimage routes in India. If

there is insufficient work carrying loads, they are hired by local contractors to do other types of labour: breaking rocks, building walls, and mending paths. *Kandi valas* are porters who carry baskets woven from bamboo and supported by straps across their foreheads and ropes over their shoulders. A *kandi* basket can be laden with backpacks, suitcases, bags, children, and aged or unwell visitors. For those visitors unable to sit on a mule or in a basket, *dandi valas*, in groups of four, bear them up the slope in wooden sedan chairs supported by poles.

Though they were traditionally herdsmen, all but a few of the local hill people have given up this occupation in favour of opening businesses which service the pilgrimage and tourism industry. Now, of the more than a thousand mules and horses that work the route to Hemkunt Sahib carrying people and supplies, most come from the plains. They are herded up the highway at the start of the visitor season, and back down again at its end. Most of the men who own and care for these animals also come from the plains. They differ culturally and linguistically from the local hill people and the visitors.

The *ghora valas* (mule brokers) stand at the trail head with their animals and call out "*ghora, ghora, ghora*" to everyone who passes. Mules can also be hired further along the path at places where those walking may decide they are too weary to continue on foot. I heard one *ghora vala* joke with a customer that she was hiring the services of a *pahari* Maruti. *Pahari* means 'of the mountains' and Maruti is a make of car. The man was, of course, referring to his mule, which to his mind was a "luxury *ghora*." He insisted that this justified the high price he was asking to hire it.

The cost of hiring a mule is always negotiated, and what the *ghora vala* settles for is dependent on the volume of visitor traffic and on how much he thinks visitors are willing to pay. Mules add both colour and sound to the journey. They are decorated with red, yellow, and blue tassels. Bells around their necks jangle as they walk. And the men who urge them forward whistle, shout, and prod them with sticks while at the same time yelling for those walking up ahead to move to the side of the path.

Gobind Ghat to Gobind Dham

From the suspension bridge in Gobind Ghat, the start of the footpath can be seen as it zigzags up a steep hillside. Visitors cross the river and begin their slow ascent. After two kilometres the trail levels out and begins to follow a stream. Clear, cold water, its source in the Valley of Flowers and Hemkunt lake, tumbles over boulders on its way to meet the Alaknanda. The path, which is constructed from stones painstakingly set into the earth by hired labourers, is wide enough for two laden mules to pass each other. Finding footing on the stones is difficult for both mules and humans, but a stone surface is necessary to keep the path from degenerating to mud during the monsoon rains.

At intervals all along the route there are clusters of tea shops set up by local villagers and itinerant workers from Nepal. These shops are housed in temporary structures made of wooden boards and branches roofed with plastic sheets over bamboo poles. They provide long benches for travellers to rest on. In addition to tea, their proprietors sell hot snacks, coffee, and an assortment of cold drinks, biscuits, sweets, and chocolate bars. Visitors often express their surprise at how many packaged foods and drinks are available along the route. Some complain that the simplicity of the pilgrimage has been lost; that it is now possible to have a Coke even in the most remote region of the Himalayas.

Tacked to trees and tea shops alongside the path are signs with Sikh devotional messages printed on them in Punjabi, Hindi, and English. Pilgrims are reminded by these signs to utter "*Vahiguru*" (Wondrous God) or "*Satnam*" (True Name). Most graffiti, however, commemorates the visits of individuals and groups. Names and the dates, together with Sikh symbols, are splashed across stone surfaces in brightly coloured paint. A recent initiative taken by one *jatha* was the painting of environmental slogans in an attempt to stem the accumulation of garbage alongside the path. Another *jatha* undertook the *seva* (voluntary service) of posting hundreds of stickers on tea shops, and even on the saddles of passing mules, reminding visitors that smoking on the way to Hemkunt Sahib is prohibited.[2]

When Sikhs pass each other on the trail, they exchange the affirmation "*Vahiguru Ji ka Khalsa, Vahiguru Ji ki fatah*" (The Khalsa is God's, Victory is God's). Those descending distribute glucose powder, sweets, cardamom, sugar crystals, nuts, and dried fruit, even walking sticks, to those climbing upward. Encouragement, too, is passed among the pilgrims. Phrases like "God will give you strength," "You're almost there!" and "Every step brings you closer to the Guru" are commonly heard. Together, these practices strengthen the sense of community and commonality among the pilgrims.

One Sikh visitor told me that when walking to Hemkunt Sahib she felt as if she had made millions of friends: "Everyone was doing it together, supporting each other emotionally and physically, in a sense carrying each other up" (Interview 15). "It brings people together as a community ," another told me,

> This pilgrimage is positive because it's a gathering of Sikhs going to a holy place. Such gatherings have been going on since the time of Guru Nanak. Being around others of the faith strengthens an individual's faith. It's a positive environment ... It makes people remember why they're Sikhs, it's not just something they're born into (Interview 20).

Indeed, Sikhs from every place within India and the Diaspora, from every social strata, and from every religious background, whether *sahijdhari*, *kesadhari*, or *amritdhari*,[3] make the journey. McMullen affirms that travel in *jathas* reinforces community solidarity (1989:48), and Khalsa adds that it is,

> is in keeping with Sikh teachings which emphasize the importance of being in congregation with other spiritually motivated people. The feeling of affinity is strong. The journey has a reward intrinsic to the Sikh tradition: the remembrance of God's name in the company of the holy (Khalsa 1996:25).

A disabled villager has taken advantage of the religious spirit of the Sikh pilgrims by learning to perform Sikh *kirtan* (hymns). He sits near the path and claps as he sings and the passers-by leave money for him. Other non-Sikhs also make their living from the pilgrimage. Some sweep the manure from the path near the villages. When pilgrims pass

the sweepers hold out their hands, say "*Sat Sri Akal Ji*" (the Sikh greeting), and request a donation towards their *seva* of keeping the path clean. More find employment in the evenings by walking through the villages carrying mats and oil and offering massages for a fee. To appeal to their customers, shopkeepers, though Hindu themselves, play Sikh devotional music on their stereo systems. All are familiar with Sikh greetings, and welcome Sikhs who enter their restaurants or pass their lodges with short phrases of Punjabi.[4] Some locals have even picked up sufficient Punjabi to do business in the language.

Three kilometres above Gobind Ghat, the trail passes Pulna (1,920 m), the winter village of the local people. After five kilometres more, it passes Bhyundar (2,239 m), their summer village (*Garhwal* 1990:20). There, the first snow covered peaks come into view. One kilometre above Bhyundar, a bridge spans the stream. Beyond it, the way becomes difficult: steep and rocky. Many visitors report being warned before coming that as soon as they cross the bridge they should stop and prepare themselves mentally for the climb. Accordingly, the tea shops clustered just after the bridge do very good business.

When visitors commence their climb, they count the milestones written in Hindi which mark off the last three kilometres to Ghangaria, also known as Gobind Dham. The path ascends through dense forests and across an open meadow before the corrugated steel roofs of the village come into view. To complete the whole twelve kilometre trek from Gobind Ghat takes from four to seven hours.

Gobind Dham

Sikh pilgrims rest for the night in Gobind Dham, the 'abode of Gobind' (3,048 m) (*Garhwal* 1990:20), before commencing their final ascent to Hemkunt Sahib. Trekkers bound for the Valley of Flowers also stay in the village, as overnight camping is not permitted in the national park. Gobind Dham is a seasonal resort; there are no homes, only lodges and shops. When the Hemkunt Sahib *gurduara* opens on June first, Gobind

Dham opens for business. After the closing ceremonies are performed during the first week of October, Gobind Dham, too, closes for the season.

Only a few years ago, the only buildings in Gobind Dham were the government Tourist and Forest Rest Houses, the Sikh *gurduara*, and two or three small shops (Interview 04, Interview 14). As the number of visitors has multiplied,[5] the *gurduara* complex has expanded, and the locals have put up numerous new structures to take advantage of the growth of the pilgrimage. There are now many permanent buildings in Gobind Dham, and just as many temporary shelters set up on its periphery by porters and *ghora valas*. In 1996 there were almost forty restaurants and tea shops, twenty hotels, and forty-five shops. They were always opening and closing during the time I was there, so I found it difficult to make an accurate count.

As in Gobind Ghat, several shops sell souvenirs: photographs of flowers, pictures of Hemkunt Sahib with devotional messages printed on them, steel *karas* (bangles) and wooden *khangas* (combs) etched with the words 'Sri Hemkunt Sahib,' *patkas* (head coverings made from colourful cotton cloth), *malas* (rosaries and bead necklaces), and *rumalas* (beautiful coverings for the holy book which are donated to the *gurduaras*). Other shops sell sweets, batteries, handkerchiefs, dry fruits, water bottles, socks, and other necessities of the journey.

Two or three *sabzi valas* (vegetable vendors) sell cabbages, onions, potatoes, and occasionally apples, mangoes, and bananas. Restaurants serve Chinese, South Indian, and rich Punjabi dishes which cater to the tastes of the visitors. There is also a chemist in town, a government doctor, and an army dispensary run free of cost inside the *gurduara* compound. All supplies to stock these businesses must be carried up by mule or porter. The variety of goods available, given these conditions, is surprising.

The accommodation in Gobind Dham is very basic. In the *gurduara*, guests sleep on the cement floors of large, crowded halls or in smaller rooms. Each person is allotted five woolen blankets if there are enough to go around. In a pinch, the *gurduara* can sleep several thousand. Many more visitors stay in lodges which have beds and supply heavy

cotton quilts to ward off the unaccustomed chill and dampness of the Himalayan air. Most rooms have bathrooms attached but no showers. Taps have stream water piped to them and hot water can be purchased in buckets. Since the village is only occupied during the summer months, all buildings are unheated. Intermittent electricity is supplied by a turbine which, when the ice and snow have melted by mid-June, is turned by the stream which flows down from Hemkunt.

Each year, the greatest volume of visitors comes during June when the weather is clear and Indian students have school holidays.[6] At times their numbers are too great for the limited facilities to handle. On one June day during the 1996 season, *gurduara* staff estimated that more than 10,000 people passed through Gobind Dham. They had come to Gobind Ghat in 165 large buses and trucks, as well as more cars and vans and jeeps than I could count. When Gurdwara Gobind Dham was full, the staff closed the gates. Those left without sleeping arrangements were accommodated in shops or on the porches of the hotels and restaurants.

Even if they do not stay in the *gurduara*, opting instead for relatively more comfortable hotel rooms (Interview 19), many Sikh visitors eat in the *langar* (community kitchen) within the *gurduara* compound. Rice, *roti*, and *dal* are served free of charge, prepared from supplies donated by the pilgrims or purchased with their offerings. Sikhs relish the food, they tell me, because of the spirit that went into its making (Interview 29). As is common at *gurduaras* everywhere, visitors to Gurdwara Gobind Dham—those who still have enough energy after the journey—take some time to do *seva*. Usually, that community service takes the form of serving food or cleaning utensils in the *langar*.

When they enter or leave the *gurduara* or its courtyard, some pilgrims bend down to touch the threshold or the steps. They then raise their hands and brush their fingers across their foreheads. They do this because the dust of pilgrims' feet collects there. I was told by one pilgrim that of the many who cross the threshold, perhaps a few are saints. If that is so, then the dust from their feet may change the course of your life (Interview 32). Guru Nanak wrote,

Dan mahinda tali khak je milai ta masatak laiai.
ਦਾਨੁ ਮਹਿੰਡਾ ਤਲੀ ਖਾਕੁ ਜੇ ਮਿਲੈ ਤ ਮਸਤਕਿ ਲਾਈਐ ॥

The gift I seek is the dust of the feet of the Saints;
If I were to obtain it, I would apply it to my forehead.
(1st Guru, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 468)

Some Sikhs interpret scriptural passages like this one literally. Others are influenced by Hindu tradition: it is also customary to bend and touch the dust on the threshold when entering a Hindu *mandir*.

Gobind Dham to Hemkunt Sahib

Sikh pilgrims begin their ascent to Hemkunt Sahib before sunrise. At three in the morning, the sleeping halls in the *gurduara* suddenly fill with chatter. People move about folding blankets, tying turbans, and dressing children. Some gather for group prayers. Others cluster in the courtyard holding steaming glasses of sweet, milky tea. The narrow street outside the *gurduara* compound becomes crowded with porters and mules jostling for the business of the visitors who push past them. As they set out from the village, loud cries are raised by groups of pilgrims. One shouts out "*Bole so nihal* ..." to which any Sikh within hearing distance replies, with equal force, "*Sat Sri Akal!*" Non-Sikh visitors often asked me what all the shouting was about. The phrase, which is called a *jaikara*, or 'victory slogan,' means "Anyone who speaks will be happy ... True is the Timeless One!"

By six thirty a.m. the street of Gobind Dham becomes quiet again. The only people who remain in the village are the temple staff, the proprietors of the businesses, government workers, and a few trekkers who later depart for the Valley of Flowers. Until more visitors begin to arrive from Gobind Ghat in the early afternoon, those left in the village do what is known in local parlance as 'time-pass': they drink tea, gossip, play cards, or snooze.

Before my departure from Canada, a correspondent described the journey to Hemkunt Sahib for me and told me what to watch for. One image in particular stayed with me. Beyond the edge of the village, he said, at the base of the footpath,

> You'll find yourself looking down at this beautiful small valley with this incredibly high cliff going straight up to touch the sky. On a cloudy day you could squint your eyes and see that there is a long pole on top of the cliff with an orange flag on it. It's the sign of a *gurduara* (DasGupta 1995:e-mail correspondence).

On my first ascent to Hemkunt Sahib, I was not the only traveller looking up with squinted eyes to see the flag. Its sight encourages pilgrims to continue their upward journey: despite difficulty and fatigue, their destination is always in sight (Interview 17).

The climb to Hemkunt Sahib is steep. The trail has been cut into the slope, and for most of its length the surface is stone. Even so, during the heavy rains that fall in July and August, it becomes muddy and treacherous. It zigzags upward through forest and then through high altitude meadows above the tree line. Turning to look out across the valley below, visitors can see snow-covered peaks rising in the distance. More often than not, however, these peaks are obscured by fog and cloud. The rain is unceasing at the height of the monsoon season, and the ascent is wet, slippery, and cold. Tea shops cling to the hillside. At every switchback, people can be seen resting, sitting on rocks or beneath the shelters provided by the shops. Others trudge past them, taking anywhere from two to six hours to cover the six kilometre distance to the lake.

As they walk, many Sikhs recite God's name. The chant of "*Satnam* ... *Vahiguru*" sets the rhythm for their footsteps. Other Sikhs reaffirm their knowledge and their faith by reading passages of scripture from prayer books. They read as they are carried up in *kandi* baskets or on the backs of mules. Or they stop to read at rest breaks. I asked one group about this practice, and they said: "on the way up, all the way up, you should cover your head, and you should pray and meditate on the words in the *Guru Granth Sahib*" (Interview 28). Another group I walked with stopped at intervals along the trail to offer

prayers. When other pilgrims passed by, they would join in, reciting the words until they had moved out of hearing range.

Sometimes a whole *jatha* travels in procession behind a portable *nishan sahib* on a pole topped by a *khanda* (double-edged sword). Behind it, group members walk carrying drums and cymbals and singing devotional hymns. A commonly sung *shabad* (verse from scripture) is "*Charan chalo marag Gobind.*" It means "Walk ye, O my feet, on God's path." Because the appellation used for God in this verse is Gobind, it seems an appropriate hymn to sing along a footpath leading to a place dedicated to the memory of Guru Gobind Singh. Other popular songs are sung in praise and remembrance of this Guru. Of those who do not sing themselves, some listen to devotional music on portable cassette players as they walk. For others, just concentrating on the journey is enough. "Take God's name and go," one told me (Interview 37).

With two kilometres remaining, travellers begin to walk on snow. Some, having never seen snow before, scoop up handfuls of it and pose for photos. Then they proceed slowly, taking cautious steps. Most grasp hold of a rope installed beside the path and simultaneously jab their walking sticks into the earth. Mules cannot go past the place where the snow begins until enough of it melts to expose the gently sloping switchbacks of the main trail. Early in the season, a slowly moving column of pilgrims and porters can be seen labouring up the 1,175 steep stone steps which are an alternate route to the top.

Without the sound of the bells around the mules' necks and the whistling, clucking, and shouting of the *ghora valas*, the only sounds that can be heard on the steps are the footfalls of the pilgrims, the clatter of walking sticks hitting stones, and recitations of "*Satnam ... Vahiguru.*" Chants and shouted slogans become more frequent and intense as pilgrims near the top of the ridge. Those descending jubilantly shout *jaikaras* to urge on those who are still climbing. Though weary, pilgrims feel a tangible excitement with the knowledge that their long sought destination is near. They climb the last few steps, and then the saffron flag, the silver roof the *gurduara*, and the holy lake itself with its surrounding peaks come into view.

Hemkunt Sahib

Their sacred journey complete, pilgrims at last have the cherished *darshan* (sight) of the sacred place. Many collapse at the top of the stairs and give thanks. Some are overcome with altitude sickness, but most, before the chill of the air at an altitude above four thousand metres becomes too much, bathe in the water of the lake. It is common for *gurduaras*, especially historical *gurduaras* in Punjab, to have a *sarovar* (pond) in their compounds. Sikhs customarily take *ishnan*, a 'holy bath', in these sacred waters. Likewise in the natural *sarovar* at Hemkunt.

The lake is cold. It is fed by springs and rainfall and glacial meltwater which spills down the mountainside on the far shore. Until mid June, all but a narrow margin of water along the shore is covered by ice. The men bathe outside after removing their clothes beneath a shelter. For women there is a separate enclosure inside the *gurduara* itself: a bath fed by water which flows from Hemkunt and then cascades down the slope towards Gobind Dham. Most enter the frigid water slowly, utter a prayer, then take a series of brisk dips before scampering back to shore. Some pause for a moment to have photos taken to preserve the event. Local youths are on hand to photograph, for a fee, those without cameras.

Each season several pilgrims stay in the chill water, out of faith or devotion, while they meditate. I watched one day as an elderly Sikh man sat chest-deep in the lake while he recited from scripture. During his recitation, which lasted for more than half an hour, onlookers gathered on the shore. When he finished, he stood up in the water and said the *Ardas*, the standard Sikh prayer. At its conclusion, he called out "*Bole so nihal*" to which a chorus of replies and repetitions rose from an exhilarated crowd.

At the conclusion of their bath, many change into clean clothes which have never been worn before. They feel that by praying throughout the journey they are purified on the inside. The bath and clean clothes then purify them on the outside. Others assert that the idea of purification has no place in Sikhism. Even so, for most Sikhs the water of the lake is holy water. It is referred to as *amrit*, or 'nectar'. Shops along the route sell empty

plastic bottles which pilgrims fill when they reach the lake. After stooping to collect the water at the shoreline, some then place the bottles inside the *gurduara*, just beside the platform on which the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh holy book, rests. Later, after the congregational *Ardas* has been said, they retrieve their bottles and take them home. In times of sickness or celebration the water is administered to family and friends.

Whenever the sky clears, pilgrims can be seen standing on the lakeshore pointing upward as they try to count the seven flags atop the seven peaks which surround the lake. They tell stories about the flags, speculating about how they came to be there, and how the wrappings on the flagpoles are changed. They tell other stories as well, about the large yellow-green blossoms of the Brahma Kamal ('God lotus') flowers which bloom on the slopes around the lake, about the fate of the stone on which the Guru once sat in meditation, and about feeling a sense of the Guru's presence. Pilgrims also tell of sightings of gods and faeries, of strange splashing noises and lights during the night, of magical lotus flowers blooming in the centre of the icy lake, of birds that pluck foreign objects out of the water to prevent them from polluting its purity, and of appearances of Guru Gobind Singh's falcon sitting atop the tall *nishan sahib* beside the *gurduara*. Some Sikhs pay a visit to the Hindu temple, feeling that God is everywhere and in everything, no less in a *mandir* than in a *gurduara*.

