

J.S. Grewal

A Historian's Professional Journey

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This paper traces the professional journey of Professor J.S. Grewal (1927-2022) which epitomizes the expanding scope and method of history in the post-1960 Western world and India. His active interests evolved over time and encompassed a wide range. An integrated study of the Sikh and Punjab history in the context of medieval and modern India remained his hallmark. While his work in Sikh history has been regarded as path-breaking, his conceptualization of regional history is widely seen as a distinct departure. His studies of Punjabi literature, Persian documents, Indian Sufism, and British historiography of medieval India are considered seminal. Professor Grewal's contribution to urban history was especially acknowledged while proposing his name as General President of the Indian History Congress. As a Visiting Professor in India and North America he lectured on a wide range of subjects. He received several honors and awards, and held administrative responsibilities with distinction. All along, he continued to reflect on philosophy, method and teaching of history, even writing for school students. His commitment to history was total. The paper has ten sections and concludes with an overview of Professor Grewal's approach and method and some personal reminiscences, followed by a list of his published work.

To understand J.S. (Jagtar Singh) Grewal's professional journey, we may begin with aspects of his early life that apparently had a bearing on his vocation.¹

I

Early Environment, Education and Experiences

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Jagtar Singh Grewal's grandfather migrated from village Dhandra in Ludhiana district of British Punjab to the newly created Lyallpur district in the Lower Chenab Canal Colony. He worked hard to become a yeoman farmer (Sufedposh) and leave fifty acres of land for his son. Since the new village was inhabited

largely by his collaterals, it was also called Dhandra; in the colony records it was known as Chak No. 46 J.B. (Jhang Branch). The other landowners in the village were from different villages of the Ludhiana district and one village of Ambala. The Chak No. 46 was surrounded by the Sikh and Muslim villages. Besides Ludhiana, the Sikhs had come from Amritsar and Ambala districts. The Muslim settlers came from Amritsar and Hoshiarpur. All the settlers were Jats. But the Sikh settlers looked upon themselves as 'Jats' and thought of the rest as 'Musalmans'. There was also a village of the old nomadic inhabitants of the area, called 'Jaanglis', on one side of Dhandra across the canal. They were Muslim by religious affiliation. The small world of the boy Jagtar Singh, the youngest child of his parents, was socially an interesting world: it reflected not only economic differentiation but also religious, cultural and sub-regional diversities.²

For his early education, Jagtar Singh went to the anglo-vernacular middle school at a distance of 3 kms in a Muslim village called Ram Diwali, Chak No.2 J.B. In the school records his date of birth was entered as October 4, 1927 which may not be correct. Besides Urdu, which was also the medium of instruction, he studied arithmetic, geometry, history-geography and Persian as compulsory subjects, and opted for English in lieu of agriculture as a subject meant for rural boys. Only a small number of boys used to take up English. He recalled that he went to school on foot, took his tiffin along and generally finished his homework in the school itself, leaving the school bag in the village with the mother of a Muslim class fellow. He read all the books in the small school library - mostly Urdu fiction and poetry. A particular book which every student was asked to read was entitled *Jang-i Azadi*. It justified support for the British in the war which had started in 1939. Jagtar Singh stood first in school in the final examination and was on merit list for the district. But he was considered a bright boy in his own village because he had failed in no class.

Most of the boys in the school were from the Muslim villages because of its location. Rarely a boy from the 'Jaangli' villages would join the school. Most of the Sikh boys were from Dhandra. All the boys were from Jat families, with the exception of the son of a Hindu Patwari. The teachers were also Muslim, but only a few of them belonged to the neighborhood. The school had separate cabins for drinking water for Muslim and Sikh boys before the hand pump came into use in the late 1930s. The Muslim and Sikh boys used to sit separately for eating their tiffin during the recess

called *tafrih*, literally relaxation. By and large, they had friendly relations, sharing jokes, and occasionally, sweets purchased from a local shop. There could also be arguments, especially about the superiority of one's religious faith. This was a reflection of what the boys imbibed at home in the Punjab of the late 1930s. Forcible conversions to Islam by Aurangzeb and abduction of Hindu women by Mahmud Ghazni were common themes of speeches at the time of Guru Gobind Singh's birthday in Sikh villages.

In this environment informal education was as important as formal education. A few of the boys, and girls, learnt Gurmukhi in the village Gurdwara to be able to read the Sikh scripture. Much more attractive, however, was folklore and music. Among the various modes of popular entertainment there could occasionally be the performance of *Ram-Lila* (folk drama on the life of Rama as the incarnation of Vishnu) and *Ras-Lila* (dance and drama on the boy Krishna), presented by itinerant teams of artistes. Jagtar Singh was attracted to all such activities. He also discovered his love for Punjabi folk narratives in poetry (*kissa*) and read, among others, the *kissas* of Heer-Ranjha, Sohni-Mahiwal, Shah Bahram and Sassi-Punnu despite the disapproval of his father who was devoutly religious. He frowned upon secular entertainment of all kinds, and wanted his son to take religion seriously and attain to liberation (*moksha*). He remembered Guru Granth Sahib by heart and used to expound it in Vedantic terms and discuss its key concepts with all those who showed interest. He spent several summers on the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Yog Vashishtha*, asking his son to read these out and himself expounding the texts to a small audience which would assemble in the mango-grove belonging to the family. Jagtar Singh also visited the village Gurdwara in the evening, enjoyed *kirtan* and developed interest in Sikh theology. At one stage, he even thought of becoming a *ragi* (a singer of the verses of Guru Granth Sahib set to the *ragas*).

For matriculation, Jagtar Singh had to go to Lyallpur. He chose to join the Dhanpat Mal Anglo-Sanskrit High School, which was considered to be good because it showed good results. There was a lot more competition now. In addition to mathematics, history, geography, English and Persian he studied science in school, opting out of Urdu as literature but not as the medium. He enjoyed geography and Persian, but for history he had a photographic memory. He passed matriculation with a high first division, but with a lower percentage than at the middle school level. Residing in a hostel was a new experience, with good many distractions, including

football. The daily *havan* (fire-sacrifice), followed by *dharm-shiksha* (religious instruction) by an Arya Samaji 'Pandit' also was something new.

There was no career guidance for Jagtar Singh. His father was highly regarded in the locality for his learning and uprightness. For arbitration in disputes people preferred him over the village headman (*lambardar*). But all that his father wanted to ensure was that his son should never think of joining the police which in his view was oppressive, or the profession of law which sometimes obliged one to argue against the known truth. Jagtar Singh was guided largely by what his peers were doing. He got admission to B.Sc in agriculture, because the degree was believed to open good avenues for employment. The bright ones among his class fellows, however, were taking up medicine or engineering. Instead of joining the College of Agriculture, he joined Government College, Lyallpur, for 'F.Sc. non-medical' to study physics, chemistry and mathematics. English was a compulsory subject and he took up Urdu optional. The college environment was quite different from the school. In the college hostel there were boys from all over the south-western Punjab. Many of them belonged to rich zamindar families - spendthrift and well-dressed, fond of sports, and indifferent to studies. Jagtar Singh also cultivated these interests, doing better in football than in studies. He missed first division and could not compete for engineering. Perhaps, he was working against his essential inclination for social sciences, languages and literature. During the summer vacation he read the *Heer* of Waris Shah and also learnt to recite it.

The stay at the Government College, Lyallpur induced Jagtar Singh to go to Lahore for graduation. He convinced himself, and his father, that he should do B.Sc. which was possible only in Lahore. He applied for admission to the Forman Christian College which was then regarded as a premier institution in north India (now a Chartered University in Pakistan). There were about 2000 applicants for 200 seats, including a few reserved for sports. His powerful shots at the 'trials' won him the determined support of G.C. Sony who was looking after sports. He argued with the college authorities and got 'Physics and Mathematics-A Course' for Jagtar Singh. He worked hard at football, practicing for over two hours every day except Sundays. Like most sportsmen he was a back-bencher. But he did surprisingly well in physics. He found Professor Frank Thakur Das's 'Bible Class' interesting, attended it regularly and bought his own copy of the Bible.

The cosmopolitan environment of the college was a rich experience. The city had its own attractions. Many students were from elitist background, spending over five hundred rupees a month. Jagtar Singh spent much less than many, on an average a hundred and fifty, but even this was more than a college lecturer's salary in those days. This was a measure of his father's keenness to give good education to his son. He could have purchased at least ten acres of land with the savings.

Of his days at Lahore Professor Grewal recalled that he continued his interest in Urdu literature and remembered the *Diwan-i Ghalib* by heart. He also continued his interest in Persian, reading with a friend the books prescribed for B.A. He was introduced to modern Punjabi poetry through Mohan Singh's *Saave Pattar*; he did not much appreciate Amrita Pritam's 'Ajj Akhdi Waris Shah Nu'. Jagtar Singh developed a special liking for the Punjabi periodical *Preetlari*. Its liberal ideas and humanistic sympathies had great appeal for him. Once he lectured in his village on Guru Gobind Singh's conception of social equality and questioned why the low-castes were not allowed to enter the main hall of the local Gurdwara? This made him a hero among them, but he incurred the odium of the village elders. Like many young men of the 1940s, he felt inspired by patriotism. Although apolitical in his general stance, he worked for the Congress during the elections of 1946 and returned the unspent balance to the surprise of the campaign organizers.

After the March 1947 riots at Lahore, the college and the university were closed and the students went home. Jagtar Singh returned to Chak No. 46 J.B. Tension was gradually building up between Hindu-Sikhs and Muslims in the city of Lyallpur, also affecting the neighboring villages. He felt concerned about 'defense' against possible attacks, and raised a band of volunteers for this purpose. Once he had a narrow escape from a Muslim mob; he was actually saved by his own presence of mind and also that of a friend who was among them. Finally, after the August 15, he was prevailed upon by his father to leave for India, and Jagtar Singh managed to buy a seat in a privately run airline for one thousand rupees. His feeling at that time was one of sorrow and sadness, rather than anger or resentment. He boarded a train from Delhi to Ludhiana, travelling without ticket (there were no tickets then) and sitting at the top.

Back in the ancestral village, Jagtar Singh had the option to do 'social service' among the refugees to get the B.A. degree. He was going to get himself enlisted when he met a class fellow from the F.C. College who remarked that only the good-for-nothing sort of students were doing

'social service'. Jagtar Singh returned home to prepare for the B.A. examination without much reading material. He worked hard, studying in the quiet of the night by an oil lamp and sleeping on the floor. He passed the examination in second division and began to look for a job. His father, who had joined the family by then, was no longer in a position to support his education. Jagtar Singh was shortlisted for commission in the army but not selected finally. This, he felt, was largely due to his inability to articulate well in English.

Though vaguely, Jagtar Singh was intellectually ambitious. He wanted to study further. With little financial support, he could join only the college at Ludhiana. Fortunately for him, M.A. in English, geography and mathematics had been opened after many teachers from the Government College, Lahore joined the Government College, Ludhiana. Jagtar Singh joined M.A. in English which he had studied up to B.A. level. All that he needed was the tuition fee and a cycle to cover the 12 kms from his village. He could pass but could not get a second division. He did B.A. in geography during the summer vacation of 1949 to become eligible for admission to M.A. in that subject. He passed this second M.A. in one year, missing first division by a few marks. Like many other students of the college he began to think of competitive examinations. To overcome his inhibition in general and his inability to articulate in English, he accepted the advice of his teachers and began to participate in debates, declamations, recitations and extempore speech contests. His stage fright lessened and his articulation improved. Though he always managed good marks in written papers, he could qualify in the viva only once and that too for the Indian Police Service. On the basis of his performance in the written papers, Jagtar Singh was selected for the Audit and Accounts Service. He went for training at Nagpur, but only to discover that he had no interest in what he was being trained for. He found relief in fiction and cinema, and in antiquities and monuments. Using all admissible leave, he visited Sanchi, Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta.

By now it was clear to Jagtar Singh that he could not continue with Audit and Accounts. He began to feel that history could be an abiding interest. At this time, option had to be given for further training, and he opted for 'Postal Service' simply because the training was to be held nearer home at Kapurthala. There he made up his mind to take up research in history and go in for university teaching. He joined Masters at the History Department of the Panjab University, then at Hoshiarpur. Professor Hari Ram Gupta, who was heading the Department, told him

that he was a 'fool' to have resigned a good job. But he felt mollified to know that this new student wanted to pursue research. Jagtar Singh participated in a Punjabi poetry competition at the Government College, Hoshiarpur, and got the first prize. The participants included Sohan Singh Misha who was later acknowledged as a poet of distinction. Before long, savings ran out and Jagtar Singh felt obliged to get a teaching job at Ferozepur and appear in examination as a private candidate. He passed M.A. in history in 1956, managing to get a good second division which could serve as a reasonable base for research.

With hindsight, it is possible to see that far more important for research in history were Jagtar Singh's assets like ability to work with four languages (Persian, Urdu, Punjabi and English), a keen sense of space acquired from geography, familiarity with English, Urdu and Punjabi literature, exposure to Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, and the lived experience of the Sikh way of life and of the rural and urban Punjab. Above all, he had a secular rational world-view, in all probability imbibed from physics, mathematics and a liberal self-education.

II

Beginning of Research in History

Jagtar Singh now started exploring possibilities of research. Professor Gupta suggested 'social and economic conditions in the *Adi Granth*' as a possible subject. This did not appeal to Jagtar Singh at that time. Professor R.K. Kaul, who was teaching English at Hoshiarpur, advised him to read all the Greek and Latin classics in English translation as an intellectually rewarding pursuit. Jagtar Singh followed this advice and remembered it gratefully. He became more ambitious in his reading plans. He bought the ten volumes of Arnold Toynbee's *Study of History* and spent a whole year on its thorough reading. Oswald Spengler figured rather prominently in Toynbee's volumes. Jagtar Singh purchased his *Decline of the West* and studied it with equal interest. By now, he was thinking of working on interaction between Islamic and Indian civilizations during the medieval centuries. He had apparently been influenced by Toynbee's idea of interaction between two well developed civilizations. Professor R.K. Kaul suggested that he could work with Dr Fazl ul-Rahman, a known scholar of Islamic history and theology, who was teaching at Durham in U.K.