In addition to taking water from the lake, pilgrims often take some token of the journey home with them to remember it by. That token may be a souvenir purchased from one of the shops. It may be a *saropa* (length of cloth) or *parshad* (consecrated food) presented by one of the *granthis*. Or it may be wildflowers collected from the meadows surrounding the lake. These things become treasured reminders of the journey. Sometimes they are given to friends and relations so that those unable to come to Hemkunt Sahib can feel a spiritual connection with the sacred place, symbolized by the material object.

Other objects are left as donations to the *gurduara*. Pilgrims offer blankets, ornaments, food, money, and prayers. Some of these are given in turn to other pilgrims.

Donations of *ghi* (clarified butter), sugar, and wheat flour, for example, are used to make *karah parshad* (a sanctified sweet) which is distributed to all. *Rumalas* (decorated cloths) are sometimes given out as *saropas*. Or they are given, along with wrappings for the *nishan sahib* flagpole, to other *gurduaras*. Receipts for donations of 101 rupees ($3.00) or more can be taken down to Gurdwara Gobind Ghat and presented in exchange for *saropas* and dry *parshad*. These items are given to the absent friends and family members on whose behalf the donations and prayers were made. The *saropas* are often used as turbans on future journeys to sacred places, their saffron colour symbolic of sacrifice.

When they enter the *gurduara*, visitors have tea. It is poured into stainless steel glasses from great cauldrons simmering over wood fires. On very cold, foggy days, additional fires are built using wood carried up by mules. Wet, shivering travellers gather around these fires to keep warm. When they have had their fill of tea and warmth, they remove their shoes, cover their heads, and climb the cement steps to the inner sanctum of the *gurduara*.

In bare feet they pad across soft carpets and approach the holy book enshrined under a decorated brass canopy. They press their palms together in prayer, then reach forward, place a donation in cash or in kind before the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and bow, touching their foreheads to the ground in a demonstration of supplication and respect. Then they rise, place their hands together once more, and make the *parikarma* (circumambulation) of the platform on which the sacred scriptures rest.

If they have brought offerings of *rumalas*, silk flowers, brass ornaments, blankets, *ghi*, or *parshad*, they present them to the *granthi* in attendance. Then they sit, wrapped in shawls and blankets, to meditate, pray, read or recite from scripture, or join in the singing of devotional hymns. Some weep from the fatigue of their exertions, or out of joy at finally reaching, by Guru's grace, the place they had long hoped to visit.

Of these practices, many are identified by Clift and Clift as common motifs which give deep inner significance to pilgrimage (1996:66ff). In form, if not in specific meaning, they are shared by pilgrimages in many religions. Among these motifs are difficulty of

access, sense of community and sense of presence, water rituals, leaving something behind and taking something away. Pilgrims connect with the sacred place by bathing, bowing, beholding, and circumambulating the shrine, and by undertaking the sacred journey itself (ibid.:15). Pilgrims also connect collectively by sitting, praying, singing, and telling stories with other pilgrims (ibid:159).

Clift and Clift affirm that "Religious ritual in many of its forms seeks to make a connection with God," (1996:154). For Sikhs, the above rituals are interpreted not as mechanical outward actions, but as ways to express and strengthen that inward connection. The rituals of pilgrimage and the rituals of everyday religious practice are sometimes inseparable (ibid.). Sikhs do not observe special ceremonies, renunciations, austerities, dietary restrictions, penance, or pilgrim dress while on pilgrimage. All of the rituals of the sacred journey to Hemkunt Sahib also obtain at other Sikh sacred places. However, at Hemkunt Sahib they can be observed in an intensified form.

Like all *gurduaras*, Hemkunt Sahib is the place of the Guru. Yet it is unique among shrines commemorating events from the history of the community and the faith because it is Guru Gobind Singh's legendary place (*asthan*) of meditation (*tapassia*), communion, and union with God. Before he was born into the world, God bestowed on him the mission of guruship at Hemkunt. Consequently, for pilgrims, there is no other place like it. As one interviewee insisted, "*Tap asthan* is only Hemkunt; *tap asthan* is not any other place. *Tap asthan* is only Hemkunt Sahib" (Interview 36).

No other *gurduara* is associated with the spiritual attainment of a Guru in his past life. Nor is any other *gurduara* so remote and surrounded by such a powerful mystique that pilgrims are willing to travel such great distances and undergo such hardships to reach there. Many Sikhs can make the journey only once in a lifetime (Interview 10, Interview 15, Interview 16). For this reason, a greater proportion of Sikhs can be observed taking *ishnan*, offering *rumalas*, and giving donations than at other, more accessible, historical *gurduaras*. Many meditate and pray during the journey at a pitch of

intensity greater than their daily devotions. For some, the pilgrimage is made as the culmination of a special period of meditation and prayer.

Two congregational services are held daily at Gurdwara Sri Hemkunt Sahib, the first at ten o'clock and the second at one o'clock. Both centre around the *Ardas* and the reading of the daily *hukamnama*. Before and after these services, visitors who can perform *kirtan* seat themselves behind *tabla* (drums), *harmonium* (organ), and microphones to sing before those assembled in the hall. Their music and voices are broadcast outside the *gurduara* over loudspeakers, and echo across the surface of the water and off of the surrounding rock walls. Before the group prayer, set *shabads* are sung by the whole of the congregation. The *granthi* then takes the microphone, welcomes the congregation, and explains the significance of their journey:

> The whole true congregation is fortunate to travel here from across the country and from foreign lands after traversing this path due to the mercy and compassion of *Satguru*, plume adorned royal Guru. After traversing this path, you have arrived at *Satguru's* meditation place Sri Hemkunt Sahib with *Satguru's* blessings. After having a dip in the pool of nectar and bowing at the feet of *Satguru Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, you are attending the sacred court. The *Satguru* has deeply blessed the congregation and shown generous compassion that all of you be given an opportunity to bathe and see *Satguru's* meditation place. Touching *Satguru's* sacred feet, leaving behind your worldly activities, and traversing difficult tracks and solitary valleys you have reached *Satguru's* meditation place Sri Hemkunt Sahib. At this sacred place the destroyer of evil, the plume adorned royal Guru, in his previous birth contemplated, meditated on God *Vahiguru* (Translation by Singh 1997_b:personal communication).

The *granthi* then relates the story of Hemkunt as it was told in Guru Gobind Singh's autobiography, *Bachitar Natak*. He sings, accompanied by all, more *shabads* as he unfurls donated *rumalas* over the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and then moves to stand before it and begin the *Ardas*.

When it is said at Hemkunt Sahib, the standard Sikh prayer is embellished with references to *darshan* of the sacred place and *ishnan* in the holy lake. Special emphasis is also given to Guru Gobind Singh. As in every *gurduara*, prayers are read aloud for

individuals and families who have requested them. Most of these prayers are made for the blessing of a son, for a good marriage partner, or for healing. The service concludes as the *granthi* seats himself again behind the book of scriptures and reads the *hukamnama*. At the close of every service, volunteers pass out *karah parshad* to all members of the congregation. When the auditorium has cleared, several others volunteer to sweep the carpets and fold blankets and *rumalas*.

Visitors to Hemkunt Sahib begin their descent early. The climate at Hemkunt is severe and facilities are limited. Aside from the *granthis* and *sevadars* (workers) who stay throughout the season,[7] no one is permitted to stay overnight at the *gurduara*. By three or four o'clock, only a few visitors remain at the lake. By five they have all started down. Most will reach Gobind Dham before the sun sets. A few, placing unaccustomed feet carefully among the stones on the path, complete their slow downward journey under starlight.

The Valley of Flowers

In 1982, the smallest national park in the Himalayas was created to protect the catchment area of the stream which flows past Gobind Dham. The stream first emerges from the glacier at the end of a valley which British mountaineer Frank S. Smythe passed through in 1931 after a successful climbing expedition (see Smythe 1932). He was awed by the variety of wildflowers growing there, and described it as "the most beautiful valley that any of us had seen. We camped in it for two days and we remembered it afterwards as the Valley of Flowers" (Smythe 1985:2). He returned in 1937 to collect 262 botanical species. His 1938 book entitled *The Valley of Flowers* brought the remote Himalayan meadow to the attention of the world.

The Valley of Flowers is a glacial corridor, eight kilometres in length and two kilometres in width. Its floor slopes from almost 3,500 metres up to almost 4,000 metres (Kaur 1985:160). Above Gobind Dham the path to the Valley branches off from the main path to Hemkunt Sahib. There, a wildlife guard in the employ of the forest department

issues entry permits for the national park. From this checkpost it is a three kilometre trek to the entrance to the Valley of Flowers. The trail passes through forests and meadows, across rivers and an avalanche slope, before the floor of the Valley opens up before it.

True to its name, the national park is carpeted with wildflowers during the monsoon season. Of the many species which coexist in this unique ecosystem, the most popular among visitors are the Himalayan blue poppy, the uncommon varieties of primula and orchid which bloom during June, and the impatiens, potentillas, and campanulas which paint the valley pink, red, and purple during July and August. A stone path meanders among the flowers and across streams. The flowers grow so tall that leaving the path is difficult.

In one day, the number of visitors entering the park seldom exceeds two dozen. Most are Indian trekkers from Calcutta, Bombay, Pune, and other Indian cities, and more come from Europe, North America, Australia, and Japan. A few Sikhs whose primary purpose for coming to the region is to visit Hemkunt Sahib stay an extra day to see the Valley. Some come to study the flora and fauna, and a few come for spiritual reasons. The majority come for recreation and nature appreciation.

Few visitors continue beyond the first one or two kilometres inside the Valley. They pause to photograph flowers, drink from a mountain spring, and scan the valley floor for a glimpse of a grave rumoured to be there among the flowers. In 1939, Joan Margaret Legge, a botanist from the Kew Botanical garden in London, was collecting floral specimens in the Valley when she fell to her death (Kaur 1985:162). A memorial was erected in her honour. Etched in English and Hindi into the white marble of the gravestone is a line from Psalm 121 which reads "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence commeth my help."

The Meaning of the Sacred Journey

The meaning of the sacred journey is conveyed to pilgrims during their passage to the sacred place. Elements in the environment they pass through provide them with a

repertoire of symbols through which to experience and express the underlying significance of the pilgrimage (Aziz 1987:256). Morinis notes how "Indigenous categories tend to merge geographical and non-geographical aspects of sacred journeying" (1992:2). From the perspective of pilgrims, the physical and spiritual qualities of the environment—geography, mythology, and history—are intertwined. Together, they symbolize the goal and the way to approach it.

In the context of Sikh pilgrimage generally, the indigenous category 'place of the Guru' incorporates both physical and spiritual elements which pilgrims encounter and experience. All along the Sikh pilgrimage route to Hemkunt Sahib, pilgrims are reminded of the Guru. *Gurduaras* and towns are named for the Guru. Stories shared recall deeds of the Guru. Songs sung are in praise of the Guru. Posters and plaques bear images of the Guru. Books and speeches recount tales of the Guru. And practices and prayers seek contact with the Guru.

Moreover, pilgrims believe that the remoteness of the region, the ruggedness of the mountains, the harshness of the climate, and the trials of the climb are conditions the Guru himself endured while doing austerities there. The majesty of the peaks and the serenity of the waters are sights the Guru himself beheld. Together, these evoke images of the Guru's meditation. In turn, these are refracted through the lens of pilgrims' own experiences until the Guru's accomplishments seem less distant.

What his accomplishments represent is reinforced as pilgrims negotiate the same physical and, ideally, spiritual landscape. As they do so, they symbolically re-enact the Guru's own journey. They walked where he walked, bathe where he bathed, meditate as he meditated, and, as I will argue in the chapters which follow, strive to accomplish what he accomplished. Pilgrims at Hemkunt Sahib encounter the Guru and, perhaps, encounter God.

III. Conclusion

The above description will give the reader a sense of the sights, sounds, and processes of the pilgrimage to Hemkunt Sahib. These details, related from the perspective of the anthropologist, remain the impressions of an outsider who, although a participant in the journey, did not share in the beliefs, meanings, and experiences of the Sikh pilgrims. A sense of this meaning will come, in chapters five and six, from an exploration of the myths and history which surround the sacred place, and from the words of pilgrims who undertake the sacred journey.

Notes

[1] For those few pilgrims who walk from the plains, the journey to Hemkunt takes forty days (Interview 53).

[2] Sikhs, by commandment of their tenth Guru, abstain from smoking tobacco (Singh and Singh 1989_c:66).

[3] Please see the glossary for definitions of these terms.

[4] Punjabi is the language spoken by the majority of Sikhs.

[5] From 6,050 in 1980 to 189,340 in 1990 according to *gurduara* records.

[6] A count of 1996 pilgrim volumes provided to me by the staff of Gurdwara Gobind Ghat lists 44,678 during June, 40,898 during July, 21.526 during August, 13,115 during September, and 764 during the first week of October.

[7] There are two *granthis* at Hemkunt Sahib, a manager, and twenty-five staff. The caretakers of the Hindu *mandir* also stay beside the lake in a separate building.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Sacred Place

> Shri Hemkunt Sahib is that sacred place where *Kalgidhar* Guru Gobind Singh Jee in his previous life spent a long span of time meditating and remembering the Immortal One—*Vahe Guru*. In this holy state of spiritual bliss he found himself as one with the Great One. So the Great Lord ordained him to take birth once again on this earth to defeat and destroy the evil.
> Bhajan Singh Giani, *Hemkunt Parbat Hai Jahan*, n.d.:2

I. Introduction

"Every Sikh has heard of Hemkunt Sahib" (Interview 05). The image of the *gurduara* with its backdrop of Himalayan peaks appears on calendars, plaques, key chains, ornaments, and the covers of cassettes for sale at *gurduaras* throughout India. Even outside of India, pictures of Hemkunt Sahib commonly hang in Sikh homes, businesses, and *gurduaras*. The shrine is featured in newspaper and magazine articles, in picture books, and in small pamphlets containing the stories of past pilgrims. It is the subject of *katha* (religious discourse and narration of stories) at fairs and Sikh youth camps. All of these evoke memories of the place, and inspire the telling of more stories.

Stories read, heard, and shared before, during, and after the pilgrimage communicate the meaning of Hemkunt Sahib to the pilgrims. In the content of stories the researcher, too, can access that meaning. I was told stories by pilgrims, by workers, by *gurduara* staff, and by people native to the valley leading to Hemkunt Sahib. These stories were many, varied, and sometimes contradictory. It is not my purpose in this chapter to sift fact from legend, but rather to portray my research site for the reader as it was portrayed for me by my research subjects.

II. Lokpal: The Place of the Gods

Mythology

Long before Sikhs began coming to Hemkunt, the lake was known to the people who lived in the nearby valleys as a place of pilgrimage. Its name was Lokpal, which means 'protector of the world' (Nabha 1990:1073). A village elder told me that the name refers to Vishnu, who is the sustainer in the Hindu trinity of creator, sustainer, and destroyer (Interview 14). The sanctity of Lokpal can be attributed to tales of the gods. Most notably, the god Lakshman[1] is said to have meditated or done penance there (Interview 06, Interview 19).

In a popular story told by local people and visitors alike, Lakshman was brought to the shore of Lokpal after being mortally wounded in a battle.[2] Lakshman's wife wept and prayed that her husband be saved. Because of her heartfelt prayer, the monkey god Hanuman was able to find a life-giving herb called *Sanjivani Buti*. It was administered to Lakshman, and when he revived, God showered flowers from heaven. These fell to the earth and took root in the Valley of Flowers (Interview 06, Interview 08, Interview 14, Sharma 1994:127, *Garhwal* 1990:18).

Another villager told me a story about Lakshman's previous incarnation as a many-headed serpent. In this form he meditated under the water at Lokpal and lord Vishnu slept on his back (Interview 25). A version of the same story was narrated by a local *sadhu* (holy man). In it, the snake was named Shesh Nag, the seat of the god Shiva, and its tail was wrapped around the base of the mountain (Interview 12, Interview 82).

Stories like these, and the ones about Hemkunt which I will relate below, have written sources in the *Puranas* (ancient volumes of Indian mythology) and the Hindu epics (the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*). As they are passed from person to person and from generation to generation, they change, taking on local references and becoming blended with elements from other stories with other sources.

History

According to local legend, Lokpal was an ancient place of pilgrimage for the Tibetan people (Interview 74). For three hundred years the local Garhwali people have followed a tradition of visiting the temple on the shore of the lake on three annual festivals held during the summer season: Rakshabandhan, Janam Ashtami, and Durga Ashtami (locally known as Nanda Ashtami)(ibid.). The sacred journey was made primarily by women, both Garhwali villagers from the valley below Lokpal and villagers of Bhotia (Indo-Tibetan) ancestry from neighbouring valleys. Its significance as a Hindu place of pilgrimage was and is little known outside of the region (Interview 39).

All who went to Lokpal recognized it as a sacred place. Out of respect for the purity of the water and the surrounding landscape, they made the steep ascent barefoot, clad only in white cotton *dhoti* (an unstitched garment). The women left their clothes and shoes behind at a halting place set in a glade of fir trees. This halting place became the site of what is today Gobind Dham or Ghangaria, named after the *ghagara* (petticoats) which the pilgrims would leave there. The women would spend the night singing songs of the goddess, and at dawn they would set out to climb the slope to the lake. When they reached Lokpal, they would make offerings of coins, coconuts, Brahma Kamal flowers, and *parshad* (a sacrament made from *ghi*, flour, and sugar). They would bathe in the cold water, and pray to Lakshman for the blessing of a son, a better future, the health of their menfolk, or a cure for sickness (Interview 38, Interview 74).

Before the first Sikhs came to the valley, there was a small cave *mandir* on the lakeshore. The four stones that comprised its roof and walls housed a statue of the Buddha alloyed from eight different metals. There was dissent among the local people when, in the early thirties, the Sikhs explained to them that they hoped to construct a *gurduara* nearby. As Sharma writes, some villagers "did not want a Sikh shrine to supersede their ancient belief of the association of this place with Lakshman" (1994:130). They feared outsiders would compromise its sanctity (Interview 45). Other villagers did not understand the concept of a *gurduara*, so told the Sikhs to build a larger Lakshman

mandir instead. The Sikhs agreed, and the elders gave them permission to do repairs on the *mandir* and also build another one for their *Guru* (Interview 74).

In 1936, repair work began on the *mandir*. The Sikhs had their contractor build a new four by four foot building to demonstrate that they respected the place's meaning for the locals (Interview 73). The same year, the first *gurduara* was completed on the shore of the lake. In 1945, the Buddha figure was lost from the *mandir*, and it was replaced by a stone image crafted in Joshimath. When the original deity was recovered years later, it was installed in another Lakshman *mandir* in the nearby village of Bhyundar. The temple at Lokpal was enlarged still further in June of 1988 with the help of the military. A local committee oversees its ongoing development (Interview 74).

III. Hemkunt: The Place of the Guru

Mythology

Apart from the legends about the gods summarized above, there are other stories about heroes for whom the small mountain lake was a place of penance and prayer. The following mythical tale was narrated to me by pilgrims and locals, Sikhs and Hindus alike.[3] As the story opens, the gods approach Brahma, the creator god, for his blessings. He assures them that Nanak, the protector of the universe, will protect them in his tenth form as a great warrior and ascetic, the destroyer of evil. The gods press Brahma to tell them more about this hero. He then relates an ancient story to them (Singh 1993:4168).

During *Sat Yug*, the 'age of truth' (the first of four ages according to Hindu mythology), fierce demons were terrorizing mortals and gods. The goddess Durga was engaged in battle with the demons Bel and Subel and their army when she fled to the mountains (Narotam 1975:105). There, she approached a great *rishi* who was meditating, seated on a lion skin. When Durga asked for his help, he told her to hide. The demons came in search of her. They demanded that the *rishi* tell them where she had gone. He refused, saying that since she, the great goddess and mother of all, had come to him for protection, it was his sacred duty to give it (Interview 78).

The demons were infuriated. They were about to attack the *rishi* when he said, "My disciples and I, we are *brahmans*, and *brahmans* are not to fight for religion. Therefore, to destroy you I will create a *khattri*" (Narotam 1975:105). Then he rose and shook the lion skin he had been sitting on. From the dust produced by this action there emerged a *shakti* (power) in the form of a strong *khattri* (warrior) youth clad in lion skins and carrying a sword. He addressed the *rishi*, saying, "Respected father and guide, what are your orders for me?" (Interview 78). The *rishi* commanded the youth to slay the demons. A battle ensued.