In his unrestrained ambition, Jagtar Singh sailed to England and chose to work on the 'social history of medieval India'. His familiarity with

Persian was surely an asset but at the back of his mind was the trauma of Partition as he recalled later. Staying at New Castle with his elder brother who had gone there in the early fifties, Jagtar Singh used to have weekly discussions with Dr Rahman, spending the whole day with him. Before the academic year ended, Jagtar Singh had drafted five or six chapters which were liked by Dr Rahman. At this stage, Dr Rahman shifted to Montreal in Canada.

Jagtar Singh went to London to work at the British Museum and the India Office Library. In the University Library in London he came upon Dr Peter Hardy's doctoral thesis on the 'Historians of Medieval India'.³ Immensely impressed by its quality, he made enquiries and learnt that Dr Hardy was teaching at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) just across the street. Jagtar Singh sought an appointment with the Head of the Department of History, Professor A.L. Basham, who was 'surprised' to learn that he was studying at Durham. 'But, London is the obvious place for you', he said. 'And, what about my admission', asked Jagtar Singh. 'You are admitted', Professor Basham replied! The next problem was how to support this research venture. Jagtar Singh applied for teaching jobs at several places, and accepted the first offer that came his way. By September 1958, he had shifted to London, doing research on part-time basis. His wife, Harjinder whom he had married in 1957, and baby daughter, Reeta, joined him in December. His wife's silent but sure support sustained him not only through research and work in London but also through his professional career till April 2007 when she passed away.

In view of Jagtar Singh's interest in medieval India, Professor Basham referred him to Dr Peter Hardy. Soon it was decided that the scope of his research should be restricted to a specific aspect of 'social history'. Jagtar Singh chose to work on Indian Sufism. Sufis, particularly Shaikh Farid, Nizamuddin Aulia and Bulleh Shah, were well known in the Punjab. Jagtar Singh saw most of the Persian manuscripts in the India Office Library and took notes. Before the year was out he was asked to give a seminar on how Indian Sufism had been treated by historians and social anthropologists. This gave him the idea that he could analyze British historical writing on medieval India. Dr Hardy did not take long to approve of this informal change. During the year that followed, Jagtar Singh studied the works of Alexander Dow, Edward Gibbon, William Jones, James Stuart Mill, Mount Stuart Elphinstone, James Grant-Duff, James Tod, J.D. Cunningham and several others, in addition to the manuscripts they had left behind and all that they had published,

including reviews. He left teaching and on the basis of his graduation in physics became 'laboratory assistant' in another school. This gave him more time and a place for work. Professor Grewal remembered that as a 'very hard time, but interesting also'. He wrote parts of his thesis while travelling on the local train.

Working with Dr Peter Hardy was an exciting experience. Himself an impeccable scholar with rigorous standards, Dr Hardy insisted on quality in research. A good understanding of the philosophy and methodology of history was essential for studying 'second-order history', that is history of historical writing. It proved to be a watershed in Jagtar Singh's growth as a researcher and a historian. He used to meet Dr Hardy once a week. Dr Hardy would ask him to explain each note in terms of its significance. He responded only to provoke Jagtar Singh to think. They both enjoyed their weekly sittings so much that whenever Dr Hardy got late, Mrs Hardy would say, 'must have been Grewal'!

After about a year, Dr Hardy went on sabbatical. Major J. B. Harrison supervised the research of his students. Grewal drafted his thesis within a year. On Dr Hardy's return, however, it took him one year more. Dr Hardy would insist upon careful weighing of statements, clarity of expression, economy of words, and logical connections. 'Your sentences should come like bullets', he used to advise. 'Never say the same thing twice' was another piece of advice. 'The opening sentence of your paragraph should contain its basic idea'. 'If I read the opening sentences of your paragraphs, I should get a summary of your chapters'. To crown it all, he would add 'do as I say, not as I do'. It was a marvelous time. Professor Grewal acknowledged later that Dr Hardy taught him how to write clearly. And to write clearly remained the height of his ambition. He had learnt also to think for himself. These years deepened his conviction that irrespective of one's metaphysical beliefs, historical change must be explained in rational and human terms.

Finally, the day of 'submission' came, and after the necessary formalities were over, Dr Hardy declared, 'henceforth, I'll be your examiner'. This, however, did not make him indifferent. He gave to Jagtar Singh three or four difficult passages from Abul Fazl and Amir Khusrau for translation. After some time, he asked Jagtar Singh if he would like to work as a Research Associate in a project on Persian sources of Medieval India. In fact, Dr Hardy had shown the translated passages to Professor A.K.S. Lambton for a 'green signal'. Jagtar Singh liked the idea and worked on this project for several months. Dr Hardy would often say,

'Grewal goes through Persian like knife through butter', but he ascribed this to Dr Hardy's kindness.

After obtaining his doctoral degree in 1963, Dr Grewal had to decide about his future course. Dr Hardy was keen that he should go to the Duke University in USA as an Assistant Professor, but Dr Grewal was keen to return and to work in his own country. He happened to receive offers from Kirori Mal College at Delhi and the Panjab University, Chandigarh. When he asked Dr Hardy for advice, without any hesitation he said that Delhi was the obvious place. 'Don't you know it is K.M. Ashraf's college?' Dr Ashraf was a well-known historian of medieval India. The vacancy had in fact arisen because of his death. Dr Grewal came to Delhi in 1963 to teach history at the K.M. College. His wife and daughters, Reeta and Aneeta, joined him later. Dr. A.C. Joshi, the Vice-Chancellor of the Panjab University, renewed his offer informally a year later, and Dr Grewal thought that Chandigarh might on the whole be a better place for him to work. He joined the Department of History at the University as a Lecturer in August 1964.

III

Post-Doctoral Research and Publications: Chandigarh

This was the beginning of Dr Grewal's career as a historian. He had already attended a session of the Indian History Congress and published a research paper on J.D. Cunningham in 1964. During his stay of nearly seven years at Chandigarh Dr Grewal took interest in several new areas which stayed with him. He was soon working on Mughal documents acquired by Dr B.N. Goswamy, then teaching in the newly created Department of Fine Arts at the Panjab University. These *madad-i ma'ash* (charitable revenue-grants) documents in Persian related to the Jogi establishment at Jakhbar near Pathankot. In view of its 'size, range and character' this collection turned out to be extremely significant. Dr Grewal remembered his long sittings with Dr Goswamy which revealed, among other things, his keen observation and an exceptional ability to decipher formidable *shikasta*. Subsequently, Professor Goswamy recalled their team-work:

Months of careful laborious work followed: evening after evening we pored over these documents, trying to make sense of the unfriendly *shikasta* script in which most of them are written;

decoding words, phrases, usages; taking a sentence apart and then putting it back again; tracking down the tiniest places that figured in them; reconstructing the history of the establishment and its traditions; discussing the context and the importance of these grants and deciding about the format in which our book would - we were hopeful - appear; facsimiles of documents followed by transcriptions by translation by annotation etc. It was hard, nuts and bolts kind of research work. But there was never a dull moment in those evenings. Each time I sat down with Professor Grewal I learnt something; each session enhanced my awareness of the issues involved; each discussion was lit up by great wit and intelligence. We saw ourselves as a team – in the course of those months Professor Grewal became for me 'Jagtariji' (the ji I have never been able to drop) – ready to take the whole field on.⁴

The Jakhbar collection was published in 1967 by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. Its Director, Professor Nihar Ranjan Ray, was quick to recognize its wide-ranging significance. It presented concrete evidence about *madad-i ma'ash* to non-Muslims which was not known generally. Its importance for Mughal polity and state patronage was obvious. It was also the first work on a Jogi establishment, representing a very important movement that dominated the Punjab for several centuries. In 1969, the Institute published another set of documents by the team as the *Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori*. Dr Goswamy had been able to procure this much bigger, more diverse and more significant collection of documents from a Vaishnava establishment at Pindori, not far from Jakhbar. Covering 300 years of a Vaishnava institution this was also the first study of its kind. Furthermore, nearly three-fourths of the fifty-two documents published from this collection pertained to the century of Sikh rule, providing insights into the administration of the early Sikh rulers and nature of the Sikh polity. The earliest available seal of a Sikh ruler in this collection is of 1750 CE which suggested that by then individual Sikh leaders had begun occupying territory in central Punjab. Although the Jakhbar collection also had documents from the period of Sikh rule, their significance, admitted Dr Grewal, was missed by them. They included only one order (*parwana*) of a Sikh ruler in the eighteen documents selected from that collection. Together, the two collections touched upon several aspects of polity,

administration, revenue-grants, and property right. Yielding valuable insights and setting very high standards of editing and annotation, these two volumes served as the bases for subsequent researches of Dr Grewal's students on the period of Sikh rule.

In 1965, Dr Grewal was asked by the Department to teach pre-colonial history of the Punjab. Soon, he felt vaguely dissatisfied with the available reading on the eighteenth century. His own understanding of this period was reflected in an essay on the 'Eighteenth Century Sikh Polity',⁵ which he presented at a seminar on the 'Medieval Indian State', organized at his initiative by the Department of History in March 1966. With his thrust on how power was acquired and actually wielded, he argued that the *misl*, *gurmata*, *dal Khalsa*, and the *rakhi* had no relevance for administration and governance under the Sikh rulers in the late eighteenth century. This seminal essay questioned the generally accepted view of Sikh polity embodied in J.D. Cunningham's formulation of 'theocratic confederate feudalism'. Subsequently, Dr Grewal's detailed analyses of the Persian histories of the Punjab by Ahmad Shah of Batala and Ganesh Das Wadhwa reinforced his view that the connection between the religion of the Sikhs and the acquisition of power by them stopped short of governmental arrangements.⁶ Cunningham's formulation, which had been accepted entirely or partially by nearly all the later historians, stood discarded in the doctoral research of Dr Grewal's students.

In November 1966, the Punjab became a Punjabi-speaking state. In early 1967, the Panjab University decided to celebrate Guru Gobind Singh's third birth centenary by publishing his biography. Dr Grewal accepted the assignment jointly with Dr S.S. Bal. In addition to the 'Introduction' giving the background and the wider historical context, Dr Grewal wrote on the institution of the Khalsa and the post-Khalsa phase. The focus on Guru Gobind Singh's mission obliged him to remain close to contemporary sources, especially the tenth Guru's own writings and the *hukamnamas*. While Dr Grewal found contemporary evidence lacking on some 'vital points', he maintained that beliefs held by a large number of people over a period of time must be respected. The historian may 'suspend his judgement' till he has thoroughly examined 'the later tradition and the historical circumstances under which it came into existence'.⁷ Strictly following, thus, the norms of historical methodology, he sought to understand the secret of Guru Gobind Singh's greatness in human and rational terms. Dr Grewal gave a copy of this book to Professor S. Nurul Hasan, a distinguished medievalist from the Aligarh

Muslim University. Professor Hasan told him a little later that his appreciation for Guru Gobind Singh had increased immensely after reading the book. Thenceforward, recalled Professor Grewal, Professor Nurul Hasan, who became the Minister of Education at the center, treated him with great kindness and respect.

In 1969, the Panjab University celebrated Guru Nanak's 500th birth centenary by publishing a historical study of the Guru. This work was assigned to Dr Grewal. It was not an easy task. A lot had already been written on Guru Nanak. Only a year ago Dr W.H. McLeod's *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* had come out. He had analyzed Guru Nanak's theology thoroughly, and concluded that his biography could not be written with the available sources and techniques. Dr Grewal decided to start with an open mind and address his enquiry to 'the role which Guru Nanak assumed for himself and the legacy which he left to his successors'.⁸ To get an answer he made a distinction between the 'conditions' of Guru Nanak's times and his 'response' to those conditions. It was a modification on Toynbee's idea of challenge and response. Dr Grewal sought his answers about the first from the Persian sources, Bhakti literature and later works; and for the second, he sought his answers directly from Guru Nanak by analyzing his compositions in Guru Granth Sahib, verse by verse, line by line. Dr Grewal used the compositions of the successor Gurus and Bhai Gurdas and the *Janamsakhis* only for understanding how Guru Nanak's successors and followers viewed his mission. It emerged from this analysis that Guru Nanak was constructively critical of every religious system around.

Unlike Dr McLeod who placed Guru Nanak in the *sant* tradition, that is amongst the *sants* (not saints) like Kabir and Ravidas, Dr Grewal came to the conclusion that Guru Nanak was telling something new. He was offering a system of interconnected ideas which was independent of other systems, notwithstanding the similarities of their constituent elements. For example, Kabir also used the terms *hukam*, *shabad*, *nadar*, *naam* and the *guru*, but the concepts were not the same. Dr Grewal put these ideas together in their relative importance, and as a coherent whole. He came upon a totally different kind of religious ideology than what is found in Kabir. Moreover, Guru Nanak's social and political concerns underscored his social commitment. Kabir did not think of equality in terms of gender, though he remained concerned with caste. He had a bare inkling of the political situation around, but Guru Nanak used political metaphors frequently and even made direct statements on contemporary politics and

administration, criticizing oppression, injustice, corruption and discrimination. Thus, approaching Guru Nanak with an open mind and paying close attention to his words enabled Dr Grewal to bring out 'the distinctive quality' of his message in the context of his times.⁹ Here, the role of the theologian and the historian overlapped, but the author remained embedded in the discipline of history. With this starting point, Dr Grewal could provide an alternative kind of interpretation of the whole range of Sikh history.

In a comparative study of the methodology of the historians of Guru Nanak, Dr John C.B. Webster, a historian of Christianity in North India, observed that by this 'study of Guru Nanak as Guru', Dr Grewal 'placed himself on very safe ground from the point of view of historical scholarship', while at the same time 'satisfying the demands of faith by using a method which highlights Guru Nanak's moral fervour' and 'the depth and scope of his experience'.¹⁰ In the words of Professor Harjeet S. Gill, a renowned linguist:

We witness here the dialectical and analytical incisions of the highest order. It is a radical departure from the traditional empirical historiography. It is situated squarely in the domain of the history of ideas, *histoire de idées*, in the dialectical interaction with the existing theological parameters.¹¹

Dr Grewal has rendered 'great service to the study of Indian history', says Professor S. Nurul Hasan: 'With his erudition, research and discovery of new facts, he has combined a degree of objectivity and scientific outlook which is uncommon among the historians of such subjects'.¹² The book came out in 1969; it was awarded a specially instituted prize by the President of India, and the degree of D. Lit by the University of London in 1971.