When the youth had destroyed the demons and their whole army, he came before the goddess. She blessed him, gave him a sword, and said that he would now be known as Dusht Daman, the 'destroyer of evil' (Singh 1993:4174). And, since he came from the skin (*khal*) of a lion, he would also be known as Khalsa. The goddess departed after telling the youth that he would be given a mission to fight like a lion (*singh*) in human form and create the Khalsa (Narotam 1975:106). Dusht Daman laid his sword before the *rishi* and asked, "Father, what are your further orders?" The *rishi* instructed him to go to Hemkunt. There he should meditate and perform intense penance until called upon by God (Interview 44, Interview 78, Interview 82, Singh 1995_f:11).

Herein lies the mountain lake's significance for the Sikhs. As the story continues, Dusht Daman realizes his oneness with God through worship and austere discipline. He is then summoned from Hemkunt by God and given a mission to be reborn in *Kal Yug*, the 'age of darkness' (the fourth and final age). He is born as the son of the ninth Sikh Guru and his wife, and later he becomes the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. This final part of the story is recounted in *Bachitar Natak*, which roughly translates as the 'wonderful drama'—an autobiography attributed to Guru Gobind Singh himself. This composition is included in the *Dasam Granth* and so is considered scriptural (McLeod 1989:90). In poetic language, the author alludes to the place from which the Guru was called by God:

Ab mai apni katha bakhano.
ਅਬ ਮੈ ਅਪਨੀ ਕਥਾ ਬਖਾਨੋ ॥

Tap sadhat jih bidh muh ano.
ਤਪ ਸਾਧਤ ਜਿਹ ਬਿਧਿ ਮੁਹਿ ਆਨੋ ॥

Hemkunt parbat hai jaha.
ਹੇਮਕੁੰਟ ਪਰਬਤ ਹੈ ਜਹਾਂ ॥

Sapatsring sobhit hai taha. [1]
ਸਪਤਸ੍ਰਿੰਗ ਸੋਭਿਤ ਹੈ ਤਹਾਂ ॥੧॥

Sapatsring tih nam kahava.
ਸਪਤਸ੍ਰਿੰਗ ਤਿਹ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਹਾਵਾ ॥

Pandaraj jah jog kamava.
ਪੰਡਰਾਜ ਜਹ ਜੋਗੁ ਕਮਾਵਾ ॥

Tah ham adhik tapassia sadhi.
ਤਹ ਹਮ ਅਧਿਕ ਤਪੱਸਿਆ ਸਾਧੀ ॥

Mahakal Kalka aradhi. [2]
ਮਹਾਂਕਾਲ ਕਾਲਕਾ ਅਰਾਧੀ ॥੨॥

Ih bidh karat tapassia bhayo.
ਇਹ ਬਿਧਿ ਕਰਤ ਤਪੱਸਿਆ ਭਯੋ ॥

Dvai te ek rup hvai gayo.
ਦ੍ਵੈ ਤੇ ਏਕ ਰੂਪ ਹ੍ਵੈ ਗਯੋ ॥

Tat mat mur Alakh aradha.
ਤਾਤ ਮਾਤ ਮੁਰ ਅਲਖ ਅਰਾਧਾ ॥

Bah bidh jog sadhana sadha. [3]
ਬਹੁ ਬਿਧਿ ਜੋਗ ਸਾਧਨਾ ਸਾਧਾ ॥੩॥

Tin jo kari Alakh ki seva.
ਤਿਨ ਜੋ ਕਰੀ ਅਲਖ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ॥

Tate bhae prasann Gurdeva.
ਤਾਤੇ ਭਏ ਪ੍ਰਸੰਨਿ ਗੁਰਦੇਵਾ ॥

Tin Prabh jab (1) ais muh diya.
ਤਿਨ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਜਬ ਆਇਸ ਮੁਹਿ ਦੀਯਾ ॥

Tab ham janam kalu mah liya. [4]
ਤਬ ਹਮ ਜਨਮ ਕਲੂ ਮਹਿ ਲੀਯਾ ॥੪॥

Chit na bhayo hamaro avan kah.
ਚਿਤ ਨ ਭਯੋ ਹਮਰੋ ਆਵਨ ਕਹਿ ॥

(2) Chubhi rahi (3) srut Prabh charnan mah.
ਚੁਭੀ ਰਹੀ ਸ੍ਰੁਤਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਚਰਨਨ ਮਹਿ ॥

Jiu tiu Prabh ham ko samajhayo.
ਜਿਉ ਤਿਉ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਹਮ ਕੋ ਸਮਝਾਯੋ ॥

Im kah kai ih lok (4) pathayo. [5]
ਇਮ ਕਹਿ ਕੈ ਇਹ ਲੋਕ ਪਠਾਯੋ ॥੫॥

(*Dasam Guru Granth Sahib Ji* 1952:54-55)

Now I narrate my story—how from meditation and austerities I came to this world. At that place where Hemkunt Mountain is adorned by seven peaks—the place named Sapatsring—King Pandu did *yoga*. There I did intense meditation and austerities and contemplated the great goddess. In this way I meditated until, from duality, two forms (God and myself) became one. My father and mother also contemplated the Formless One through several kinds of *yoga* and austere discipline. They served the Formless One and God was pleased with them. So God gave a command to me, and then I took birth in *Kal Yug*. I did not desire to come, as I was absorbed in devotion at God's feet. Somehow God made me understand His purpose, and saying thus sent me into this world.

The stories about Hemkunt which circulate among pilgrims are woven together, such that the Guru's tale from *Bachitar Natak* completes or complements other stories whose textual sources are less certain. Most of the references in the stories are drawn from the *Puranas*,[4] from local legends,[5] and from two nineteenth century works which will be discussed below.[6] One interviewee explained how the myths spread about Hemkunt

are like Chinese whispers. Over time, as they are passed orally from person to person, they become changed and exaggerated (Interview 17). This may account for the different forms they take.

The *rishi* in the above story is known variously as Samundh Rishi, Rishi Medhasa, Rishi Bishala, or simply Asan Rishi, which refers to his posture of meditation on the lion skin (Interview 44, Interview 82, Sharma 1994:127, Singh 1989_a:99, Singh 1995_f:11, Agarwala 1996:119). In one version, the *rishi* was a disciple of the goddess. When the goddess granted him a boon, he himself became Dusht Daman (Singh 1993:4174). In another version, the *rishi* did not shake the lion skin, but instead offered a prayer for God's intercession. A bright light appeared which manifested itself into the form of the *shakti* (Interview 44, Singh 1995_f:11).

That the *shakti* then addressed the *rishi* as "father" is significant. I was told that both the *shakti* and the *rishi* were reborn in *Kal Yug*, the former as Guru Gobind Singh, and the latter as his earthly father (Interview 82). Further, his earthly mother is said to be the reincarnation of the goddess who sought the *rishi's* help (ibid.). In still another version, it was not a goddess but a king who fled to the mountains. The *rishi* turned the king into a lion skin which he then sat on so the demons could not find him. Later it was the king who was reincarnated as Guru Gobind Singh's mother (Interview 44).

In still another version of the tale, it was God himself who came into the body of the *rishi* who was later reincarnated as Guru Gobind Singh's father (Narotam 1975:104). He had been meditating for the protection of other *rishis* who were also doing austerities at Hemkunt. Later, all of them became great heroes when they were born in human bodies. One of them was King Pandu, the father of the five Pandava brothers whose story is told in the *Mahabharata*. In chapter 119 of the first volume of the great epic, King Pandu crossed over a mountain known as Hem Kut (pronounced 'koot') during his time of penance in the Hundred-Peak Mountains. There he did penance at a place named for seven peaks.

This is the episode mentioned in *Bachitar Natak*. Although the local people have no tradition that the place described in *Bachitar Natak* and the *Mahabharata* is the same as Lokpal, a *mandir* in the nearby village of Pandukeshwar commemorates King Pandu's passage through the region (Singh 1993:12). Lokpal is also not traditionally associated with the names Sapatsring or Hemkunt (Interview 79). Nonetheless, it was these clues which helped the first Sikhs to locate and identify Lokpal as Hemkunt Parbat Sapatsring. Later verses from *Bachitar Natak* complete the story:

Tap sadhat Har moh bulayo.
ਤਪ ਸਾਧਤ ਹਰਿ ਮੋਹਿ ਬੁਲਾਯੋ ॥
Im kahkai ih lok pathayo. [28]
ਇਮ ਕਹਿਕੈ ਇਹ ਲੋਕ ਪਠਾਯੋ ॥੨੮॥
Akal Purakh bach. Chaupai.
ਅਕਾਲ ਪੁਰਖ ਬਾਚ ॥ ਚੌਪਈ ॥
Mai apna sut toh nivaja.
ਮੈਂ ਅਪਨਾ ਸੁਤ ਤੋਹਿ ਨਿਵਾਜਾ ॥
Panth prachur karbe kah saja.
ਪੰਥ ਪ੍ਰਚੁਰ ਕਰਬੇ ਕਹ ਸਾਜਾ ॥
Jah taha tai dharam chalai.
ਜਾਹਿ ਤਹਾਂ ਤੈ ਧਰਮੁ ਚਲਾਇ ॥
Kabudh karan te lok hatai. [29]
ਕਬੁਧਿ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ ਲੋਕ ਹਟਾਇ ॥੨੯॥
Kab bach. Dohra.
ਕਬਿ ਬਾਚ ॥ ਦੋਹਰਾ ॥
Thad bhayo mai jor kar bachan kaha sir nayai.
ਠਾਢ ਭਯੋ ਮੈਂ ਜੋਰਿ ਕਰਿ ਬਚਨ ਕਹਾ ਸਿਰ ਨਯਾਇ ॥
Panth chalai tab jagat mai jab tum karah sahai. [30]
ਪੰਥ ਚਲੈ ਤਬ ਜਗਤ ਮੈ ਜਬ ਤੁਮ ਕਰਹੁ ਸਹਾਇ ॥੩੦॥
Chaupai.
ਚੌਪਈ ॥
Ih karan Prabh moh pathayo.
ਇਹ ਕਾਰਨਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਮੋਹਿ ਪਠਾਯੋ ॥
Tab mai jatat janam dhar ayo.
ਤਬ ਮੈਂ ਜਗਤ ਜਨਮੁ ਧਰਿ ਆਯੋ ॥

(*Dasam Guru Granth Sahib Ji* 1952:56-57)

> From meditation and austerities God called me, and saying thus sent me into this world. *God speaks:* "I acknowledge and bless you as my son. I have created you to teach the true path. Wherever in the world you go, spread righteousness, and remove ignorance from the world." *The poet speaks:* "I stood, folded my hands, and spoke this promise with head bowed: 'With You as the supporter Your path will be established in the world.'" For this work God sent me, and then I was born into the world.

The name Dusht Daman, 'destroyer of evil,' is one of many names used to describe Guru Gobind Singh. Two interviewees speculated that Dusht Daman is, perhaps, synonymous with the name Lokpal, 'protector of the world' (Interview 19, Interview 71). Other interviewees drew my attention to the fact that that Guru Gobind Singh did not

write about himself as Dusht Daman. When pressed, some told me that they thought the stories about Dusht Daman were myths but that, like all myths, they contained a message.

One pilgrim explained it this way: the mission for which Dusht Daman was created—to destroy evil—was the same mission that he carried into his next incarnation as Guru Gobind Singh. Because he was the embodiment of *shakti* he was able to be saint, soldier, philosopher, poet, and householder all at the same time. He made great sacrifices and yet continued to fight for eternal truth, humanism, and justice. The stories help those who go to Hemkunt Sahib to remember this message (Interview 67). Another interviewee said,

> My understanding is that this passage is about the importance of *Nam*/meditation. A person of Guru Sahib's stature had to work hard to come to this world for his mission and the foundation of that mission was laid down with intense *simran*. My view is that this passage emphasizes the importance of God's name and Guru Sahib's special relationship with God. The special mission for which he came to this world is also highlighted (Interview 60).

Still others affirmed that Hemkunt Sahib was erected to honour the Guru's example so that we all might learn from it and find inspiration to follow it (Interview 57, Interview 78).

Stories of Dusht Daman aside, the reminder of Guru Gobind Singh's mission is enough to draw pilgrims to Hemkunt Sahib. After visiting Hemkunt Sahib and learning from his experience of closeness to the Guru there, one first time pilgrim I interviewed adopted Guru Gobind Singh's mission as his own personal mission (Interview 68). Again and again, pilgrims impressed on me the greatness of the tenth Guru and of the mission he fulfilled in the world (Interview 01, Interview 11, Interview 67):

> It's important to visit this place which gave us this great man who kept Sikhs from ritualism. He came to this world of evil to take the burden of the people, lead them to a better path. It is important to remember him and his accomplishments (Interview 05).

More historical *gurduaras* have been built to commemorate the events in Guru Gobind Singh's life than those in the life of any other Sikh Guru (see Singh 1975, Johar 1976, Sabi 1978, Randhir 1990, and Singh 1995$_a$). Hemkunt Sahib, as one of those historical *gurduaras*, reminds Sikhs who visit it of the life of the tenth Guru and the history Sikh community.

In contrast to the stories of events from the Gurus' lifetimes which other historical *gurduaras* commemorate, the story of Hemkunt Sahib "is rather ethereal, quite unlike others which are historically significant. Probably that's one of its attractions" (Interview 61). A past pilgrim told me that he is skeptical about places associated with the mythical lives of Hindu gods, but "Religion is blind faith. If I hear stories about Krishna like those about Guru Gobind Singh's five thousand year meditation at Hemkunt, I disbelieve. But because of my blind faith in my Guru, I believe the story about Hemkunt" (Interview 44). These stories are significant to the people who tell them even if they are not in strict accordance with Sikh doctrine (Interview 35). They have become incorporated into the tradition and give colour and motive to pilgrims' journeys.

History

Precise historical details about the people and events involved in the discovery of Hemkunt are scarce. Particularly troublesome is the period between the late nineteenth century and completion of the first *gurduara* in 1936. The local people admit that only one or two elders remain in their villages who remember what happened when the first Sikhs came to Lokpal. Those Sikhs have themselves passed on, leaving a legacy of stories now told by the trustees and staff of the present-day *gurduaras*. Others, both Sikhs and Hindus, have documented the history of Hemkunt/Lokpal in books and articles.[7]

Whether written or told, stories from different sources differed markedly. It is uncertain that anyone had a vested interest in telling me a particular version. What follows is an account of the history of Hemkunt which I have pieced together from the many,

sometimes contradictory, accounts I collected in the field. In preparing it I have relied heavily on the tellings of those closest to the people and events involved.

Discovery

The *Dasam Granth* was compiled in 1734, twenty-six years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh (Loehlin 1974:41). A tumultuous century passed before the attention of the Sikh community was drawn to the passage in *Bachitar Natak* that described Hemkunt Parbat Sapatsring. Kavi Santokh Singh, a mid-nineteenth century historiographer, was the first Sikh to pen his speculations about the Guru's *tap asthan* (place of meditation). In his fourteen volume *Sri Gur Partap Suraj [Parkash] Granth* first published in 1843, he elaborated on the story of Dusht Daman's creation and intense *tapassia* at Hemkunt.[8] Several decades more passed before the search for the actual location of the 'lake of ice' began.

In the late nineteenth century, the Maharaja of Patiala[9] gave a grant to Pandit Tara Har Narotam, a Nirmala scholar[10] and Sikh historian (Mann 1997$_a$:personal communication). This enabled him to make a collection of Guru *tiraths*—places consecrated by the visits of the Sikh Gurus. In a work entitled *Sri Gur Tirath Sangrah*, published in 1884, he compiled descriptions of 508 of these sacred places (Oberoi 1994:126). Hemkunt was among them.[11]

In his account of Hemkunt, Narotam first related the story about Dusht Daman from *Suraj Parkash*, and then concluded that, as told there, it did not conform with what the Guru himself wrote in his autobiography. A reading of the relevant passage from *Bachitar Natak* reveals the only clues given about the Guru's *tap asthan*. The place, named Sapatsring (seven peaks), was on or near Hemkunt Parbat (lake of ice mountain), and was the same place at which King Pandu had practiced *yoga*. Narotam corroborated these clues with the tale of King Pandu told in the *Mahabharata*. References to Hemkunt Parbat and Sapatsring in other ancient texts allowed him to trace the geographical location of the lake. His search took him to Badrinath and nearby Pandukeshwar, a village which

neighbours present-day Gobind Ghat. There, he collected local traditions relating to the same clues (Interview 65, Interview 66).

The story of his search was told to me by the oldest man in the village nearest to Hemkunt.[12] He had heard the story from his elders, who at the time knew nothing about the Sikhs. However, they knew that a man with a beard had come to Lokpal some fifty years before 1936. That man was named Tara Singh Narotam. Beyond Badrinath, in a village named Mana near the Tibetan border, Narotam met with a group of Bhotia women. They were departing for a pilgrimage on the festival of Janam Ashtami, the birthday of Lord Krishna. He asked the women where they were going, and they said "We are going to Lokpal. There we will take *ishnan*." They described the lake as more sacred than even Badrinath, and Narotam asked if he could accompany them to have its *darshan* (sight) (Interview 72).

Upon reaching the shore of the lake, he recalled the verses from *Bachitar Natak* as he gazed up at the seven peaks. He determined that the place where he was standing fit the description in the Guru's writings. Then, according the village elders, he wrote a powerful poem about the place (ibid.). In *Sri Gur Tirath Sangrah*, he provided a description of the location of Hemkunt/Sapatsring/Lokpal together with a hand-drawn map of the surrounding area. It seems, however, that Narotam's discovery was not heeded by the Sikh community until the twentieth century, when Sikhs began visiting Hemkunt as a place of pilgrimage of their own.

In 1925 the renowned Punjabi historian, reformer, and poet Bhai Vir Singh published *Sri Kalgidhar Chamatkar*. The title refers to the 'miracles of the plume-adorned one,' Guru Gobind Singh. The opening chapters of this "quasi-historical" biography (Singh 1984_a:71) describe the Guru's passage from Hemkunt to *Sach Khand* (the realm of Truth) where he was given his mission by God, and then from *Sach Khand* to *Mat Lok* (the terrestrial world).[13]

Although Bhai Vir Singh had never visited the area (Interview 80), he gave beautiful descriptions of the seven peaks of Sapatsring, of the Hemkunt lake, and of the

stream which flows down from it to meet the Alaknanda river near the village of Pandukeshwar. He then described a cave in which a tall, slim ascetic sat in deep meditation. His meditation was so intense that he merged with God, and then God commanded that he go into the world to establish a brotherhood of ideal humans. Then Bhai Vir Singh related the dialogues about the Guru's mission which took place between the Guru and the ascetics, *yogis*, penitents, and *rishis* from various religious traditions who were also doing austerities at Hemkunt (Singh 1993:1ff).

Bhai Vir Singh's account was evidently inspired by the passage from *Bachitar Natak*, by Kavi Santokh Singh's description in *Suraj Parkash*,[14] and by Pandit Tara Har Narotam's discovery in *Sri Gur Tirath Sangrah*. Notes appended to the first chapter of post 1930's editions of *Sri Kalgidhar Chamatkar* give brief descriptions of four possible locations for Hemkunt. They indicate that Bhai Vir Singh did considerable research before concluding that Narotam's findings were correct. They also include mention of the *tap shila* (meditation stone) discovered at the site and the small *gurduara* constructed there in 1936. These details cannot have been included in the original 1925 manuscript, and must have been added after 1934. From that year onward, Bhai Vir Singh became instrumental in developing Hemkunt after it had been, in a sense, *re*-discovered by another Sikh in search of the Guru's *tap asthan*.