Meanwhile, Dr Grewal had revised his doctoral thesis submitted to the University of London as 'British Historical Writing from Alexander Dow to Mount Stuart Elphinstone on Medieval India'. It was published in 1970 by the Oxford University Press as *Muslim Rule in India: The Assessments of British Historians*, analyzing the worldviews, assumptions, methods and purposes of the British historians. The author related these to the imperial interests of the British as well as the contemporary intellectual movements like the Enlightenment, Utilitarianism, Evangelicalism, and Romanticism. He underlined 'the growing

awareness that the modes of historical research and interpretation largely reflect the historian's own intellectual and cultural environment'.¹³ As a form of the history of ideas, this 'second-order-history' illumined the first order history of Indo-British relationship itself, laying bare the 'first traces of some of the stereotypes of British thinking about India and the place of Muslims therein'.¹⁴ In fact, Dr Grewal rejected stereotypes in nearly all areas, attributing this to insufficiency of evidence and the temptation to generalize. In his view, the foremost and fundamental stereotype in British historical writing was periodization itself.¹⁵

Another offshoot of Dr Grewal's doctoral work was his *Medieval India: History and Historians* (1975). This volume included masterly analyses of the classic works of Grant-Duff on the Marathas, James Tod on the Rajputs, and J.D. Cunningham on the Sikhs. Commenting on both the volumes, which were published a few years ahead of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Professor Irfan Habib says:

They present a striking contrast to the latter work in offering a critical and balanced appraisal of Orientalist endeavours in retelling the story of medieval India. In a notably insightful judgement Professor Grewal holds British historical writing on India to have been 'inspired by efforts at self-understanding as well as by self-interest'. The latter motive qualifies but does not obliterate the positive contributions made by British historians. It must be added that Professor Grewal always remains fully conscious of the inaccuracies and imbalances in the writings that he himself so carefully scrutinizes.....he brings out the great break from the older conventional European view of Islamic civilization that Edward Gibbon represented – a point Edward Said significantly overlooks....Professor Grewal does not also omit to give W.H. Moreland his due for bringing in economic history into a scholarly tradition so heavily burdened until then with the baggage of political history.....Professor Grewal has thus been able to put practically all the important Indo-British historians in their proper contexts, by reference to their careers and affiliations.

Furthermore, says Professor Irfan Habib, Professor Grewal's works show that very few British historians used 'primary' documents for their sources; they relied usually on historical texts only.¹⁶

In 1971, while still at Chandigarh, Dr Grewal completed his study of a number of legal documents in Persian which he had found at the Punjab State Archives at Patiala as a part of the 'Bhandari Collection'. In all, there were over 150 deeds of sale, mortgage, gift, agreement and declaration, executed in the court of the *qazi* of Batala from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. Their analysis showed that the office of the *qazi* continued to administer part of the *shari'at* for both Muslims and non-Muslims in the Sikh times in the same way as under the Mughals. This was particularly true in matters of contract.¹⁷

The Batala documents provided unequivocal evidence on the existence of proprietary right in land; land was owned also by the lower castes; even women held property, having the same rights as men in certain situations. The documents throw light on the prices of land, rates of interest, revenue functionaries, agrarian economy and urban life. Through a rigorous analysis of the documents, seals and hundreds of attestations in different scripts - Persian, Lande, Devnagari and Gurmukhi - Dr Grewal was able to get glimpses of life in the town and social relations across creeds and classes. To reconstruct the history of the town, he had to enlarge the scope of his evidence to include other sources and field work, literally going through the by-lanes of this fascinating town which retained much of its old world charm in the late sixties. He also used the evidence of frescos, inscriptions and graffiti. In fact, the graffiti, largely in Persian verse in the tomb (*hazira/hajira*) of the founder of Batala, giving the names, parentage and places of the visitors along with the dates of their visits, became the starting point of Dr Grewal's explorations. Published in 1975 somewhat misleadingly under the title, *In the By-Lanes of History*, this came to be regarded as the first study of a medieval Indian town.¹⁸

IV

Broadening Concerns and Institution Building: Amritsar

In 1971, Dr Grewal was selected as Professor of History at the newly established Guru Nanak Dev University at Amritsar, and as Associate Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. After much debate with himself and some discussion with academic friends, he chose to go to Amritsar which appeared to present the opportunity of establishing a new center of historical studies. As its Founder-Head, and as the first Dean of the University and its third Vice-Chancellor, Professor Grewal's

work at Amritsar was multidimensional. He revised the history syllabi and introduced examination reforms, initiated a publication program, introduced research and translation projects, launched journals, and encouraged faculty members and researchers in social sciences and humanities to pursue excellence in research in regional studies. The cornerstone was his own work. He published path-breaking essays, brought to light new source materials in Persian, analyzed religious and secular literature in Punjabi, wrote monographs and books, and motivated his colleagues and students to explore new areas of research.

Professor Grewal's publications from Amritsar prepared ground for an integrated study of the Punjab and Sikh history. The two were inseparable in his view: one could not be studied without reference to the other. However, if the scope of regional history was much wider, the Sikhs could be studied in diaspora. In 1972, the University published a collection of his articles entitled, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, each essay being pointed and refreshing, sometimes a daring departure from conventional understanding. All but one of these 18 essays had been submitted by him alongside his other work to the University of London for the degree of D.Lit. It went into four editions, the last coming out in 2007.

In another collection published by the University in 1974 as *The Historian's Panjab* new directions for research in Punjab history were suggested, fresh sources were introduced and a case for the study of regional history was made:

The regional historian, because of his limited canvas, can venture to study a region in the round during a given period. In order to make his study meaningful, he has not only to discover new forms of evidence but also to learn new methods and techniques of analysing available evidence. He has also to evolve concepts cutting across religious or communal affinities. A study that is truly regional cannot be parochial. Only an uninhibited and dedicated research can serve national interest in the last analysis.¹⁹

Professor Grewal felt convinced that one way of improving our understanding of Indian history was an intensive study of a region as its unit, with different kind of information, problems and interpretations. The region for him was not a political unit but a geographical entity with certain features. His assumption here seemed to be that cultural

developments, among other things, were related to the physical environment and its zones. Study of a region and its sub-regions in terms of continuities and changes over decades, centuries, and even millennia, could yield meaningful results. He applied this approach to his studies of the Punjab region and motivated others to publish on local and regional history (1974).

In 1975, the year of the four hundredth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom, a controversy arose over interpretation of the evidence of some Persian chronicles on his life. Professor Grewal decided to examine the tradition of Persian historiography developed around the ninth Guru by analyzing the accounts of ten Persian chroniclers of the period of Sikh rule (Ahmad Shah, Aliuddin, Bakht Mal, Budh Singh, Ghulam Husain, to name a few). He compared their purposes, attitudes, methods and statements about the life and pontificate of Guru Tegh Bahadur, and brought out their factual errors and logical contradictions. Professor Grewal provided a significant insight into their usefulness vis-à-vis Sikh tradition:

The present day historian of Guru Tegh Bahadur can safely afford to shut the Persian chronicles and open the Gurmukhi works. It may be suggested, indeed, that more meaningful evidence on a people who at a certain stage of their history were at the receiving end is likely to come from them rather than those who identified themselves with the powers that were. Paradoxically, the 'worm's eyeview' is likely to be more useful to the historian than the 'bird's eyeview' in studying such historical situations.²⁰

Conversely, Persian sources broadened the perspective and added depth to the history of Ranjit Singh and his times. The English translation of a part of Ganesh Das's Persian history, titled the *Char Bagh-i Panjab*, was published in 1975 as the *Early Nineteenth Century Panjab*. Its comprehensive introduction, classified indices and useful annotation enhanced its value as a source for political and social history of the region.²¹ Yielding topographical, sociological and cultural data on the region, it became the foundation for several theses and dissertations produced at Amritsar and elsewhere. This work led to a project on the Punjabi translation of Persian sources. The second *daftar* of Sohan Lal Suri's voluminous record of Ranjit Singh and his predecessors entitled *Umdat-ut Tawarikh*, and covering the period from 1771 to 1830, was

published in 1985.²² It contained 'the most significant kind of evidence' on the political process under Ranjit Singh, his administration and the ruling class, besides 'his movements, pilgrimages, thanksgiving bathings and charities'.²³ Yet another significant Persian source, complementing Sohan Lal Suri's *Umdat* and showing Ranjit Singh actually 'at work', was a collection of more than 450 of his orders addressed to a single officer over a single year. Their translation and comprehensive analysis was published in 1987 as *Civil and Military Affairs of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*.²⁴

Professor Grewal promoted a rounded study of the Punjab under Ranjit Singh through his own work and that of his students. The seminars organized by him brought out several less known facets of the times. The focus was more on the processes, institutions, peoples and their cultural articulation.²⁵ In 1981, the Punjabi University, Patiala published the Sita Ram Kohli Memorial Lectures by Professor Grewal as *The Reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Structure of Power, Economy and Society*. While putting together the results of recent researches, these lectures provided clues for further enquiry into his administrative organization, system of justice and the sources from which Ranjit Singh derived legitimacy. They also dwelt on the agrarian society, urbanization, trade and banking, spread of Sikhism, emergence of a composite ruling class and secularization of consciousness during his reign (1790-1839). Awareness of the 'core region' and sub-regional variations informed the discussion all through. It also took into account the relative economic advantages enjoyed by various sections of society in the configuration of power. The patronage of Punjabi literature which was meant 'for all the three communities' gave 'an indication of a better mutual understanding and a growing inter-communal cohesion' in this period.²⁶ In one sense, Ranjit Singh created a Sikh kingdom, but it was also a Punjabi enterprise. In the contemporary context, it had 'no chance of survival. In the context of ancient and medieval times, however, 'his reign was the most glorious epoch in the history of the Punjab'.²⁷

The *Journal of Regional History* with Professor Grewal as the editor was launched at Amritsar in 1980, the second birth centenary year of the Maharaja. The 1981 issue of the *Journal* was devoted to him, and a substantial paper on 'the Historians of Ranjit Singh' was contributed by the editor himself. The early volumes of the *Journal* touch upon several relatively new themes with an interdisciplinary approach like historical geography, state-formation, social classes, Sikh tradition, religious establishments, agrarian economy, urbanization, cultural resurgence,

including art and literature. Thus, a refreshing and rounded picture of the north-western region began to emerge.

The 'value of literature', whether religious or secular, as a form of historical evidence was underlined by Professor Grewal. He made a beginning as early as 1965 at the first session of the Punjab History Conference at Patiala, with a paper on the *Prem Sumarg* as a theory of Sikh social order. Over time, he worked on different *genres* of medieval Punjabi literature like the *Vars*, *Gurbilases*, *Rahitnamas* and the *Sakhis*. He analyzed the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, the *B-40 Janamsakhi*, *Bansavalinama* of Kesar Singh Chhibber and the *Panth Prakash* of Ratan Singh Bhangu. In his analysis of the *Heer-Waris* 'as a great social document' he took into account 'every word' for reconstruction of social and cultural history in mid-eighteenth century. Professor Grewal also analyzed the Punjabi drama written in response to the colonial situation. He emphasized that the emergence of new literary genres was always 'a pointer to social transformation'.²⁸ He treated literature as 'a mirror' of society, but cautioned that there was no one to one relationship between literature and history.

Once we learn to treat literary works as the product of history it is possible to know much more about the past than what the writers wanted us to know. A work of literature has to be unwound, so to speak, to get at the historical situation that produced it. This does not mean, however, that a literary work is a direct reflection of the total historical situation. The exact relationship has to be discovered rather than assumed in the case of every writer, in fact, in the case of every literary work.²⁹

Professor Grewal's *Sikhs of the Punjab* was characteristic of his integrated approach to the study of Sikh and Punjab history. In response to an invitation from the *New Cambridge History of India series* in 1981, he wrote a history of the Sikhs placing it squarely in the context of the Punjab and treating it with reference to Indian history. Published in 1990, it took note of the latest research and touched upon 'religious, social, political, economic, cultural and demographic developments over the entire span of Sikh history'.³⁰ In the first six chapters on medieval period, there is an unmistakable stamp of his own path breaking research and that of his students. In four chapters covering the period of colonial rule and the post-Independence developments up to 1984, the author's focus is on change with reference to continuities, on what was happening within the

community in the larger historical context of the region and the country, and why. The Epilogue and the Postscript trace the developments up to 1990. Its second edition (1998) has run into several reprints.

An offshoot of Professor Grewal's interest in local and regional history was the team project proposed by him in the mid-1970s to the University Grants Commission on 'Urbanization in the Upper Bari Doab, c.1600-1947'. About a dozen urban centers were taken up under this project which identified, located and used a variety of sources, including municipal records, to reconstruct the history of small towns in this geographical sub-region. Under its aegis, a seminar on 'urban history' was organized at Amritsar in 1978. The participants included distinguished scholars from the entire spectrum of Indian history like Shireen Ratnagar, Nurul Hasan, S.C. Misra, Narayani Gupta and an urban geographer like Atiya Habeeb Kidwai. The idea mooted by Narayani Gupta and endorsed by all the participants led eventually to the formation of the Urban History Association of India. Geographers, sociologists, economists and town-planners too were among its active members, though the sustained support came from the discipline of history. Professor Grewal worked for the Association in various capacities, including that of president. In addition to organizing its annual symposia and biennial seminars and publishing *News-Letters* and *Occasional Papers*, he contributed research papers on urban history and edited two volumes: *Studies in Urban History* (1981) and *Calcutta: Evolution of a Colonial Metropolis* (1991). When Professor Grewal was elected General President of the Indian History Congress in 1984 his pioneering role in promoting urban history in India was cited as one of the reasons. At the same time, his work is said to have presented a significantly wider approach in the study of the region:

By placing Punjab history in its larger context, Grewal takes into consideration a diversity of forces and factors, contributing to a more objective social history. It is with this more rigorous methodology and critical attitude towards both the sources and the work of earlier historians that historical writings on medieval Punjab begin to conform to the more exacting standards demanded by present day research.³¹

The depth and breadth of Professor Grewal's vision of regional studies in pan-Indian context was reflected in the two multi-volume team projects – one on the socio-cultural history of the Punjab 'since the earliest

times' and the other on the 'history of literature in the Punjab', including creative literature in Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and English – which he formulated and coordinated as the Vice-Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University (1981-84). Over thirty scholars were associated with these projects which were pursued even during the time of militancy at Amritsar. Institutional support for them ceased after the Vice-Chancellor's tenure ended in November, but some scholars, including Professor Grewal himself, continued to work and publish on aspects covered by these projects.