When Sant Sohan Singh read *Sri Kalgidhar Chamatkar* in 1932, he found the description of Hemkunt so compelling that he resolved to find the place at which the Guru had meditated (Interview 55). Sohan Singh was a retired *granthi* from the Indian army who was working in a *gurduara* in Tehri Garhwal—the same region in which Hemkunt is located. He set out in search of the lake in 1933. Like Narotam before him, he worked from clues in *Bachitar Natak* and the *Mahabharata*, and perhaps from Narotam's own *Sri Gur Tirath Sangrah*. Sohan Singh was not successful that year, but he was so inspired by the idea that the *tap asthan* might exist that he committed himself to the finding it, and returned to try again in 1934.

That year he went to Joshimath and Pandukeshwar where he made inquiries of the local people about holy places in the vicinity. It was they who said that the lake known as Lokpal, accessible from the valley on the other side of the Alaknanda river, might fit the description of Hemkunt Parbat Sapatsring (Interview 71, Sharma 1994:129). He crossed the river with the assistance of the villagers and started towards the *sarovar* they had spoken of. On the final day of his journey, he climbed the steep slope towards Lokpal alone. When he saw a beautiful lake, he started to count the peaks which surrounded it, wondering if this could be the place described in *Bachitar Natak*.

As he was counting, he heard a voice behind him say, "*O Khalsa, kidhar aye ho* (from where did you come)? *Kya dhundh te ho* (for what do you search)?" Sohan Singh turned and saw a tall *rishi* (hermit) clad all in white. He had a long beard, heavy eyelids, and a face so radiant that Sohan Singh was unable to look at him eye to eye. So he bowed his head before the *rishi* and said, "*Baba Ji, Mai Guru Gobind Singh ka tap asthan dhundh ne aya hu* (I came to search for the meditation place of Guru Gobind Singh)" (Interview 78).

The *rishi* gestured to a flat stone beside the water and said that *this* was the place at which the Guru had sat for so long in deep meditation. "Go and bow your head." Sohan Singh hastened to go, and his eyes were filled with tears of joy that after two years of exploration he had finally found the place he had been seeking (ibid.). According to one source, "The ecstasy at the fulfillment of a cherished mission was too great and he was somewhat dazed" (Sharma 1994:129). While he was in this state, it occurred to him that he should ask the *rishi* more questions. But when he opened his eyes and turned, the old holy man had disappeared.

This is the story as told by Havaldar Modan Singh, who visited Hemkunt with Sohan Singh the following year. In Gobind Ghat, Modan Singh narrated it to one of the original members of the Gurdwara Sri Hem Kunt Sahib Management Trust on the 17th of September, 1959 (Interview 78). A guidebook to Hemkunt Sahib published by the

Management Trust in 1967 mentioned another story which Sohan Singh himself used to tell.

Sant Sohan Singh described meeting an aged *yogi* who stayed in the region and who was covered with white hair and had long eyelashes which shielded his eyes. In 1936, that *yogi* appeared suddenly before Sohan Singh, raised his hand in blessing, and said "*Shabash! Tum acha kar rahe ho. Yahi hai, yahi hai Guru ka asthan, thik yahi hai* (Well done! You are doing well. Here, here is the Guru's place, certainly here)" (*Sri Hem Kunt Sahib: History and Guide* 1967:20). It is plausible that when Sohan Singh first visited the lake in 1934 he felt he had found the place he had been seeking, and then in 1936 he met the old holy man who confirmed his discovery.

Another version was told to me by another Hemkunt trustee who has been going to Hemkunt Sahib since 1955. In his account, Modan Singh and Sohan Singh were searching for the lake together, and it was Modan Singh who made the first ascent. When he reached the top of the slope, the weather was very cloudy. Slowly it cleared and he saw before him a clear, blue lake surrounded by a mountain with seven peaks. He asked himself then if he had at last found the place he had been seeking. As he stood beside the water he had a vision of Guru Gobind Singh who said to him, "This is the place you are looking for. Come tomorrow and you will discover the exact spot on which I meditated." The next day, Modan Singh came to the lake again, this time accompanied by Sohan Singh, and found that on a large flat stone beside the water there was a page from an old manuscript handwritten on birch bark. The page, after Sohan Singh had translated it, indicated that this was the exact place at which meditation had been done. Modan Singh erected a *nishan sahib* on that spot. The discovery of the place, and miraculous events that happened to him thereafter, convinced him to spend the remainder of his life in the service of the Guru and the shrine. The mysterious page has been untraceable since his death (Interview 45).

Yet another version was told by a local man now in his eighties who, in the years that followed the discovery of Hemkunt, was employed by the Sikhs as a guide, guard,

contractor, and caretaker. He reports that it was Modan Singh who first came to the valley in March of 1936. Modan Singh was forced to turn back because of snow, and in July of the same year, Sohan Singh came in his stead. In Bhyundar, Sohan Singh met with the village chief, who was the father of the storyteller, and some other elders. The men climbed the slope to Lokpal, making their way through the jungle. When they reached the lake, Sohan Singh took *ishnan* and then recited from the Sikh scriptures and prayed. As he was wondering whether this place in Uttarkhand was the *tap asthan*, his mind became clouded with doubts. In his heart, he was not certain that he had found the tenth Guru's place. His doubts cleared when he received a revelation from above (Interview 74). This last story is corroborated by the *granthi* at Hemkunt Sahib, who has, in his official capacity, told pilgrims about the discovery of Hemkunt since 1984 (Interview 71).

The existence of these varying versions may have no significance. As they come from equally credible sources, I had no basis on which to choose one above the others. When I expressed my frustration to a *sevadar* who had been doing voluntary service at Hemkunt Sahib throughout twenty-six seasons, he turned to me and said, passionately, that "History is meaningless. The knowledge of this place and its meaning comes from God. It's a feeling inside. History is only *jhutha* [false, spurious]. Don't write it. The knowledge is inside, that Guru Gobind Singh did and does his work here." For most pilgrims, this knowledge is enough and the accuracy of the myths is unimportant. The mythical origins of Hemkunt, however, serve to set it apart from historical *gurduaras* on the plains. The details of its further development, after this initial discovery, are less mythologized and, fortunately for the researcher, less contentious.

In his excitement to spread news that the Guru's *tap asthan* had been located, Sant Sohan Singh went first to Mussoorie, a hill station in Uttarkhand. He approached the president of the *gurduara* there and explained what he had found in the hope that a memorial could be set up beside the lake. The *gurduara* president, who later narrated the incident to a trustee, gave no attention to what he said (Interview 78). So Sohan Singh went to Amritsar and announced his discovery before members of the Shiromani

Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.), an administrative body which manages historical Sikh shrines. His story met with skepticism or ambivalence, and he was deeply disappointed.

After some thought, Sant Sohan Singh decided to approach the man whose book had first inspired his search. In the winter of 1934, he met with Bhai Vir Singh in Amritsar. At first the scholar was not convinced. He questioned Sohan Singh thoroughly about the place he had discovered. For two days, Sohan Singh stayed with him in his home while further research was done (Interview 78). When at last Bhai Vir Singh felt satisfied that the place fit Guru Gobind Singh's description in *Bachitar Natak*, he committed himself to the cause of developing it. He gave Sohan Singh 2,100 rupees with which to buy supplies to start construction of a small *gurduara* on the shore of the lake, then he went on to publicize the discovery of Hemkunt and to collect and manage further funds for its development (Interview 55).

Development

Early in 1935, Sant Sohan Singh was purchasing building materials in Mussoorie when Modan Singh, a *havaldar* (sergeant) from the Survey Department of the Indian army, approached him and asked what he was preparing to build. Sohan Singh explained, and Modan Singh asked if he might accompany him to the site. They went together to Hemkunt that same year (Interview 55). In Pandukeshwar they hired a contractor to oversee the construction, then the two Sikhs went to the lake accompanied by local men. Among them were the contractor, the village chief, and the village chief's son (Interview 74).

Work was begun on a ten by ten foot stone *gurduara* with a three foot verandah facing the lake. In November of the following year, the structure was completed (Interview 72) over the same spot on the shore of the lake that had been indicated as the Guru's place of meditation (Interview 73). A copy of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh holy book, which had been presented by Bhai Vir Singh was formally installed inside

during the first week of September, 1937 (Interview 78) making Hemkunt Sahib the highest *gurduara* in the world.

Soon after, Sohan Singh contracted tuberculosis and Bhai Vir Singh arranged for his treatment in Amritsar. In February of 1939, Sohan Singh passed away, but not before entrusting Modan Singh with his mission to continue the development of Hemkunt Sahib. The *havaldar* had already retired from the military and dedicated the rest of his life to the service of the shrine. From 1938 onwards, he came with a small group every year to have *darshan* of the Guru's *tap asthan* (Interview 74). When he came down to the plains each winter, he described the place and its significance to people wherever he went (Interview 78).

The first structure built at Gobind Dham was a small tin shed. Prior to its construction, Modan Singh had found shelter from rain, cold, and wild animals in the hollowed out trunk of a tree (Interview 01). The tree still stands in the courtyard of Gurdwara Gobind Dham, and pilgrims gather around the plaque mounted before it to read its story. A series of appeals for construction funds was made by Bhai Vir Singh in the pages of the *Khalsa Samachar* and other Punjabi publications. Monies were raised by Sikh *sangats* from India and abroad (Interview 80). Over time, *dharamsalas* and *gurduaras* were constructed along the path in Gobind Dham and Gobind Ghat, and along the road in Joshimath, Srinagar, Rishikesh, and Hardwar. During these formative years of development, all construction materials were carried along the route without the benefit of a motorable road to Gobind Ghat. At that time, the bus terminus was at Chamoli, some seventy kilometres away (Interview 78).

In 1951, the Chief Khalsa Diwan,[15] Amritsar was given responsibility for the upkeep and further development of the route. Arrangements to have a path constructed were made with the locals (Interview 74). Then, with the inspiration of Bhai Vir Singh, the first organized *jatha* was formed in 1952. The small group of pilgrims were led up the beginnings of a path which was not completed until two years later. The going was difficult, but not as difficult as it had been in previous years when local men had held the

Sikh pilgrims, unaccustomed to mountain terrain, by the hand and helped them up the slope to the lake (ibid.).

The first five organized *jathas* originated in Amritsar, Punjab. The sixth started out from Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh in 1957. Since Hemkunt Sahib was located in the same state, it was decided that the Chief Khalsa Diwan branch there would be entrusted with the management of the shrine. In March of 1960, shortly before his death in December, Modan Singh established a seven member trust to take over the management responsibilities. Today the trust oversees the operation of seven *gurduaras* along the route from Hardwar to Hemkunt (Interview 78).

Inspiration for building a larger *gurduara* at Hemkunt Sahib came from a woman who was given the mission to lay its foundation stone in a vision of Guru Gobind Singh. When Mata Ram Kaur, a housewife from Pathankot in Punjab, presented herself in Gobind Ghat in 1960 and revealed her purpose, the management thought her a hoax. She was able to convince them of the sincerity of her mission by describing details of Hemkunt that, never having been there before, she could not have known (Kaur 1993:27-40). That year a decision was taken at Gobind Ghat to draw up plans for a new *gurduara* (Interview 57).

At a time when their yearly pilgrim group was only 175 strong, Modan Singh told the other trustees that one day people would come to Hemkunt Sahib in their thousands from all over the world. He also foretold that a *gurduara* would be built there in the shape of an upside down lotus blossom. When asked how he knew, he said that Guru Gobind Singh himself revealed these things, in dreams and visions, in times of prayer (Interview 70). The architect commissioned to draw up plans for the new *gurduara* was told what Modan Singh had envisioned, and he designed it with the image of a lotus in mind.

Alongside early sketches of the new structure in *Sri Hem Kunt Sahib: History and Guide* a caption reads,

> Look at the design and you will feel that the Creator of Universe has gently placed a Brahm Lotus at the exact spot where Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji had realized Oneness with Him. From heavens He holds the stem of the Brahm Lotus in His Hand, that is why, petals touch the ground while stem is skywards (1967:n.p.).

The architect consulted with the Trust about building what was to be the largest structure in the world at that altitude. Since no specifications or guidance were available, several designs were considered and experiments were made.

The plans were drafted in 1964, but work could not begin until 1968 after the motor road was extended to Gobind Ghat and beyond, along the Alaknanda river valley towards Badrinath (Kaur 1985:132, Interview 78). The path to the construction site was narrow, and transporting building materials was difficult. Progress was slow. The roof of the *gurduara* was designed to withstand the weight of heavy winter snowfall. At its base, five half-ton foundation plates were laid over the course of the three years required to bring them up. On these, pillars were erected, and the final hexagonal perimeter of the *gurduara* began to take shape. At its base it measured 110 by 110 feet, and doors on each of the five sides symbolically welcomed pilgrims from every faith and direction.

The lower storey was completed first, and in a room in its centre the *Guru Granth Sahib* was installed beneath a brass canopy. At the end of the 1993 season the upper storey was completed and the *Guru Granth Sahib* was installed at the start of the 1994 season. Work still continues at the site to improve paths and facilities (Interview 55). Funds, supplies, and labour for operations, maintenance, and building are donated by *jathas* and individual pilgrims, and managed by the Trust.

Growth

The desire on the part of a few Sikhs to search for the actual site of Guru Gobind Singh's legendary *tap asthan* was the impetus for Hemkunt's discovery. It was developed as a place of pilgrimage to commemorate the mission given to the Guru by God. Its growth in popularity can be attributed to several additional factors. The first of them is

sacred geography. The location of the Hemkunt Sahib as one sacred place among many in a mountain landscape of mythological importance contributed to its significance, fitting it into a pattern of mountain pilgrimage common to many traditions (Khalsa 1996:23). Patronage, too, played a role, both in Hemkunt's initial discovery and in the later support and publicity the shrine received through the influential figure of Bhai Vir Singh. The increasing affluence of Punjabi Sikhs ensured that more and more pilgrims would be financially able to visit it.

That Hemkunt Sahib's co-developers both hailed from the Uttarkhand was another contributing factor. Sohan Singh and Modhan Singh may have felt need of their own sacred space beyond Punjab and may have had hopes of bringing the Uttarkhand region onto the sacred map for the Sikhs (Interview 65). The popularity of these outlying sites grew during the 1980s, after the Indian army invasion of the Golden Temple compound, when access to Punjabi shrines became difficult and dangerous.

Since then, Sikhism has been in a state of active religious revival (Bhardwaj 1997:17), and there has been a heightened interest in Sikh history, identity, and sacred places generally (Interview 63). Hemkunt Sahib is only one of many Sikh shrines which has experienced a sharp rise in visitor numbers since the 1980s. Even in the face of doctrinal sanctions against pilgrimage, this intensification demonstrates that what historical shrines represent is an affirmation of community solidarity and ties to history and identity.

Note should also be made of the way in which the origin and growth of the pilgrimage to Hemkunt Sahib followed a pattern common to many pilgrimages. Not imposed from above, or even necessarily sanctioned by religious authorities, pilgrimages often begin spontaneously as people travel to and gather at a site (Clift and Clift 1996:9). Such pilgrimages are expressions of popular religion, built from the grass-roots level up. As a result, they reflect the orientation of individual pilgrims (see Aziz 1987) which may or may not be the orientation of the sacred tradition.

Turner (1973:209) observes that pilgrimage brings the "Little Tradition" into the "Great Tradition" and as such is often regarded by religious authorities with ambivalence.

As expressions of popular religion, pilgrimages are in one sense pious, but in another sense superstitious. If a new pilgrimage centre is to survive, the popular devotions which create and sustain it must not be direct challenges to religious orthodoxy. Instead, they must impart new vitality to extant traditions (ibid.:229).

Khalsa's study of Hemkunt Sahib confirms that the emergence and growth of the pilgrimage follows this pattern (1996:30). What Hemkunt Sahib represents for the Sikh community is communicated by its popularity, and by the richness of the mythology surrounding it. Perhaps because it is a shrine with a very recent genesis, and perhaps because of the controversies which surround it,[16] official theological justification and sanction for the pilgrimage has not yet been given, and may never be given. As more and more people have travelled to Hemkunt Sahib, however, word about it has spread until it has become a new feature of the sacred geography of Sikhism (ibid.). "The signs are evident that people will continue to make this place a flourishing pilgrimage centre based on the conviction that Guru Gobind Singh's previous life was spent here in harmony and communion with God" (ibid.:32).

The numbers of pilgrims to Hemkunt Sahib have been steadily multiplying from the time of its discovery in the 1930's until today. In 1977, the first year for which data is available, there were 516 visitors. By 1980 there were 6,050. And by 1990 there were 189,340.[17] The incredible growth of the sacred journey in a short time, and the way the newly-discovered sacred place achieved legitimacy in the minds of the pilgrims, are fascinating subjects of study in themselves. In the future, the pilgrimage to Hemkunt Sahib may be looked at in terms of 'the invention of tradition' following Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).

Guru

Khalsa asserts that "the Sikh mountain pilgrimage to Hemkunt Sahib creates a distinct pilgrimage pattern that differs from visits to other historical sacred sites on the plains of Punjab" (1996:23). Further,

> What distinguishes Hemkunt Sahib from other well-known Sikh *gurduaras* in India and Pakistan is its association with a former life of a Guru. There is no actual historic connection between Guru Gobind Singh as the tenth Guru of the Sikhs and the mountain lake. Dating Guru Gobind Singh's previous lifetimes is both impossible and unimportant to the pilgrim. This demonstrates that historical verification has little to do with the pilgrimage process. What matters is the pull of tradition and the sacred ideal it represents (ibid.:30).

The proposition made here is that Hemkunt Sahib is an embodiment of the sacred ideal which, in the context of Sikhism, is the highest state of perfection that a Sikh of the Guru can attain. That ideal is communicated in the mythology of the Guru's previous life at Hemkunt Sahib. In it, the Guru, through his devotion, became one with God. From Hemkunt Sahib, he was summoned to come into the world and lead the people by his example. Sikhs go to the place of the Guru's attainment to be inspired to walk the same difficult path that the Guru walked, both in body and in spirit, and to, through the Guru's grace, attain a connection with God in the same place the Guru attained his. In the next chapter, further evidence for these assertions will be found in pilgrims' own expressions of the meaning and experience of the pilgrimage.

Just as Sikhs "go to Hemkunt Sahib to commune with Guru Gobind Singh as their sacred exemplar," (Khalsa 1996:29) they also go "to other sites for the inspiration and remembrance of their Gurus" (ibid.). "The *Gurduaras* in the Punjab are visited as the places of pilgrimage by large numbers of Sikhs" (Sahni n.d.:61). Like Hemkunt Sahib, "many of them are intimately associated with the life work of the Gurus and other heroes and martyrs" (ibid.). So, while it is true that in its form and setting—the mythological, historical, and geographical features which surround it—the pilgrimage to Hemkunt Sahib is unique, it shares one vital thing in common with all Sikh sacred places: it is the place of the Guru. The sacred ideal that it represents is arguably the goal of all Sikh sacred journeys. "The presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib* embodies the sacrality of the site and confirms its association with the eternal Guru" (Khalsa 1996:30).

IV. Conclusion

The newly emergent popular attraction of Hemkunt Sahib is an affirmation of the life and deeds of Guru Gobind Singh which represent the ideal attainment of every Sikh. The sacred journey to Hemkunt Sahib, rich in geographical, mythological, and historical significance, is also rich in personal meaning. In the next chapter, I will allow the voices of the pilgrims themselves to express that meaning, together with the details of their passage to the sacred place.

Notes

[1] Lakshman is the younger brother of the god Ram. Ram is the protagonist in the epic *Ramayana*.

[2] Lakshman fought against the son of Ravan. Ravan is the antagonist in the *Ramayana*.

[3] The tale is first told by Kavi Santokh Singh in *Suraj Parkash* (1843) and later retold by Pandit Tara Har Narotam in *Sri Gur Tirath Sangrah* (1884). Narotam wrote, even at that time, that the story was told in different ways by different people.

[4] A *sadhu* I interviewed claimed to have read the story of Dusht Daman's battle in the *Brahma Purana* (Interview 82). Some of the characters and events also resemble those in the *Markandeya Purana*, which many Sikhs are familiar with because it appears, translated and interpreted, in the *Dasam Granth*. References to Lokpal and *Sapatsring* appear in the *Skanda Purana* (Awasthi 1983).