V

As Teacher of History

At Chandigarh and Amritsar Professor Grewal made a mark also as a teacher of history. For him research and teaching were inseparable, each strengthening the other, and the two together strengthening the discipline. Therefore, he paid considerable attention to making history teaching a meaningful pursuit at all levels – in schools, colleges, and universities. Being in a new university at Amritsar gave him considerable freedom and flexibility. He was closely associated with the revision of the school syllabi for all classes in the Punjab state. For the junior classes particularly he tried to relate the social studies courses with the society around and with the surviving monuments and structures in the region. He was also associated with the review of history textbooks from the perspective of national integration. He considered writing for school children extremely important. He himself wrote a *History of India* with an elaborate 'work-book' for class XI. He believed that only the historians themselves writing for schools and colleges could raise the standard of history textbooks.

Professor Grewal remained equally concerned with the problems of history teaching in colleges. He was one of the 'leaders' for a three-week seminar-cum-workshop on the 'Study of History and College History Teaching', organized at the Punjabi University, Patiala in 1965. This workshop was 'the first of its kind to be held in India'. In the second workshop held at the Panjab University early in 1966, he made 'an outstanding contribution' as its initiator, local secretary and one of the 'leaders'. The other 'leaders' were Dr Romila Thapar, Dr Ravinder Kumar, Dr P.S. Gupta and Dr. John C.B. Webster. In their view, 'it is impossible to teach history well without realizing what is involved in being a historian,

what its methods and techniques are, and what the latest researches on any particular theme are'.³² The third workshop of the series was convened by Professor S.C. Misra at Baroda, with Professor Grewal among its 'leaders'.

The experience of these workshops proved to be useful when Professor Grewal organized 'summer institutes' and workshops at Amritsar. He believed that the syllabi, teaching and evaluation should be treated as one integrated whole. He involved nearly a hundred history teachers in this endeavor through conferences and workshops held at Amritsar. Besides reviewing the syllabi, they were engaged in discussing techniques of teaching and evaluation at undergraduate level, as well as the preparation of question banks. They were also associated with standardization of the processes of evaluation and moderation. This pilot project was based on the conviction that through 'piece-meal technology' a 'closer integration of teaching, learning and evaluation' can be brought about even at undergraduate level.³³

Professor Grewal's M.A. students at Chandigarh remembered him as a serious-minded and earnest teacher, keen to work hard for them – taking pains to prepare lectures and minutely going through their assignments. He gently argued a point with them for hours until they were able to get rid of their prejudices and unquestioned assumptions about medieval India in particular. They were encouraged to think for themselves. For postgraduate teaching at Amritsar, Professor Grewal could do more. During his first year there, he was able to persuade the Board of Studies in History to introduce 'the system of prescribed monographic literature for each paper of M.A. in addition to the books for reference', which was acknowledged as 'a sound idea' by the UGC North Zone Workshop held at Amritsar in 1976.³⁴ By then, the affiliated colleges too had accepted and implemented the system. In the Department of History, 'prescribed reading' was combined with lecture outlines, reference reading, supervised library work, seminar discussions and individual tutorials. It was altogether a new experience for the students coming from the neighboring villages and small towns which remained backward because of proximity to the international border. Professor Grewal was acutely conscious of their handicaps and would often tell his colleagues that success should be measured in terms of what these students became at the end of two years. After they overcame their initial resistance, many of them even began enjoying the library hours and working on their own in the afternoons. There were no 'free periods' in the forenoons: the students

were either attending lectures or working in the well-stocked Department library. A dictionary became their companion everywhere.

Discussions with Professor Grewal were stimulating and some of the students who had been planning for years to compete for the civil-services, felt enthused to take up research and teaching. He shaped them up with generosity, patience and care, ensuring that they grasped the nature of history as a discipline along with the finer points of its methodology and techniques of research. As a supervisor, Professor Grewal took researchers to task if they failed to appear for their periodic discussions. He was particular about the mechanics of note-taking, encouraging the use of the note as a tool of research. He discussed each note with the researcher – going into its rationale, significance and possible uses. These discussions often led to fresh insights. The researchers were encouraged to formulate as many questions as possible. They were required to know the terrain, or every significant geographical feature of the area under study. Their research was amply illustrated by maps and diagrams. Professor Grewal was equally particular about their learning the language of sources. Since most of his early students worked on medieval period, they were encouraged to acquire a working knowledge of Persian by translating passages from the early nineteenth century Persian works. Steingass's *Persian-English Dictionary* became an indispensable tool. Sometimes, Professor Grewal himself translated difficult passages for them. His general advice regarding every source was: pay close attention not only to what it says, but also to what it means. Approaching the sources in this manner required an open mind. He did not appreciate any dogmatic leanings or assertions on the part of his researchers.

The writing stage was the most difficult. Professor Grewal insisted on the use of simpler and smaller words and clear sentences. He considered different types of dictionaries and *Roget's Thesaurus* as essential companions for researchers. Besides Ernest Gowers' *Complete Plain Words*, they were advised to follow Robert Graves' *Reader Over Your Shoulder*. Professor Grewal went through every paragraph, checking it meticulously, occasionally cancelling it out altogether. Where necessary, he also explained the rules of grammar. He insisted on logical connections, clarity of expression and economy of words. On an average, a chapter went through half a dozen drafts.

By 1987, over a hundred M.Phil. dissertations and Ph.D. theses had been produced at Amritsar on social, economic, cultural and political

history of the Punjab, together presenting a rounded view of the region. Professor Grewal regarded research supervision as the collective responsibility of the Department and was always available for guidance to the researchers formally working with other colleagues. He saw to it that a student's work did not get delayed because of the non-availability of the supervisor for illness or any other reason. For his own students, he never seemed to lack time. Researchers were encouraged to write papers for seminars and conferences. Professor Grewal saw the draft before the paper was considered fit for presentation. Year by year, the number of papers taken from Amritsar to the Indian History Congress and the Punjab History Conference began to increase. Their bound volumes became quite visible. Incidentally, as early as 1967, Professor Grewal and his students at Chandigarh took a volume of papers to the Indian History Congress session at Patiala. At its Burdwan session in 1983, the number of papers from Amritsar rose to twenty-seven. Some scholars had by now begun to talk of the 'Amritsar School' of historiography. Professor Barun De in his General Presidential Address to the Indian History Congress in 1988 generously appreciated the contribution of Professor Grewal and his students to the understanding of medieval Punjab:

They have systematically categorized valuable factual information and have persuasively suggested reconsideration of the obsolete characterization of the eighteenth century Punjab history as Khalsa-Misl period of theocratic confederate brotherhood of Sikh dominance which had earlier been put forward by scholars like N.K. Sinha.³⁵

For Professor Grewal, teaching was inseparable from learning, and he never ceased being a teacher-learner after his retirement from Amritsar.