[5] One local reference which has been incorporated into the myth places the *rishi's* meditation at the nearby lake of Kag Bhushandi. The locals consider it to be the most sacred of sacred places (Interview 25, Interview 79, Interview 44), and Guru Nanak is said to have visited it during his travels (Singh 1995$_e$:9).

[6] See note 3

[7] Only some of the books about Hemkunt Sahib are available in English. I had other important works translated, and the contents of the remainder were largely inaccessible to me. *Sri Gur Partap Suraj Granth* was translated by Gurdit Singh, *Sri Gur Tirath Sangrah* by Shamsher Singh Sandhu, *Sri Kalgidhar Chamatkar* by Sangat Singh Siali and Gurdit Singh, and the transcript of a cassette recording of the Hemkunt Sahib *Ardas* by Kulbir Singh.

[8] See pages 4159 to 4183 of volume ten of the edition of *Sri Gur Partap Suraj [Parkash] Granth* edited by Bhai Vir Singh. To this day, *Suraj Parkash* is read aloud in *gurduaras* when *katha* (religious discourse) is done about episodes from the lives of the Sikh Gurus. The only Guru whose previous life is the subject of this narration is Guru Gobind Singh.

[9] Patiala was a princely state in the Punjab.

[10] Scholars in the Nirmala tradition gave Vedantic interpretations to Sikh theology and history (McLeod 1984:15).

[11] See pages 102 to 117 of the 1974 edition of *Sri Gur Tirath Sangreh*.

[12] This same story is told of Sant Sohan Singh and Havaldar Modan Singh. There was some uncertainty in the minds of most who told it about who the first Sikh to visit Hemkunt actually was, and in which year the discovery took place.

[13] See pages 1 to 32 of volume one of the 1993 edition of *Sri Kalgidhar Chamatkar*.

[14] Bhai Vir Singh was working on a new edition of Santokh Singh's monumental *Suraj Parkash* at the time. He published it in fourteen edited volumes between 1926 and 1934 (Singh 1984_b:21).

[15] Singh Sabhas were "a group of closely related Sikh organizations dedicated to religious, social, and educational reform" (McLeod 1996_a:55). The Chief Khalsa Diwan was an educational body founded in Amritsar in 1893 to represent and coordinate the Singh Sabhas. It served to revitalize the reform movement then underway in Punjab (Grewal 1995:145, Fox 1990:171).

[16] While studying the fieldnotes which recorded my interviews at Hemkunt Sahib, I noticed a curious absence. When they were on pilgrimage, Sikhs seldom raised the subject of controversy. Yet Sikhs often raised the subject in interviews conducted when they were not on pilgrimage, even if they had been to Hemkunt Sahib in the past or planned to go in the future. Several areas of controversy centre around whether or not Hemkunt Sahib is a legitimate historical *gurduara*. The authenticity of *Bachitar Natak* as an actual composition of Guru Gobind Singh is called into question, as is the selection of the geographical location of Hemkunt Sapatsring. The doctrinal relevance of transmigration, asceticism, and pilgrimage for Sikhs is also questioned.

[17] These estimates have been made on the basis of visitor registration logbooks maintained by the staff of Gurdwara Gobind Ghat.

CHAPTER SIX

The Pilgrims and Their Pilgrimage

> Though the mountain lake has no historical relation to Guru Gobind Singh, the pilgrimage journey focuses the Sikh religious imagination on Guru Gobind Singh and provides an idealized collective goal—a real place on earth where the spirit of the Guru reigns supreme.
> Gurudharm Singh Khalsa, *High Mountain Pilgrimage*, 1996:32

I. Introduction

Pilgrims come to Hemkunt Sahib for reasons as diverse as the national, religious, linguistic, and occupational backgrounds they come from, reasons which range from religion to recreation. Each pilgrim gives subtle shades of meaning to his or her expectation and experience of the pilgrimage. Taken together, however, these subtle shades resolve into one broad stroke; one reason for coming to Hemkunt Sahib which all Sikh pilgrims share. Taken further, this consensus among pilgrims applies to all Sikh places of pilgrimage. The reason is this: to be in the presence of the Guru.

II. From Guru to God

"The first and foremost reason for this journey is the visit to our shrine; it's a pilgrimage," was the matter-of-fact response of one pilgrim I questioned about why she had come to Hemkunt Sahib (Interview 33). During a discussion with another pilgrim, I asked what value there was in travelling to such a remote shrine in the Himalayas. The Gurus, she agreed, had taught that such journeys were unnecessary, but even in light of this teaching she felt the journey to Hemkunt Sahib was important because,

> The *gurduara* is historically related to a Guru. You might understand the Guru better by going to that place and feeling the same things. At Hemkunt, this is where he walked, this is where he lived, this is what he

> did: bathe in the lake, for example. In this way we come to know more about our Gurus. This is one reason for going to Hemkunt Sahib and other *gurduaras*, even though God is everywhere, and in your heart (Interview 30).

Even though God is everywhere, another pilgrim explained, it is the Guru who helps the seeker to realize it:

> Everywhere in our religion we always say that there is one intermediary—the Guru—who gets you closer to God ... [At Hemkunt] I think I will be able to take the benefit of his holiness in changing my life. What is the end result? The end result being that I would be getting closer to the God (Interview 35).

"For a Sikh, closeness to God is established through the Guru" (Khalsa 1996:30). "It is to seek the Guru that people choose to go there" (Interview 67). Sikhs go "to see the place where the Guru was" (Interview 16), just as they go to dozens of other places of the Guru marked by historical *gurduaras*. But Hemkunt Sahib has an even greater attraction.

The Guru's Experience

"An event happened over here," a pilgrim told me, "there was someone who took the Name of the Almighty" (Interview 35). That someone was the Guru in his previous life. In these discussions of Hemkunt Sahib, Guru most often refers to Guru Gobind Singh himself, and occasionally to the Guru embodied in the *shabad* and the *sangat* present at the site. The interviewee envisioned the Guru, Gobind Singh, as a pilgrim who at Hemkunt was "in search of his own self." He made great sacrifices, became one with God, and obeyed God's order. It is this event that the shrine commemorates. Following the example of Guru Gobind Singh, the interviewee, a pilgrim among other pilgrims, hoped he could benefit from the Guru's blessings and learn from the Guru's example (ibid.).

There is one other Sikh shrine which commemorates a Sikh Guru's attainment of oneness with God. A parallel between that place[1] and Hemkunt Sahib was drawn for me

by an interviewee reflecting on what he had learned as a pilgrim to both shrines. The former commemorates the mission given by God to the first living Guru to lay the foundation for the Sikh *panth*. The latter commemorates the mission given to the tenth living Guru to bring the Sikh *panth* to its culmination by founding the Khalsa *panth*. The message of Hemkunt for all who go there, the interviewee told me, is to fulfill the Guru's mission by continuing to build the Khalsa (Interview 75). But first, according to another interviewee, a pilgrim must learn from the way this mission was passed to the Guru at a time when he was so completely absorbed in the feet of the God that he and God became one. The message of Hemkunt is this: "You should meditate with full concentration so that you can enjoy the bliss of the Almighty" (Interview 78).

The Guru's Presence

The historical significance of Hemkunt Sahib is less certain than that of other historical *gurduaras*, but its mystical significance more than makes up for any uncertainty in the minds of pilgrims. One explained that what kept her moving upward towards Hemkunt was the thought that the Guru had walked the same paths and might, in some sense, still be at Hemkunt in spirit (Interview 18). "You have that experience that he is moving with you" said a first time visitor. "I could feel something, I was closer to something, " he continued, "I felt totally changed after that" (Interview 68).

Another pilgrim I spoke to had made the journey to Hemkunt Sahib again and again in the hope that he would feel this closeness to the Guru. "In my total visiting of the holy place," he told me,

> I have had three visions of the holy, perfect, the tenth Guru. I don't know whether he was there or whether it was just my imagination which was so rich with my experiences that I felt so close to him. I just can't say. This is what I felt, and it kept on tingling in my mind all the way back (Interview 48).

He described his visions in detail. Of course, not all pilgrims experience the Guru personally. When I interviewed them, some made particular note of the fact that they did

not see or feel anything there, or have a vision of the Guru (Interview 64). Many wished they had, and asked me if I had seen the Guru in all my time at Hemkunt Sahib. It is significant that the experience of the Guru's presence, or of closeness to him, was reported to me by pilgrims more often than any other[2]. This experience, I argue, is in consonance with the underlying meaning of Sikh sacred journeys.

God's Presence

"Sikhs rank high in religious participation," concludes McMullen in his study of the religious beliefs and practices of Punjabi Sikh villagers (1989:56). "Their ranking is high also on the experiential dimension of religiosity. A very high percentage (87.2 per cent) report that they feel the presence of God at least sometimes and more than one-third report that they feel it all the time" (ibid.). When I interviewed pilgrims at Hemkunt Sahib, many described feeling the presence of God while they were on pilgrimage. In McMullen's study "only an insignificant percentage (less than 2 per cent each) ascribed feeling the presence of God to specific religious activities such as *gurduara* attendance, prayers, or pilgrimage" (ibid.).

The feeling was more intense, my interviewees said, when they were surrounded by God's creation (Interview 33, Interview 76), able to immerse themselves in meditation and thoughts of God (Interview 05, Interview 69, Interview 71). "You can just pray anywhere," one told me, "but being closer to the creations of God makes you realize His importance. Coming over here, from my point of view, is I'm closer to the creations of God" (Interview 35). As you move up towards Hemkunt, another pilgrim explained, you leave behind you everything of the world.

> Your family is there and God is there and that's all. You can concentrate fully ... When you're up there, the whole time you're talking with God. That's what it feels like. There is something there, as though you really are closer to Him. The whole time you're talking with God. That's the reason why I go: to be close to God (Interview 49).

In the words of another, "You're going up to be with God, and that's it" (Interview 54). "God is everywhere, in everything," another admitted, "But it is true that you feel closer to God at Hemkunt, or, rather, closer, more in touch with, His creation. And more in touch with yourself" (Interview 33).

The Pilgrims' Experience

A pilgrimage place, Morinis writes, "is elevated above ordinary religious establishments, usually because it lays claim to an exaggerated relationship to the divine" (1992:17). Westwood affirms that "at bottom all pilgrimages spring from an inborn yearning for an encounter with the divine" (1997:19). The belief "that there can be direct communication between the individual and God" (ibid:14) is what attracts pilgrims, "whatever faith they belong, wherever their footsteps are directed, and whichever immediate reasons they give for going" (ibid.:19). "Whatever the experience," observe Clift and Clift, "whether a physical healing or a renewed spirit, an offering made in thanksgiving or a prayer petition left behind, there is a new sense of relationship with the divine or with some value of importance" (1996:13).

To access the meaning of pilgrimage experiences, the researcher must interpret them in the same way pilgrims do. Only then can the nature of the relationship engendered with the divine, the value, or the ideal be determined. When he researched a Hindu pilgrimage in the same region of the Indian Himalayas in which Hemkunt is located, Sax observed that his findings were meaningful only insofar as they remained true to indigenous Hindu assumptions and local ideas about place and motion (Sax 1991:14). "Hindus' own accounts of their experiences, and their explanations of the special power of pilgrimage, were ... based upon particular qualities of places, and on the powerful effects of certain kinds of persons and actions" (ibid:12). Sikh pilgrims' conceptions of their pilgrimage to Hemkunt Sahib are likewise voiced in terms of the qualities of lake and landscape, and the effects of supplication to the Guru and worship of God.

"God is within you but how to discover it?" questioned a Sikh pilgrim. "It is the touch of such holy places that shows you the light to find it" (Interview 69). "God is everywhere, but the area of the hills in which Hemkunt Sahib is situated is supercharged" (Interview 62). In common with members of other Indian religious communities, many Sikhs believe that the cumulative result of the devotional worship done in a place over many years is that the place itself takes on a spiritual essence. Holiness is thought to accumulate, too, at places blessed by the presence of a saint or Guru (Interview 55, Interview 62). This is so, writes Kapur Singh, even though "the true Sikh doctrine does not approve of any tradition of belief which seeks to tie up theophany with geography" (Singh 1995_b:7).

But Kapur Singh goes on to describe the landscape in which the Golden Temple is situated as permeated by ancient and potent spiritual forces: "this geographical site itself is charged with theophanic influences such as no other known and still accepted site on earth" (ibid:8). Sikhs describe Hemkunt in precisely the same terms. Tara Singh, who lived alone beside the lake for long periods in the formative years after its discovery, writes that the region Hemkunt is situated in,

> is a special part of the mother earth and its importance is being recognized from the ancient times. Here for thousand years, the world renowned *Rishis* and *Yogis* etc., have been engaged in meditation and penances of different types, which has saturated the atmosphere of this region with an unusual essence of holy flavour, which influences a visitor in many ways ... It is believed that meditation and penance done in these hills is more effective. Any novice would be influenced by the purity of this place, if he stays here with a clean heart (Singh 1995_f:6).

Another Sikh visitor described Hemkunt Sahib as a place of "Guru *bakhshish*," one of many places on the earth enriched and purified by meditation, at which the Guru bestows blessings (Interview 81). Devotees who visit there each receive a message or a blessing according to their need which speeds their process of spiritual growth (Interview 76). The Guru can do miracles anywhere. That he is doing them at Hemkunt

Sahib means he is encouraging his Sikhs to go there. Everyone gets something internal from the external journey (Interview 77).

Some Sikhs are skeptical about so-called sacred landscapes, and skeptical, too, that holy ones like Pandu Raj and Dusht Daman have meditated at Hemkunt. They come to its shores nonetheless, and for them the spiritual environment is in the minds of the people, not in the physical landscape (Interview 29). Other Sikhs try to explain the inexplicable feelings they have at Hemkunt and other holy places. Each time he goes there, a pilgrim reported, he feels shaken and enveloped with something:

> It's sheer bliss of the experience of having reached there, or it is some presence which is certainly there, which people say they have experienced. People say he resides up there, or people say that the souls keep on moving around into areas where there are a lot of devotees of a particular deity. I don't know. This is what I have felt all the time (Interview 48).

Another speculated that,

> There's a vibe present at Hemkunt, perhaps as a result of the numbers of people who have gone there to pray and worship ... There is a sense of the spiritual ... Forces accumulate, holiness accumulates, in places where a lot of meditation is done, where the Gurus themselves walked (Interview 27).

This belief that the landscape itself has taken on tangible sacred qualities underlies practices like collecting water from the lake and bringing home objects which have been in contact with the holy place.

The experience of being in the "spiritual area which emanates from the holy place" which, according to legend and history, was "made sacred by the dedication and meditation done over the years" (Giani n.d.:27) can be profound (Interview 55): "You feel the same way when Hemkunt Sahib finally comes into view as you feel when you first see the Golden Temple. You know and you feel, when you see it, that this place was built by the Guru himself" (Interview 43). "You feel inspired, blessed, and the message of Hemkunt brings your soul to peace" (Interview 76).

Something is there at Hemkunt Sahib that brings peace to the mind, so pilgrims say: "I've been here once before and believe me I get peace of mind there" (Interview 37). "When you reach Hemkunt, all tiredness leaves you, and you feel at peace and in the presence of the Almighty" (Interview 06). This feeling is widely reported, and most people have an expectation before they go up that they will feel peace descend on them as they ascend the last steps and make their way towards the shore of the holy lake. On the eve of their climb to Hemkunt Sahib, an elderly couple explained: "Guru Ji has called us. He has given us so much to get us this far. Really—there you get peace" (Interview 13).

The source of the peace is the place itself—what it represents. "Imagine, how much sacred [*sic*] it would be where Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji preferred to meditate and become one with God?" wrote a past pilgrim who penned his account in a Sikh newspaper (Gadhoke 1983:18). In an interview, another Sikh explained how, for daily devotions and meditation, you must choose the place where you can be at peace. "Guru Gobind Singh chose *this place*," he said. The choice and the place are important (Interview 67).

This pilgrim continued, explaining that two things at pilgrimage places are imbued with sacred essence: water and dust. "Where the Guru sits, meditates, and prays, the water and the soil connected with that place becomes holy enough to cure all human ills," he said. They become "magnetized" with strength, and that strength pervades through all eternity; it is inexhaustible. It can transform you through contact with you; it can bring you into contact with the Lord (Interview 67).

"What is this sacred power?" Morinis asks of pilgrimage places. "It could be plausibly argued to arise from the collective investment in the ideals that are enshrined at the pilgrimage centre" (1992:6). What makes Hemkunt Sahib a sacred place in the minds of the Sikhs who visit it is the same thing that makes all Sikh temples sacred: the presence of the Guru. The value of the sacred journey is the closeness it affords with the Guru, and through the Guru, with God. Given that the ideal of Sikhs is communion, and eventually union, with God, what Hemkunt Sahib represents is integral to the Sikh spiritual path.

Turner and Turner (1978:250) argue that this striving for oneness is at the heart of every pilgrimage, observable in pilgrims' experience of normative communitas, "A relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion" which arises in pilgrimage settings. It is a way of being detached from social structure and yet attached to others in the same state (Turner 1979:49).

> Here the pioneering communities formed by prophets, saints, and gurus together with their first disciples, provide the cultural models and paradigms. Seeking oneness is not from this perspective to withdraw from multiplicity; it is to eliminate divisiveness, to realize nonduality (Turner 1973:217).

For Turner, pilgrimages are "journeys toward a sacred source of communitas" (ibid.). This source is, arguably, the oneness that Sikh pilgrims seek. Communitas, in this sense, is there at the heart of the ideal Sikh pilgrimage. The ideal Sikh pilgrimage, then, fits into Turner's overarching theory of pilgrimage experience. Of course, not every Sikh's pilgrimage is the ideal pilgrimage.

III. From Religion to Recreation

When I interviewed a group of eighteen Sikhs from England and asked them why they had come to Hemkunt Sahib, one comment from the chorus of replies was, "To see the place where our Guru was." This reason, though of central importance, does not tell the whole story. Other responses from the English group included "If you go there, if you bathe in the holy *sarovar*, all your sins are washed away and you don't go to hell," "it's a blessing," "you can pray for anything" (Interview 26).

Among the "varied and personal" responses collected in Khalsa's "unsystematic" but nonetheless insightful survey of pilgrims to Hemkunt Sahib, the most frequent was to "have *darshan* (divine sight)" then "take an *ishnan* (holy dip)" (1996:26). Other reasons, echoed in comments from a group of fifty Sikh youth I interviewed (Interviews 15 to 18),

included fulfilling a spiritual mission, accompanying family and friends, completing the pilgrimage of another, and taking a holiday in the mountains.

Many of these reasons for going on a pilgrimage—to go to a place where something happened, to draw near to the sacred, to give thanks to God, to request blessings, to see why others go there, to get away from routine—and the experiences that a pilgrimage engenders—sense of presence, feeling of community, personal spiritual growth—are there in the comments of pilgrims from other religions as well (Clift and Clift 1996:42-83 and 151-168).

As noted at the start of this chapter, visitors to Hemkunt Sahib come from different backgrounds. Some are from India, some are from abroad. Some are baptized Sikhs, some are not. Some are young, some are old. Not surprisingly, the responses they give to the question "Why have you come to Hemkunt Sahib?" vary from person to person (Interview 17). Often, closely related reasons are expressed together by the same person, even in the same sentence. As the remainder of this chapter demonstrates, the task of separating them for analytical purposes is a difficult one. So, too, is the task of separating religious reasons from other reasons.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

"The number one reason why people undertake a pilgrimage to Sri Hemkunt Sahib is to thank God," one pilgrim told me (Interview 23). Another questioned me rhetorically: "Why go to Hemkunt?", he asked, then answered, "To thank God for doing everything, none of which we deserve, and to ask what we can do for God in return" (Interview 24).

Closely connected with thanksgiving is prayer. I spoke to a man who was making his twelfth annual visit to Hemkunt Sahib. He had come up once to wish for a child. When that child came he called him a "gift from God" and has returned to Hemkunt Sahib every year since to thank God (Interview 01). A similar story was told by a girl I met in Gobind Dham who had visited Hemkunt Sahib fourteen times in her fourteen years.

Before her birth, her parents had prayed at Hemkunt Sahib for a child. When their daughter was born, they returned every year to thank God (Interview 07).

At the conclusion of her journey to Hemkunt Sahib, another pilgrim told me she had made very specific prayers, but not for specific material gains (Interview 05). It is clear, however, that for some the journey is as much instrumental as it is devotional. Through personal testimonies made by people who have had prayers answered, Hemkunt Sahib has acquired a reputation as a place where wishes can be fulfilled. "If you want anything, and wish for it with a clean heart, you will get it here," a pilgrim told me (Interview 15). "One who goes with faith ... when he prays there, from the core of his heart, his wishes and his prayer are fulfilled," said another (Interview 75).

An annual visitor to Hemkunt Sahib insisted that one motivation for going to Hemkunt Sahib was shared by all visitors. He summed it up as "quest for the fulfillment of a desire" (Interview 35). That desire could be anything: to improve yourself, to pray for peace for your family, to request a material thing or spiritual blessing, to understand the Guru better, to feel a greater closeness to God, even to stop having desires (ibid.). Pilgrims I interviewed were uncertain, however, about the mechanism for wish-fulfillment. None spoke in terms of accumulated merit, and all agreed that requests could be made anywhere. There were no wishes specific to Hemkunt Sahib, nor could you obtain what you wished for simply by going there.

An interviewee cautioned that making requests of God was not strictly the right reason for making a pilgrimage. One should go there to be close to God, she said, not in the belief that God will grant any wish made there (Interview 06).

> Offer your prayers. Seek what you want. You should give yourself to Him also. Your actions should be of the positive kind. That will lead you to the blessings of the Guru. Otherwise you can take as many dips as you want; they will be of no benefit (Interview 27).

You have to deserve something before you will receive it from God (Interview 35). As the Guru himself taught, not much spiritual profit can be earned merely by visiting a place

of religious significance (Interview 60). You have to make efforts to pray and meditate (Interview 05, Interview 33, Interview 78). Then, "If you've got a pure heart, pure mind, humility, and you ask something from God, it will be granted" (Interview 27). "Meditate with full concentration and you can always get the blessings, you cannot absorb those blessings you get so much" (Interview 78).

Faith and Devotion

People come to *gurduaras* and places of pilgrimage in search of blessings, an annual visitor to Hemkunt Sahib observed. "It's not the place or the *Guru Granth Sahib* that bestows the blessings; it's people's own faith" (Interview 47). The story of a Sikh family I walked up to Hemkunt Sahib with illustrates this point. They had come after several years of planning and hoping. When they finally reached the lake, even though the children were suffering from the cold and the altitude, their father insisted that they were in the Guru's presence, and it was the Guru's will that they live or die. Later, at a lower altitude when all were feeling better, he explained their recovery by saying "You see? There is some power here" (Interview 09).

His statement is an illustration of the profound faith and devotion that Sikh pilgrims have in the place and their Guru. The true sense of the pilgrimage is in his words. "What are trials and tribulations when you are close to your Guru?" he said. "God will see you through" (ibid.). "There is a lesson in hardship," another said. People have the idea that what they do, they themselves are doing it. Sikhism teaches that, to the contrary, it is God who is doing it. "Hardship makes individuals appreciate God's gifts, since it is only God who gives them the strength to make it up to Hemkunt Sahib" (Interview 32).

"The only way to get to Radha Kund is by the grace of Radha herself," said a *sadhu* speaking of another holy lake (Jarow 1986:118). I heard the same words echoed by the voices of the pilgrims to Hemkunt Sahib. "People do not go there of their own will. The Guru calls them to go. And whosoever he calls, on that person he bestows a blessing. Not everyone is able to perceive what that blessing is, but everyone receives one"

(Interview 81). "Guru Gobind Singh Ji always helps those who have put faith in him," another interviewee assured me (Interview 75). "Without his blessings you cannot reach there" (Interview 67). For those who are old or infirm, "it is only the Guru who takes them up there" (Interview 62). "There has to be some energy there" if the aged and the young, some who have never walked so much in their lives, find motive to hike up the mountain path reciting prayers (Interview 30). "It's their faith," another said (Interview 27).

The sacred place is remote, the sacred journey difficult. Hardships were reported to me by many visitors: bus rides that were dangerous and exhausting, accommodation that was disorganized and uncomfortable, food that was distasteful and unhygienic, weather that was cold and wet. To all of these were added tales of thefts, accidents, altitude sickness, fatigue, and frustration. That so many pilgrims make the journey is in itself a testimony to faith. Most endure hardship, and find that their memories of their journeys are not tainted by it: "As you're going up you don't notice the difficulty of the path, the condition of the hotel rooms, the poor quality of the food. These become unimportant next to the meaning of the experience" (Interview 49). For some, they even enhance the experience.

A veteran pilgrim described how, many years ago, he and his father fell into a deep crevasse while crossing a glacier below Hemkunt. He cried out "Save my father!" while his father was saying "Save my son!" Above them, his mother listened to their voices, and then fell with her hands towards Hemkunt Sahib and prayed "*He Guru Maharaj*! Either save these two or take me also with them!" By what power they both were rescued, he does not know. He felt God had given him a new birth, and since then many more hardships have beset his family members and companions along the path to Hemkunt Sahib, and he has been witness to many more miracles. "I have too much faith in that place," he said (Interview 69).

But those who do not have faith sometimes have experiences at the other end of the spectrum. One family I met told me that this was their very first and very last trip to

Hemkunt Sahib. The way was too difficult, they said (Interview 03). Another family expressed much the same thing. They were from the plains and just not accustomed to this sort of thing (Interview 30). A third family admitted their scepticism that this was really the place where the Guru had meditated, and without that faith, the journey became just a trial (Interview 02).

But, as another interviewee observed, only a few pilgrims are so overcome by the difficulties that they are not attracted to the place (Interview 81). Some undergo hardships on purpose and relish the experience. One member of a Sikh family I spoke to claimed to have run up the steps on the last two kilometres and felt very relaxed on arrival. He then took a bath and sat in the icy water of the lake for thirty or forty minutes (Interview 16). "If you concentrate your mind on the Name of God, or on anything, you can accomplish things you think would otherwise be impossible for you" (Interview 27).

> A few people increase the difficulty by walking barefoot on the rocky path to the top. This signals an even greater degree of devotion to Guru Gobind Singh. Foregoing a mule ride or walking barefoot is understood as an act of respect to Guru Gobind Singh, who practised great austerities in his former existence. Some consider the land, like the interior of a *gurduara*, sacred, so that shoes are removed (Khalsa 1996:26).

I met three girls who came with a group whose members all walked the length of the trail barefoot, some year after year. When I asked them why they were doing it, they answered "devotion" (Interview 21). That one word sums up the motives of the following pilgrims.

An annual visitor told me of a space of a couple of years during which he could not visit Hemkunt Sahib. The following year he prayed to the Guru and asked that he please get him to that place. When a return journey became possible, the interviewee resolved to walk barefoot from Gobind Dham to Hemkunt Sahib, not because he wished to make a request of God, just because he wanted to feel he was doing it, walking barefoot for the Guru (Interview 41).

I spoke to another Sikh man making his thirteenth visit to Hemkunt Sahib. He had walked barefoot the first five times, not because he had a request to make, but because he

felt he should. He urged himself onward, walking over the snow, feeling immune to the cold and the hardships, saying "Even if I am to die, I will make it there" (Interview 04). A different motive was expressed by a man I met while he was walking barefoot. He said, "If God goes to all the trouble of coming down here to help us out, then the least we can do is undergo some difficulty in going up to thank Him." (Interview 23). "The harder life becomes," another interviewee told me, "the more you remember God" (Interview 36).

However, "There is absolutely no belief in Sikhism that one must suffer by walking barefoot or in any other way," an interviewee cautioned, "Nowhere in the *Guru Granth Sahib* does it say that if you go by walking that God will meet you and if you go by horse He will not" (Interview 37). Another interviewee observed that some pilgrims try to make it up by foot because they interpret the *shabad* "Charan Chalo Marag Gobind" (walk ye, O my feet, on God's path) to mean that you have to walk. This verse from scripture, popular as it is along the route to Hemkunt Sahib, should not be taken literally. "It is the *purpose* that matters, the spirit behind it, not the means by which you go. It's what's in your heart, not your outward mode ... I don't believe in this thing," she told me, stating that no merit accrues to a person who tortures himself (Interview 30).

Darshan and *Ishnan*

Whenever I asked any Punjabi pilgrim why he or she was going to Hemkunt Sahib, the word *darshan* was invariably in the answer. Pilgrims go for *darshan* of the holy lake, of the *gurduara*, of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and even, for those fortunate few, of Guru Gobind Singh himself. *Darshan* means 'sacred sight'. Among Hindus, the sight of a divine image or personage is popularly believed to bring merit. Among Sikhs, beholding a shrine or the *Guru Granth Sahib* housed within it is not recognized to be of value in and of itself. Inner devotion is a necessary prerequisite to receiving any benefit from such association with the sacred (Interview 51).

Ishnan is a holy dip in the sacred *sarovar* of a *gurduara*. It was and is customary for Sikhs to bathe in the early morning before going into the presence of God (i.e.

beginning their meditations)(*Sikh Religion* 1990:92). Likewise before entering the presence of the Guru. Sikhs wash hands and feet before entering any *gurduara*, and,

> Many of the *gurduaras* in Punjab have a pool (*sarovar*) for bathing in. In Sikhism one can bathe in these pools if they wish, but they should be pure inside in order to accomplish anything. For the water may clean you on the outside, but it cannot clean you on the inside if your heart is not pure (Brar 1996:web page).

Virtually all Sikh pilgrims bathe in the water of the lake when they arrive at Hemkunt Sahib. Gadhoke writes that "Facing 'Gurdwara Hem Kunt Sahib Ji' is the sacred '*Sarovar*'—the most spiritual and healing pool for the suffering mankind. It is said that any person having incurable diseases is healed if he only bathes in this holy water" (1983:23). Beliefs about the curative powers of the water are common. When I interviewed the *granthi* who worked in the *gurduara*, he said the most significant thing about Hemkunt was that the Guru himself bathed there, and now Sikhs who bathe in the same water have their diseases cured. In all his years there, many such healings had been reported to him (Interview 71).

On occasion I was told that bathing in the *sarovar* purified the pilgrim of sins (Interview 16, Interview 35, Interview 54). "It's to clean yourself," one said, "To clean your inside, inner self" (Interview 36). Such beliefs in the efficacy of *ishnan* at Hemkunt are widespread, but not everyone subscribes to them. "No, sins cannot be washed away at pilgrimage places" said one pilgrim (Interview 04). But ,"If you have faith in your mind, then by bathing in these *sarovars* you are helped to some extent. It's the faith in your mind which cures you. The faith acts, the forces from the place act" (Interview 27). Some visitors question the rationality of bathing in the near-freezing water. Others think bathing is superstitious or ritualistic. "We don't bathe in the water as a ritual, since we don't believe in rituals or anything. I guess people just bathe in it in the loving memory of our Gurus" (Interview 59).

Accomplishment and Growth

A woman I spoke to at the top of the stairs to Hemkunt Sahib admitted she had never intended to come to a place like this, but now that she had, she agreed it was the experience of a lifetime (Interview 10). "It was the last three kilometres from that bridge onward was absolutely a nightmare," a man told me as he described his own journey, "It was totally, totally upsetting. It was a great effort to reach the *gurduara* ... And reaching there was in itself a great satisfaction, mental, spiritual satisfaction that I could reach there (Interview 48).

Another man expressed mixed feelings as he reflected on his journey. The way was dirty and the hotel rooms dingy,

> But the trip was good in that the physical difficulty was a real challenge to be overcome. Only mind and spirit keep you going when your body says you can go no further. In the end it was a real accomplishment. Overcoming difficulties is good for the spirit (Interview 22).

Reaching the *gurduara* is a challenge and accomplishment, said another (Interview 62). At the end of your journey you feel peaceful and at the same time exhilarated and uplifted (Interview 20).

A Sikh woman expressed to me how, on reaching the lake, it seemed as though all the suffering she had endured on the way up had been washed away. After the bath she felt refreshed, her strength replenished. "It is pure fulfillment," she told me, "when you use all the senses that God has given you. At Hemkunt everything is there: emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and sensually" (Interview 15). The words of another pilgrim who had been to Hemkunt Sahib the day before echo her sentiments: "Yesterday was a driving force." She exclaimed that the journey was the highlight of her life, the pinnacle achievement that makes past toils appear small and future ones more bearable. She hoped she could store the experience of it in her memory to take out and think about in times of need (Interview 28).

Some Sikhs used their pilgrimage to Hemkunt as an opportunity for personal growth and change. Said one, God is the cause and the Guru, the sacred journey, and the sacred place are the source for personal change (Interview 35). Another pilgrim used the time during the pilgrimage to relax, concentrate, and meditate until her thoughts become clear. Then, she could appreciate the beauty around her and feel close to God (Interview 49). The pilgrimage "gives you opportunity to look at your life from a distance. It does change things for me. It gives me time for reflection, and in subtle ways changes the way I am when I return to my normal life" (Interview 54).

In Gobind Ghat I met a family whose members explained the personal significance of the pilgrimage to me. "This journey is an affirmation and a fulfilment," said one. "People who visit here have heard of this place all their lives. And only a few get to visit" another continued. "It is a special feeling to be among them". There are other Sikh temples which are more important than Hemkunt Sahib, but none share its physical and psychological impact. "This journey *feels* like a pilgrimage. Anything which you achieve with great difficulty becomes emotionally poignant. There's no other place like it" (Interviews 31 to 33).

The same interviewees suggested that, for some, this sense of accomplishment might be the only reason for making the journey: "It's only pious because it's a fashion, it's an accomplishment," the first member speculated (Interview 31). Another member mocked the people who "brag, show off: 'I'm here for the fifteenth time and God has been so good to me!'" (Interview 32). "Some people make pilgrimages to satisfy their egos and prove that they are better Sikhs" (Interview 58). "I'm against people thinking that their faith is stronger because they go on pilgrimages" (Interview 20).

Tourism and Recreation

A Sikh woman I interviewed listed a number of reasons why people go to there. Among them were religious reasons like understanding the Guru, becoming nearer to God, and having wishes granted, but she also mentioned going to Hemkunt to sightsee or

trek, to have a change or adventure, to understand its popularity, or to tag along with classmates, friends, or relatives (Interview 30). Hemkunt Sahib does not have religious significance for all Sikhs who go there. Because good infrastructure is in place (organized *jathas* which ply the route, cost-free lodging in *gurduaras*, abundant tea shops and restaurants), Hemkunt Sahib is an accessible destination for Sikhs interested in mountain trekking. Some go as part of an extended holiday, stopping at other points of interest along the way. Some turn their trip into a group adventure by riding bicycles or scooters into the hills then climbing the rest of the way on foot. Others, sometimes grudgingly, accompany more religiously-inclined family members or friends.

A past-pilgrim I interviewed in Punjab noted how difficult it is to demarcate where religion ends and the recreation begins. Faith, curiosity, sightseeing, getting away from routine—these motives are all mixed up (Interview 42). True to his observation, I found that most Sikhs went to Hemkunt Sahib for a combination of reasons, treating the mountain scenery as an added benefit of their spiritual pilgrimage. The recent growth in the number of studies of religious tourism indicate that the situation at Hemkunt Sahib is not unique (see Turnbull 1981, Pfaffenberger 1983, Kaur 1985, Cohen 1992, Eade 1992, Hudman and Jackson 1992, and Smith 1992). But the fact that the journey to Hemkunt Sahib is, first and foremost, a pilgrimage cannot be ignored. As one interviewee observed, she and her family could have gone anywhere for views, but they chose to undergo all of the difficulty of climbing a muddy footpath in the rain to visit a *gurduara*. While she agreed that pilgrim and tourist roles were mixed at Hemkunt Sahib, in her mind the religious aspect was certainly dominant (Interview 05).

Coming again

A pilgrim who goes to Hemkunt Sahib every year told me the story of his first pilgrimage:

> As I took my first holy dip in the sacred *sarovar*, I was thinking nothing, just thanking God. I wanted to meditate for the first time in my life. It was a blissful experience. I felt like I did communicate with my God or my Guru. I didn't want to return. I wanted to stay in that state forever. But someone from my family called for me. So I put on my clothes, went into the *gurduara*, offered *Ardas*. I didn't want to ask anything, say anything, just to stand and stand in front of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. I didn't want to go down. I knew there was something inside me. I had gained something. Something changed in my heart. For each year thereafter I wanted to be there. I missed it. I prayed to God to show me those moments again, to take me over there. Otherwise I don't think I could continue in my life (Interview 41).

And so he came again, year after year, and those years during which he was unable to make the journey passed with difficulty and with the prayer that he would get the chance, by Guru's grace, to go to Hemkunt Sahib again. The same story was told to me again and again by other pilgrims.

A man who had been to Hemkunt Sahib for the first time told me that by the grace of Almighty God he was able to go after four years of trying. One day he asked his wife to pack his *pajama* and *kurta*, and the next day, alone, he was there. He said there are no words to describe the experience. It was never possible to go before, but now he thinks it will become possible to go again next year (Interview 40). "Once you make this journey once, subsequent journeys seem less difficult" (Interview 34). Another man who had visited Hemkunt Sahib annually for thirty-nine years reported that his first visit to Hemkunt was so enchanting that he could not but go every year thereafter. He does not go by his own power, he says. The Guru takes him. "You cannot know when, but you will return," he told me. "The Guru may call any time for you to go there. Ask for that gift in your prayers" (Interview 55).

Change

"Our lives have changed and along with them the nature of pilgrimage is changing," a Sikh pilgrim reflected as I walked with her near Gobind Ghat. "We can no

longer devote as much time to prayer as our parents could. Does that make a difference? Our pilgrimages are done in more comfort, but the important thing—a chance to reflect on God, to remember and thank God—is still very much there" (Interview 33). Others also observed how the pilgrimage is modernizing. There are *kandis* and *dandis* and mules to ease the journey. Cold drinks and packaged noodles and chips are available in the shops, and there are hotels and tourist restaurants in Gobind Dham.

Some felt that all of this commercialism was diverting their minds from the true meaning of the pilgrimage. "The harder life becomes, the more you remember God," one told me (Interview 35). His friends felt that the purity of the experience had been lost, along with the sanctity of the place. They complained that the volume of film music from the souvenir shops, for example, had drowned out the singing of *kirtan* broadcast from the *gurduara*. All of this modernization is distracting, they told me. In the past, they had never demanded "'I wanna have a Coke, I wanna have a Pepsi.' We always just said 'I hope everything goes well.' That was the first time. Probably that was the time we were closest to God" (ibid.).

One of the trustees told me that, despite his fears that Hemkunt Sahib is becoming more of a tourist attraction than a place of pilgrimage, all of this growth is positive. Through all of the noise and commotion of the *yatra*, the community spirit and the mission of *seva* persist. Even if seekers of spiritual heights have proportionally gone down, they have gone up numerically. Similarly, even though everyone's time of meditation has decreased, more people are meditating, so that the total purifying impact on the atmosphere is more (Interview 78).

III. Conclusion

In this chapter, the words of Sikh pilgrims have confirmed the assertions made about Sikh pilgrimage in earlier chapters. First, they have confirmed that, through the pilgrimage to Hemkunt Sahib, pilgrims access the communal, textual, and historical Guru. In this sense, the journey is representative of other Sikh pilgrimages. Second, they have

confirmed that pilgrims justify their pilgrimages in such a way that they do not contradict the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Instead, they are an affirmation of the doctrine that the seeker must access God through the Guru. And third, they have confirmed that what the Guru represents is the ideal of union with God. As that ideal, embedded as it is in the features of the pilgrimage, is conveyed to the pilgrims, it shapes their experiences. In the end, the pilgrimage serves to amplify the connection felt with the Guru and with the ideal that the Guru represents. In the final chapter, what this analysis of Sikh pilgrimage can tell us about pilgrimage generally will be explored.

Notes

[1] Gurdwara Sant Ghat Sahib in Sultanpur Lodhi, Punjab.

[2] Interviews 04, 05, 07, 10, 18, 35, 37, 48, 49, 51, 68, 71, and others not listed in the Interviews Cited section of this thesis.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion: Walking in the Footsteps of the Guru

> One of the most common forms of pilgrimage finds devotees retracing the footsteps of a saint. The saint, like the lowly pilgrim, was once a humble seeker who then, however, successfully passed through a series of trials and won his or her position of reverence. Now, by enacting those same events, if only symbolically, a pilgrim places him/herself 'in the footsteps' of the exemplar in their endeavour to 'become' that hero or heroine.
> Barbara Nimri Aziz, *Personal Dimensions of the Sacred Journey*, 1987:257

In our journey towards an understanding of Sikh pilgrimage, we have come to the final chapter. It will convey the essence of each of the preceding chapters, and clarify the way in which the conceptual model outlined in the introduction has guided our understanding. Further analysis of the one Sikh sacred place detailed in these pages will highlight the way in which the archetype of pilgrimage is given expression in all Sikh sacred journeys. It will also indicate what Sikh sacred places and sacred journeys share with those of other traditions and communities.

This journey began in chapter one with the recognition that a balanced study of pilgrimage must take two aspects into account. The normative aspect is embodied in the sacred tradition and can be derived from the scrutiny of textual sources. The operative aspect resides with the pilgrims themselves: it is in their actual beliefs and practices and can be known only through empirical research. Although they complement one another, the two aspects do not always agree. From the perspective of the researcher, just such a disparity seems, in the case of Sikh pilgrimage, to be apparent.

Pilgrimage in the Sikh Tradition, Pilgrims in the Sikh Community

The normative significance that pilgrimage has within the textual sources of the Sikh tradition is unambiguous. It has none. When it is set against the operative popularity of pilgrimage within the Sikh community, a contradiction emerges. From the perspective of members of that community, however, there is no contradiction. This thesis has been dedicated to isolating what it is about pilgrimage that is so compelling for Sikh seekers. It was suggested in chapter one that the answer would be found in the way pilgrims justify their pilgrimages. Through a systematic comparison of their expressions and the complementary evidence of the sacred scriptures, the deeper significance that pilgrimage has within both the community and the tradition has been brought into relief.

What the Sikh Gurus taught about the path to God is at the root of both the apparent contradiction and its resolution. According to their teachings, summarized in chapter two, walking paths to external places of pilgrimage is of no use because the best of all pilgrimage places is internal. A path of love and remembrance leads to this place of communion, and eventually union, with God. The seeker can walk this path only with the guidance of the Guru. That external pilgrimages of a sort came in to currency within the early Sikh community is, at first glance, at odds with this tradition. But if looked at more closely, the movement of Sikhs towards places at which the Guru's guidance could be sought had a natural continuity with Sikh doctrine.

When the lineage of living Gurus ended, their spiritual authority passed symbolically to the Guru *Granth*, and their temporal authority passed to the *Guru Panth*. The places at which these textual and communal forms of the Guru were present became *gurduaras*, and the *gurduaras* at which the living Guru had once been present became places of pilgrimage. For Sikhs, they were not pilgrimage places in the same sense that the confluences of sacred rivers were for Hindus, or the tombs of Sufi saints were for Muslims. The ritual ablutions and austerities that pilgrims engaged in at such places had been discounted by the Gurus, along with the mechanism of merit accumulation at their root, as means for spiritual attainment.

The true means for spiritual attainment, so the Gurus taught, was devotional worship in the company of the faithful. Historical *gurduaras* were an appropriate venue for worship and, moreover, they were the spiritual and temporal centres of the Sikh community. Travel to them afforded access to everything the historical Guru represented, including access to God. Through *gurduaras*, Sikhs could draw near to the Guru, and through the Guru, to God. Within the contemporary Sikh community, pilgrims justify their pilgrimages to historical *gurduaras* in such a way that, far from being antithetical to the teachings of the Gurus, they become affirmations of them.

The conclusion drawn in chapter three was that, when examined closely, the explicit model of pilgrimage in the Sikh community is consistent with the spiritual teachings implicit in the Sikh tradition. The significance of the Guru is the common theme which underlies, and hence unifies, them. It is by means of this theme that we can recognize the archetype of pilgrimage as it is given expression in Sikh sacred journeys and sacred places. The archetype will, in turn, throw more light on the relationship between normative and operative levels of analysis.

By engaging the interpretive process pioneered by Geertz (1973), we can make the conceptual shift from the emic or experience-near concept of 'Guru' to the etic or experience-distant concept of 'ideal.' When this is accomplished, Sikh pilgrimage can be understood in a wider context as one manifestation of a universal pattern, an archetype. The details of the archetype of pilgrimage, as identified in the work of Aziz (1987:255-259), Morinis (1992:4-7), Turnbull (1992:261), and Clift and Clift (1996:1-3), were summarized in the introduction. Briefly, they are as follows:

Whether it is sacred or secular, a pilgrimage gives tangible expression to a collective ideal. When a pilgrim sets out on a physical pilgrimage, he or she simultaneously sets out on an archetypal journey towards an encounter with, even realization of, the ideal embodied in the place of pilgrimage. Further, there is a dialectic between the features of the pilgrimage and the inner experience of the pilgrim. The ideal is embodied in the journey and the destination in such a way that the pilgrim experiences

its intensification during his or her passage. The pilgrim's descriptions of inner experience, meaning, and belief then give expression to the ideal, making it accessible to the researcher. With reference to this archetype, the universal quest for a collective ideal can be recognized and documented within any community.

Sikh sacred journeys are patterned on the archetype of pilgrimage in such a way that the collective ideal of the Sikhs is embodied, not only sacred places, but in sacred personages as well. That collective ideal is union with God, which can only be attained through the Guru. *Gurduaras* enshrine the Guru, and therefore they also enshrine the collective ideal he represents. We can conclude by means of the archetype that, even though sacred journeys are given no significance in the Sikh tradition, they are given some significance in the Sikh community when undertaken to the sacred places which enshrine the collective ideal. Application of this model confirms that the significance of the Guru—the embodiment of the collective ideal—at the normative level of analysis is what gives significance to pilgrimage at the operative level.

From an exposition of sacred journeys and sacred places within the Sikh tradition and community generally, we turned in chapters four and five to a detailed ethnographic description of one sacred journey and sacred place. We observed how the collective ideal of the Sikhs was incorporated symbolically into the geographic and mythic features of the sacred journey, and then in chapter six we listened to how it was expressed in the voices of pilgrims who experienced it.

Sacred Journey, Sacred Place

Like all places of pilgrimage, Hemkunt Sahib embodies a collective ideal. Like all Sikh places of pilgrimage, it is a place consecrated by the living Guru at which the communal Guru gathers and the scriptural Guru resides. But unlike other Sikh places of pilgrimage, it is the place where the living Guru himself realized the collective ideal. Along the path to Hemkunt Sahib, pilgrims not only walk symbolically towards the ideal, they literally walk in the footsteps of one who attained the ideal to the very place at which

he attained it. Because the Guru is the model of the ideal pilgrim, a pilgrimage to the place of his attainment is a tangible means for pilgrims to approach the same ideal. As they follow in his footsteps, they enact his quest, and their expressions of inner experience confirm its nature as a quest for closeness to the Guru and through him closeness to God.

Hemkunt Sahib, then, enshrines not only the Guru and the ideal he represents, but also the means to attain that ideal. It is unique among Sikh places of pilgrimage because it has been identified as the actual place of the Guru's attainment. However, since all of the Gurus attained the same ideal, all physical places of the Guru symbolize the same spiritual journey and destination. All pilgrimages to places of the Guru are opportunities to walk in the footsteps of the ideal pilgrim toward realization of God. The pattern of pilgrims walking in the footsteps of the Guru is, therefore, a significant dimension of Sikh religiosity, whether it is observed at Hemkunt Sahib or at any other historical *gurduara*.

As demonstrated, we can move by means of the archetype from one Sikh pilgrimage, to all Sikh pilgrimages, even to all pilgrimages. Because of what they have in common—the ideal at their centre—the three levels illuminate one another. As portrayed here, the Sikh pilgrim's quest to encounter and even become the ideal is a quest shared by pilgrims of other traditions and communities. The embodiment of the ideal in the personage of a cultural hero or spiritual exemplar is likewise not unique to Hemkunt Sahib; retracing the footsteps of a saint is one of the most common forms of pilgrimage (Aziz 1987:257). This recognition of the commonalties between Sikhs and other seekers has implications for our understanding of why pilgrimage, as one expression of religiosity among many, is so compelling for pilgrims.

Sikhs, Seekers

This study, one of very few studies of Sikh religious beliefs and practices with an empirical component, has highlighted the disparity between the normative level of analysis—what Sikhs should do—and the operative level of analysis—what they actually do. As we have seen, this disparity disappears when considered from the point of view of

Sikhs themselves. Sikhs justifications for their actions are in keeping with Sikh doctrine. As noted, in Sikhism there is no doctrine of pilgrimage. Sikhs go on pilgrimage nonetheless, and what we have learned of pilgrimage in the Sikh context promises to contribute to our understanding of pilgrimage in other contexts.

The one Sikh pilgrimage examined here is an example of the emergence of a pilgrimage from below with no formal sanction from above. It began as a popular movement of people for whom the sacred place and the sacred journey had an innate attraction. The same pattern of pilgrimage growth can be observed in many, if not all, of the world's religions (Clift and Clift 1996:9). Yet at the same time, in many of the world's religions there are currents which run against the popular movement of pilgrims.

What this study of Sikh pilgrimage has demonstrated is that, even in a community whose tradition contains no formal doctrine of pilgrimage, pilgrimage is an attractive form of religious expression. Pilgrims who belong to such a community justify their pilgrimages in such a way that they reinforce the ideal at the centre of their tradition. The conclusion drawn here is that sacred journeys are attractive because sacred places offer the tangible possibility of an encounter with sacred ideals.

Glossary

The Punjabi language is written using the Gurmukhi alphabet for which there is no standardized system of Roman transliteration. I have spelled Punjabi words as they are spelled in Gurmukhi script (e.g. '*Vahiguru*'; '*gurduara*'), using Roman letter approximations for the sounds of Punjabi. As a result, some common words will appear odd, since their conventional Roman spelling reflects pronunciation rather than Gurmukhi spelling (e.g. '*Waheguru*'; '*gurdwara*'). Where these words are included in proper names, I have retained conventional spellings (e.g. Gurdwara Sri Hemkunt Sahib). In all transliterations, I have omitted vowels which are not pronounced. Diacritical marks are not used to indicate long or nasal vowels or retroflex consonants.

Adi Granth (ਆਦਿ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ)	'The First Book'; The original name for the volume of Sikh scriptures. It became known as the *Guru Granth Sahib* when guruship was bestowed upon it.
amrit: (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ)	'Nectar'; water sweetened with sugar and sanctified with a double-edged sword which is used in the Khalsa initiation ceremony. The water in the Hemkunt *sarovar* is also referred to as *amrit*.
amritdhari: (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਧਾਰੀ)	One who professes Sikhism and has undergone the Khalsa initiation ceremony and keeps the hair uncut; Khalsa Sikh.
Ardas: (ਅਰਦਾਸ)	'Supplication'; the standard congregational prayer of the Sikhs.
Bachitar Natak: (ਬਚਿਤਰ ਨਾਟਕ)	'Wonderful' or 'curious' 'drama'; autobiography attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, in which the story of his previous lifetime spent in meditation and austerities at Hemkunt is recounted.
bakhshish: (ਬਖਸ਼ੀਸ਼)	A gift, blessing, or bestowal.
bhakti: (ਭਾਕਤੀ)	'Devotion'.
bole so nihal: (ਬੋਲੇ ਸੋ ਨਿਹਾਲ)	'Anyone who speaks will be happy'. The first phrase of the Sikh victory slogan (*jaikara*).
brahman: (ਬ੍ਰਹਮਣ)	Priest; a member of the highest caste in the Hindu caste system.

dal: (ਦਾਲ) — Lentils.

dan: (ਦਾਨ) — Donation, gift, or charity.

dandi: (ਡੰਡੀ) — Sedan chair carried on poles by four porters.

darbar sahib: (ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ) — 'Royal court'; inner sanctum of a *gurduara*.

darshan: (ਦਰਸ਼ਨ) — 'Sight'; appearance or audience before a holy person or a sacred place or object.

Dasam Granth: (ਦਸਮ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ) — 'The Book of the Tenth' or 'The Tenth Book'; A book of writings attributed to the tenth Sikh Guru. Contains the composition *Bachitar Natak*.

dharamsala: (ਧਰਮਸਾਲਾ) — 'Abode of religion'; The name for Sikh places of congregational worship before they came to be known as *gurduaras*. Also refers to a shelter for pilgrims.

Dharam (ਧਰਮ) — A religious path, righteousness, duty.

dhoti: (ਧੋਤੀ) — Unstitched garment worn on the lower part of the body.

fatah: (ਫਤਹਿ) — 'Victory'.

ghagara: (ਘਾਗਰਾ) — Traditional undergarment worn by *pahari* women.

ghi: (ਘੀ) — Clarified butter.

ghora: (ਘੋੜਾ) — Horse.

granthi: (ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ) — Sikh officiant who reads from the *Guru Granth Sahib* and serves as custodian of a *gurduara*.

gurbani: (ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ) — 'Utterances of the Guru' contained in the Sikh scriptures.

gurduara: (ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ) — 'Gateway to the Guru'; Sikh temple.

gurmata: (ਗੁਰਮਤਾ) — A resolution adopted by consensus within a Sikh congregation.

Gurmukh: (ਗੁਰਮੁਖ) — 'Guru-oriented'; one who has adopted the Guru's way of life; pious Sikh.

Guru:
(ਗੁਰੂ)

'Enlightener'; in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the word Guru refers not only to a spiritual teacher in human form, but also to God and attributes of God (i.e. the *shabad*, the *nam*) which can guide the seeker to God-realization.

Guru Granth Sahib:
(ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ)

Honorific name for the book of Sikh scriptures, the *Adi Granth*. Contains the poetic writings of the Sikh Gurus and saints from other mystical and devotional traditions.

harmonium:
(ਹਰਮੋਨਿਅਮ)

Portable organ.

havaldar:
(ਹਵਾਲਦਾਰ)

A sergeant in the Indian army; also an Indian police rank corresponding to sub-inspector.

hukamnama:
(ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾ)

Divine order or command issued by the Guru. After *Ardas* is said in a *gurduara*, the *Guru Granth Sahib* is opened at random and a verse is read. That verse is the *hukamnama* for the day.

ishnan:
(ਇਸ਼ਨਾਨ)

Bath in the sacred *sarovar* of a *gurduara*.

jaikara:
(ਜੈਕਾਰਾ)

'Victory slogan'; the name of the cheer '*Jo bole so nihal ... Sat Sri Akal!*' which means 'Anyone who speaks will be happy ... True is the Timeless One!'

jatha:
(ਜਥਾ)

Group organized to carry out a mission. Sikhs often form *jathas* to go to Hemkunt Sahib.

jhutha:
(ਝੂਠਾ)

False, spurious, artificial.

ji:
(ਜੀ)

An honorific suffix.

'K's:

Five items of external identity to be worn at all times by *amritdhari* Sikhs according to the Khalsa code of conduct. They are *kes*, *kangha*, *kara*, *kirpan*, and *kachhihra*.

kachhihra:
(ਕਛਿਹਰਾ)

Undergarment with a drawstring waist which symbolizes self control. One of the five 'K's which must be worn by a Khalsa Sikh at all times.

kalgidhar:
(ਕਲਗੀਧਰ)

One who wears a plume.

Kal Yug:
(ਕਲ ਯੁਗ)

The dark age or the age of spiritual ignorance; the fourth and last of the cosmic ages according to Hindu mythology.

kandi:
(ਕੰਡੀ)

Woven basket used by porters for carrying supplies, luggage, and people.

kangha:
(ਕੰਘਾ)

Wooden comb which symbolizes discipline and external and internal cleanliness. One of the five 'K's which must be worn by a Khalsa Sikh at all times.

kara: (ਕੜਾ) — Steel or iron bangle which symbolizes unity, continuity, restraint, and remembrance. One of the five 'K's which must be worn by a Khalsa Sikh at all times.

katha: (ਕਥਾ) — 'Religious discourse', 'sermon', or 'story'.

Kaur: (ਕੌਰ) — 'Prince' or 'Princess'; Sikh surname taken by all female members of the Khalsa.

kes: (ਕੇਸ) — Uncut hair which symbolizes spirituality. One of the five 'K's which must be worn by a Khalsa Sikh at all times.

kesadhari: (ਕੇਸਾਧਾਰੀ) — One who professes Sikhism and has not undergone the Khalsa initiation ceremony and keeps the hair uncut.

Khalsa: (ਖਾਲਸਾ) — 'Purified by God'; the brotherhood of initiated Sikhs as ordained by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The allegiance of Khalsa Sikhs is directed to the Guru and to God, and not to any temporal authority.

khanda: (ਖਾਂਡਾ) — Double edged sword with concave edges. Also the name of the Sikh emblem which features an image of the *khanda* at its centre.

khattri: (ਖੱਤ੍ਰੀ) — Warrior; a member of the second highest caste of the Hindu caste system.

kirpan: (ਕਿਰਪਾਨ) — Sword or dagger which symbolizes dedication. One of the five 'K's which must be worn by a Khalsa Sikh at all times.

kirtan: (ਕੀਰਤਨ) — Devotional music; singing of scriptural hymns.

langar: (ਲੰਗਰ) — Free community kitchen.

mala: (ਮਾਲਾ) — Garland, rosary, or bead necklace.

mandir: (ਮੰਦਰ) — Hindu temple.

Nam: (ਨਾਮ) — The essence of God which pervades creation; the total expression of God's manifest aspect.

Nam simran: (ਨਾਮ ਸਿਮਰਨ) — Remembering God's *Nam* through repetition and meditation.

nishan sahib: (ਨਿਸ਼ਾਨ ਸਾਹਿਬ) — Flag of saffron or royal blue colour atop a tall flagpole which indicates the location of a *gurduara*.

pahari: (ਪਹਾੜੀ) — 'Of the mountains'.

paidal yatra: (ਪੈਦਲ ਯਾਤਰਾ) — Pilgrimage undertaken by foot.

pajama kurta: (ਪਜਾਮਾ ਕੁਰਤਾ) — The tunic over trousers that is the traditional dress of Punjabi men.

panth: (ਪੰਥ) — 'Path'; followers of the Sikh Gurus; the Sikh community.

parikarma: (ਪਰਿਕਰਮਾ) — 'Circumambulation'. *Parikarma* is commonly done around the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the *nishan sahib*, or the *sarovar* at a *gurduara*.

patka: (ਪਟਕਾ) — Cloth head covering.

parshad: (ਪਰਸ਼ਾਦ) — Gift received by a devotee, usually a consecrated food offering. *Karah parshad*, made of equal portions of *ghi*, wheat flour, and sugar, is distributed in *gurduaras*.

parkash: (ਪਰਕਾਸ਼) — 'Bring to light'; place where the *Guru Granth Sahib* is installed.

Rahit Maryada: (ਰਹਿਤ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ) — The Sikh code of conduct.

rishi: (ਰਿਸ਼ੀ) — Sage, renunciant, or holy person.

roti: (ਰੋਟੀ) — Unleavened bread.

rumala: (ਰੁਮਾਲਾ) — Beautiful cloth used to cover and adorn the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

sadhu: (ਸਾਧੂ) — Spiritual person, renunciant, mendicant.

sahib: (ਸਾਹਿਬ) — Term of respect. Appended to the name of *gurduaras* and to the Sikh holy book.

sahijdhari: (ਸਹਿਜਧਾਰੀ) — One who professes Sikhism and has not undergone the Khalsa initiation ceremony and does not keep the hair uncut; non-Khalsa Sikh.

salvar kamiz: (ਸਲਵਾਰ ਕਮੀਜ਼) — The long tunic over full trousers that is the traditional dress of Punjabi women.

sangat: (ਸੰਗਤ) — Religious community or congregation.

sant: (ਸੰਤ) — Spiritual person, Sikh saint, an adherent of the Sant tradition.

Sapatsring: (ਸਪਤ ਸ੍ਰਿੰਗ) — The 'seven peaks' which surround Hemkunt.

Sarab Loh Granth: (ਸਰਬ ਲੋਹ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ) — 'The Book of the All Steel'; A book of writings attributed to the tenth Sikh Guru.

sarbatt khalsa: (ਸਰਬੱਤ ਖਾਲਸਾ) — 'Whole Khalsa'; an eighteenth and nineteenth century institution convened twice annually for the passing of consensus resolutions of import to entire Sikh *panth*.

saropa: (ਸਰੋਪਾ) — Length of cloth given as a gift of honour. Can be worn as a turban or a scarf.

sarovar: (ਸਰੋਵਰ) — The bathing pond in the compound of a *gurduara*. The lake of Hemkunt is called a *sarovar*.

Satguru: (ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ) — 'True Guru'.

Satnam: (ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ) — 'True Name'; refers to God's essence which pervades everything and is the only reality.

Sat Sri Akal: (ਸਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ) — 'True is the Timeless One'; the Sikh greeting and affirmation.

Sat Yug: (ਸਤਿ ਯੁਗ) — The age of truth; the first of four cosmic ages according to Hindu mythology.

seva: (ਸੇਵਾ) — Community service.

sevadar: (ਸੇਵਾਦਾਰ) — A person who performs *seva*.

shabad: (ਸ਼ਬਦ) — 'Word'; verse from scripture.

shakti: (ਸ਼ਕਤੀ) — 'Power'; the manifest aspect of a god or goddess, able to influence the material world.

Sikh: (ਸਿੱਖ) — 'Disciple'; a person who learns.

Sikhi: (ਸਿੱਖੀ) — 'Discipleship'; used to refer to the Sikh community, identity, teachings and way of life.

simran: (ਸਿਮਰਨ) — Repetition or meditation.

Singh: (ਸਿੰਘ) — 'Lion'; Sikh surname taken by all male members of the Khalsa.

sri: (ਸ੍ਰੀ) — Term of respect.

sabzi: (ਸਬਜ਼ੀ) — Vegetables.

tabla: (ਤਬਲਾ) — Drums.

takht: (ਤਖਤ) — 'Throne'; any of the five seats of temporal and religious authority for the Sikh community.

tapassia: (ਤਪੱਸਿਆ) — Asceticism, worship, intensive meditation, austerities, or penance.

tap asthan: (ਤਪ ਅਸਥਾਨ) — Where *tapassia* is practiced. Hemkunt was Guru Gobind Singh's *tap asthan* in his previous incarnation.

tap shila: (ਤਪ ਸ਼ਲਿਆ) — A flat stone on which one may sit in meditation.

tirath: (ਤੀਰਥ) — A sacred ford or place of crossing in the Hindu tradition; a pilgrimage shrine with its attendant beliefs (e.g. merit, purification) and practices (e.g. vows, austerities, rituals).

tirath yatra: ਯਾਤਰਾ) — 'Sacred journey' to a 'place of crossing'; pilgrimage in the Hindu tradition.

Vahiguru: (ਵਹਿਗੁਰੂ) — 'Wondrous Guru '.

vala: (ਵਾਲਾ) — General term used to refer to someone of a particular occupation.

yatra: (ਯਾਤਰਾ) — Sacred journey.

yatri: (ਯਾਤਰੀ) — Traveller, especially to a sacred place.

yoga: (ਯੋਗਾ) — 'Union'; spiritual techniques; asceticism.

yogi: (ਯੋਗੀ) — One who practices *yoga*.

Interviews Cited

Interview			Interviewee							
#	Place	Date	Gender	Marital Status	Religion	Place of Residence	Education Level	Occupation	Travelling Companions	# of Visits
01	Gobind Dham	1996-06-08	Male	Married	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Primary	Driver	Wife, son, and other family	12
02	Gobind Dham	1996-06-12	Male	Married	Sikh	Jalandhar, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	Wife, sons, and other family	1
03	Gobind Dham	1996-06-13	Male	Married	Sikh	Chandigarh, India	Secondary	Bank Clerk	*Jatha* from Chandigarh	1
04	Gobind Dham	1996-06-14	Male	Married	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	Daughter, two aunts, and cousin	13
05	Gobind Dham	1996-06-15	Female	Single	Sikh	Chandigarh, India	Post-Secondary	Instructor	Parents and cousin-brother	1
06	Gobind Dham	1996-06-18	Female	Married	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Homemaker	Indian Navy trekking group	1
07	Gobind Dham	1996-06-18	Female	Single	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Primary	Student	Group of eleven family members	13
08	Gobind Dham	1996-06-18	Male	Married	Hindu	Dehra Dun, India	Post-Secondary	Army Officer	Wife and daughter	3
09	Hemkunt Sahib	1996-07-07	Male	Married	Sikh	Toronto, Canada	Secondary	Manager	Wife, daughters, and other family	1
10	Hemkunt Sahib	1996-07-07	Female	Divorced	Sikh	Glasgow, Scotland	Secondary	Administrator	*Jatha* from England and Punjab	1
11	Gobind Dham	1996-07-08	Male	Married	Sikh	Patiala, India	Primary	Agriculturalist	*Jatha* from Patiala	2

Interview			Interviewee							
#	Place	Date	Gender	Marital Status	Religion	Place of Residence	Education Level	Occupation	Travelling Companions	# of Visits
12	Gobind Dham	1996-07-08	Male	Single	Hindu	Gobind Dham, India	N/A	Renunciant	N/A	N/A
13	Gobind Dham	1996-07-08	Female	Married	Sikh	Moradabad, India	Post-Secondary	Homemaker	Husband and servant	1
14	Hemkunt Sahib	1996-07-14	Male	Married	Hindu	Gobind Dham, India	Primary	Village Elder #1	N/A	N/A
15	Valley of Flowers	1996-07-20	Female	Divorced	Sikh	Nottingham, England	Secondary	Dancer	Group of youth from England	1
16	Gobind Dham	1996-07-20	Male	Married	Sikh	Hamilton, Canada	Post-Secondary	Student	Two uncles from Punjab	1
17	Gobind Dham	1996-07-20	Female	Married	Sikh	Bradford, England	Post-Secondary	Nurse	Group of youth from England	1
18	Gobind Dham	1996-07-21	Female	Single	Sikh	Leeds, England	Secondary	Student	Group of youth from England	1
19	Gobind Dham	1996-07-21	Male	Single	Sikh	Surrey, Canada	Post-Secondary	Student	Two uncles from Punjab	1
20	Gobind Dham	1996-07-24	Male	Single	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Secondary	Exporter	Group of friends from Netherlands	8
21	Gobind Dham	1996-07-24	Female	Single	Sikh	Bombay, India	Primary	Student	*Jatha* from Bihar and Maharashtra	2
22	Gobind Dham	1996-07-26	Male	Married	Sikh	Amsterdam, Netherlands	Secondary	Business Owner	Daughter, son, and friends	1
23	Hemkunt Sahib	1996-07-31	Male	Married	Sikh	Kanpur, India	Post-Secondary	Lawyer	None	2
24	Gobind Dham	1996-08-15	Male	Married	Sikh	K.L., Malaysia	Secondary	Driver	*Jatha* from Malaysia	1

Interview			Interviewee							
#	Place	Date	Gender	Marital Status	Religion	Place of Residence	Education Level	Occupation	Travelling Companions	# of Visits
25	Gobind Dham	1996-08-16	Male	Married	Hindu	Gobind Dham, India	Secondary	Village Elder #1	N/A	N/A
26	Gobind Dham	1996-08-18	N/A	N/A	Sikh	England	N/A	Group of Students	Group of youth from England	N/A
27	Valley of Flowers	1996-08-20	Male	Single	Sikh	Ludhiana, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	None	14
28	Hemkunt Sahib	1996-09-12	Female	Single	Sikh	London, England	Post-Secondary	Journalist	Parents, brother, and other family	1
29	Gobind Dham	1996-09-22	Female	Married	Sikh	Agra, India	Post-Secondary	Teacher	Husband and daughter	1
30	Gobind Ghat	1996-09-24	Female	Single	Sikh	Agra, India	Post-Secondary	Technologist	Parents	2
31	Gobind Ghat	1996-10-01	Male	Married	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	Wife, daughters, and other family	1
32	Gobind Ghat	1996-10-01	Male	Divorced	Sikh	Patiala, India	Post-secondary	Salesperson	Sister and other family	1
33	Gobind Ghat	1996-10-01	Female	Married	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Administrator	Husband, daughters, and other family	2
34	Gobind Ghat	1996-10-02	Male	Married	Sikh	Chandigarh, India	Post-Secondary	Army Officer	None	5
35	Gobind Ghat	1996-10-07	Male	Single	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Manager	*Jatha* from Delhi	16
36	Gobind Ghat	1996-10-07	Male	Single	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Salesperson	*Jatha* from Delhi	8
37	Gobind Ghat	1996-10-07	Female	Single	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Accountant	*Jatha* from Delhi	5

Interview			Interviewee							
#	Place	Date	Gender	Marital Status	Religion	Place of Residence	Education Level	Occupation	Travelling Companions	# of Visits
38	Pulna	1996-10-08	Male	Married	Hindu	Gobind Dham, India	Secondary	Village Elder #1	N/A	N/A
39	Pulna	1996-10-08	Male	Married	Hindu	Gobind Dham, India	Primary	Village Elder #2	N/A	N/A
40	Paonta Sahib	1996-10-12	Male	Married	Sikh	Paonta Sahib, India	Secondary	Agriculturalist	None	1
41	Ludhiana	1996-10-13	Male	Single	Sikh	Ludhiana, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	None	14
42	Ludhiana	1996-10-16	Male	Married	Sikh	Ludhiana, India	Post-Secondary	Professor	Wife and other family	2
43	Ludhiana	1996-10-18	Male	Single	Sikh	Ludhiana, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	None	14
44	Ludhiana	1996-10-18	Male	Married	Sikh	Ludhiana, India	Post-Secondary	Headmaster	Wife and children	1
45	Ludhiana	1996-10-18	Male	Married	Sikh	Ludhiana, India	Post-Secondary	Hemkunt Trustee	N/A	N/A
46	Jalandhar	1996-10-19	Male	Married	Sikh	Jalandhar, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	Wife, sons, and other family	1
47	Amritsar	1996-10-24	Male	Married	Sikh	Amritsar, India	Post-Secondary	Town Planner	Group from Amritsar	24
48	Amritsar	1996-10-25	Male	Married	Sikh	Amritsar, India	Post-Secondary	Town Planner	Group from Amritsar	24
49	Amritsar	1996-10-25	Female	Single	Sikh	Amritsar, India	Post-Secondary	Student	Father and Grandparents	11
50	Amritsar	1996-10-26	Male	Married	Sikh	Amritsar, India	Secondary	Contractor	*Jatha* from Amritsar	1

Interview			Interviewee							
#	Place	Date	Gender	Marital Status	Religion	Place of Residence	Education Level	Occupation	Travelling Companions	# of Visits
51	New Delhi	1996-10-27	Male	Married	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	*Jatha* from Delhi	31
52	New Delhi	1996-10-28	Male	Single	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Manager	*Jatha* from Delhi	16
53	New Delhi	1996-10-30	Male	Married	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Advocate	*Jatha* from Delhi	25
54	New Delhi	1996-10-31	Female	Single	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Accountant	*Jatha* from Delhi	6
55	Telephone	1997-02-03	Male	Married	Sikh	New York, U.S.A.	Post-Secondary	Hemkunt Trustee	N/A	N/A
56	Calgary	1997-03-22	Female	Married	Sikh	Calgary, Canada	Post-Secondary	Technologist	N/A	N/A
57	Telephone	1997-03-28	Male	Married	Sikh	New York, U.S.A.	Post-Secondary	Hemkunt Trustee	N/A	N/A
58	Calgary	1997-04-13	Male	Married	Sikh	Calgary, Canada	Post-Secondary	Doctor	N/A	N/A
59	Calgary	1997-04-20	Female	Single	Sikh	Calgary, Canada	Post-Secondary	Student	N/A	N/A
60	Vancouver	1997-06-28	Male	Single	Sikh	Vancouver, Canada	Post-Secondary	Student	N/A	N/A
61	New Delhi	1997-07-03	Male	Single	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Technologist	Sister and other family	1
62	New Delhi	1997-07-04	Male	Married	Sikh	Madras, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	*Jatha* from Delhi	2
63	Chandigarh	1997-07-06	Male	Married	Sikh	New York, U.S.A.	Post-Secondary	Professor of Sikh Studies	N/A	N/A

Interview			Interviewee							
#	Place	Date	Gender	Marital Status	Religion	Place of Residence	Education Level	Occupation	Travelling Companions	# of Visits
64	Chandigarh	1997-07-27	Female	Married	Sikh	Chandigarh, India	Post-Secondary	Homemaker	Husband and other family	1
65	Chandigarh	1997-07-27	Male	Married	Sikh	Patiala, India	Post-Secondary	Professor of Sikh Studies	N/A	N/A
66	Chandigarh	1997-07-27	Male	Married	Sikh	New York, U.S.A.	Post-Secondary	Professor of Sikh Studies	N/A	N/A
67	New Delhi	1997-08-09	Male	Married	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Advocate	*Jatha* from Delhi	25
68	New Delhi	1997-08-09	Male	Married	Sikh	Madras, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	*Jatha* from Delhi	2
69	New Delhi	1997-08-09	Male	Married	Sikh	New Delhi, India	Post-Secondary	Business Owner	*Jatha* from India	31
70	Gobind Ghat	1997-08-22	Male	Married	Sikh	New York, U.S.A.	Post-Secondary	Hemkunt Trustee	N/A	N/A
71	Hemkunt Sahib	1997-08-23	Male	Married	Sikh	Paonta Sahib, India	Secondary	Hemkunt *Granthi*	N/A	N/A
72	Hemkunt Sahib	1997-08-24	Male	Married	Hindu	Gobind Dham, India	Secondary	Village Elder #1	N/A	N/A
73	Hemkunt Sahib	1997-08-24	Male	Married	Sikh	New York, U.S.A.	Post-Secondary	Hemkunt Trustee	N/A	N/A
74	Gobind Dham	1997-08-25	Male	Married	Hindu	Gobind Dham, India	Post-Secondary	Village Elder #3	N/A	N/A
75	Rishikesh	1997-08-27	Male	Married	Sikh	Amritsar, India	Secondary	Agriculturalist	*Jatha* from Kanpur	10
76	Rishikesh	1997-08-27	Male	Married	Sikh	Bombay, India	Secondary	Government Servant	*Jatha* from Kanpur	20

Interview			Interviewee							
#	Place	Date	Gender	Marital Status	Religion	Place of Residence	Education Level	Occupation	Travelling Companions	# of Visits
77	Rishikesh	1997-08-27	Male	Married	Sikh	Kanpur, India	Secondary	Business Owner	*Jatha* from Kanpur	8
78	Rishikesh	1997-08-27	Male	Married	Sikh	New York, U.S.A.	Post-Secondary	Hemkunt Trustee	N/A	N/A
79	Gobind Dham	1997-09-07	Male	Married	Hindu	Gobind Dham, India	Post-Secondary	Village Elder #3	N/A	N/A
80	Dehra Dun	1997-09-12	Female	Married	Sikh	Dehra Dun, India	Post-Secondary	Archivist	N/A	N/A
81	Gobind Ghat	1997-09-30	Male	Married	Sikh	Kanpur, India	Secondary	Business Owner	*Jatha* from Kanpur	8
82	Gobind Dham	1997-10-04	Male	Single	Hindu	Gobind Dham, India	N/A	Renunciant	N/A	N/A

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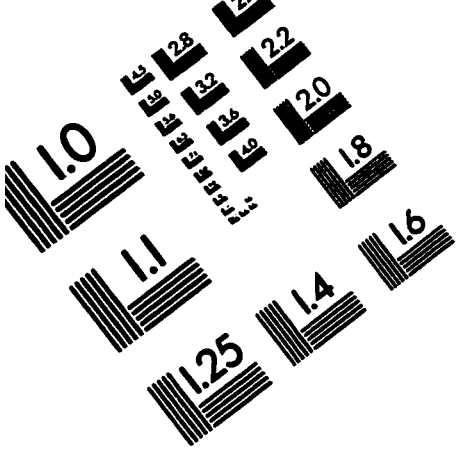

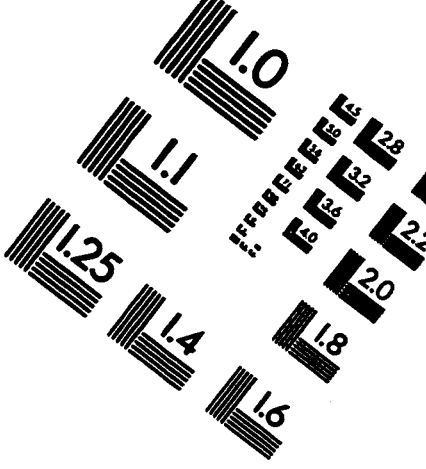

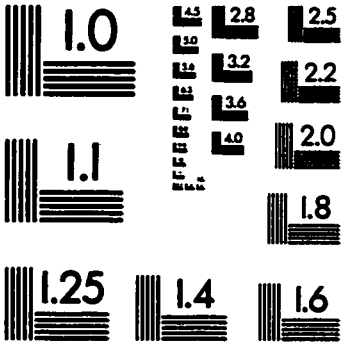

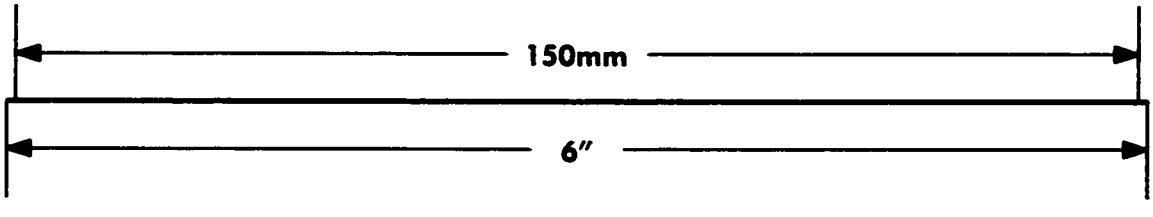

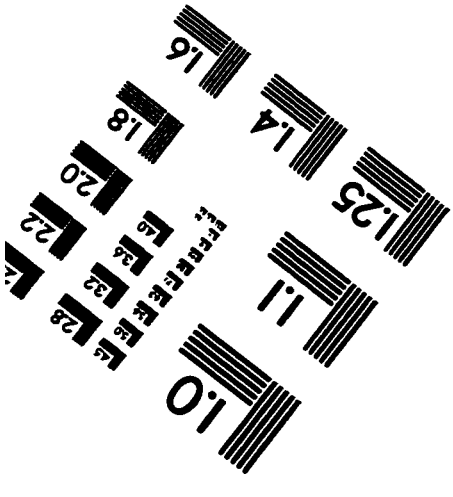

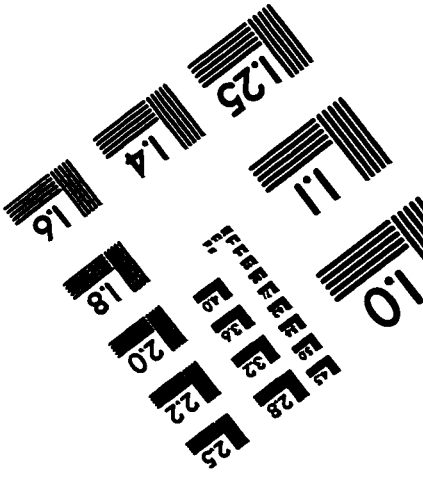

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