VI

Academic Assignments after Superannuation

After his superannuation from Guru Nanak Dev University at the end of 1987, Professor Grewal remained busy and productive for three and a half decades. We may give an overview first of his academic and administrative assignments. In January, he went to Toronto as a Visiting Professor before taking up Fellowship at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study at Shimla (formerly the Rashtrapati Nivas) in June 1988. In April

1989, Professor Grewal was entrusted with the responsibilities of the Director of the Institute, which he performed till his retirement at 65 in 1993. He successfully spearheaded resistance of the academia in the country against the move to convert the former residence of the British Viceroy built in 1888 into a heritage hotel. A dark and dinghy, virtually moribund place was revived into a brightly lit, beautifully furnished and inviting center of meaningful research and interdisciplinary interaction. Eminent physicists, social scientists, literary critics, and creative writers were in residence. The Institute became a hub of academic exchange through invitation to distinguished academics and litterateurs, selection of established scholars as Fellows, seminars on themes of vital importance through institutional collaboration, and formal networking with the UGC to enable the university and college teachers to stay at the Institute for short periods. All this was accompanied by the publication of an exceptionally large number of books and monographs. It was 'a fairy tale change', according to a Fellow.³⁶

Furthermore, Professor Grewal initiated a team-project on 'Religious Movements and Cultural Networks in Indian Civilization' at the Institute. For its formulation he involved a number of eminent scholars, most notably Professor D.P. Chattopadhyaya, who was also the Chairman of the Governing Body of the Institute, Professor Ravinder Kumar, Professor Romila Thapar, Professor Namvar Singh and Professor Attar Singh. Subsequently, over twenty Indian and foreign scholars became associated with this project. On Professor Grewal's retirement in 1993, the IAS Fellows underscored how they saw his tenure as Director:

Professor J.S. Grewal has induced a dynamic vibrancy in the various activities and programmes of the Institute by encouraging a free exchange of differing views in a spirit of mutual tolerance and goodwill. Professor Grewal combines intellectual eminence with affability, personal warmth and administrative tact which made his tenure efficient and purposeful.³⁷

His contribution was appreciated and remembered when in 2004-5 he was called upon to chair the Governing Body of the Institute of Advanced Study.

While he was serving as Director at Shimla, Professor Grewal received an invitation to become the National Fellow of the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi. His term had barely ended when he was

invited to become an Editorial Fellow of the multi-volume multi-disciplinary Project on the History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization (PHISPC) and edit a volume on the Social History of Medieval India. This work was nearing completion when he was persuaded to become the principal resource person of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad for the history content of the Khalsa Heritage Museum which was being set up at Anandpur Sahib. From 1997 to 2008, he was also the principal resource person for the Summer Program in Punjab Studies (organized at Chandigarh jointly by the Universities of California, Santa Barbara and Columbia, New York). Professor Grewal lectured to students from sixty-four universities in ten countries. In the words of their coordinator, Professor Gurinder Singh Mann: 'They have registered their deep admiration for the range of his scholarship, the clarity with which he presents it, and have noted their experience of listening to him as one of the highlights of the program'.

Professor Grewal's association with the Punjabi University, Patiala was rather varied. He attended the first session of the Punjab History Conference in 1965, participated regularly in its annual proceedings, became its Sectional and General President, and inaugurated its sessions several times. He was on many committees of the University and delivered various memorial lectures on the campus. In 2005, the Punjabi University conferred a Life Fellowship on Professor Grewal for his valuable contribution to the integrated study of history, society, literature and tradition of the Punjab. In 2006, he accepted a Visiting Professorship at this University for two years, delivering over sixty lectures to a cross section of the faculty and researchers on religious ideologies and institutions, social order and social change, agrarian relations and urbanization, religious and secular literature, and issues of Sikh identity and politics. The University published a selection of these lectures in two volumes in 2007 and 2014.

Meanwhile, the Governor of Punjab appointed Professor Grewal as the Founder-Director of the World Punjabi Centre set up on the Punjabi University campus. Through its first international conference held in December 2006, Professor Grewal chalked out a program of academic, cultural and economic cooperation and political understanding among the Punjabis the world over, and published it as *Exploring Possibilities of Cooperation Among Punjabis in the Global Context*. Under the aegis of this center, he also organized an interdisciplinary international seminar on Bhagat Singh to mark his hundredth birth anniversary and published its

proceedings in 2008 as *Bhagat Singh and His Legend*. Professor Grewal was Professor of Eminence at the Punjabi University from 2011 to 2016, and produced a major study of Master Tara Singh which was published in 2017 jointly by the Oxford University Press and the University. Incidentally, in his 84th year, he agreed to be the Local Secretary of the 72nd Session of the Indian History Congress hosted by the Punjabi University in December 2011.

All this while, Professor Grewal had continued to serve on various national bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC), Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). His uncompromising adherence to the yardstick of historical method for evaluating history text books of the NCERT was widely appreciated. As a member of the Central Advisory Board for Education (CABE) he suggested measures for improving the quality of higher education in the country. His last important assignment was as Chairman of the Oversight Committee of the Punjab Government (2019-22) to oversee its school textbooks in history. Dismayed over the quality of the existing textbooks, Professor Grewal suggested revision of the syllabi and rewriting of history textbooks. He himself contributed to the textbooks for classes XI and XII of the Punjab School Education Board. Alongside, as Honorary Director of the Institute of Punjab Studies, which he had founded in 1993, he had been promoting secular and liberal multi-disciplinary studies of the broad north-western region, organizing seminars on urbanization, gender relations, literature and history, perspectives on the Khalsa, Bhagat Singh, Ghadar movement, the *Komagata Maru*, social transformation during the twentieth century, and decolonization and militancy. Proceedings of some of these seminars were also published.

VII

Widening Interests in Sikh, Regional and Medieval Indian Studies

Most of the academic assignments after superannuation resulted in significant publications, a substantial chunk of which related to Sikh history. As Professor Grewal recalled later, the experience of militancy and 1984 at Amritsar had made him take deeper interest in Sikh history to find answers in the past. He began with a wide canvas, and moved from medieval to modern and then to contemporary times. Regional history and medieval Indian state, society and religion also engaged his interest.

Professor Grewal's own work for the team project at the Institute of Advanced Study at Shimla related to 'devotional theism' in medieval India. He published *Guru Nanak in Western Scholarship* and *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy*, in addition to writing long essays on Shaikh Farid, Kabir, Ravidas, and Shah Husain. The treatment of Guru Nanak by the Western scholars went beyond his earlier studies on British historical writing, revealing 'a close connection between cognition and praxis'. This was 'the common ground' for the administrator, the missionary and the 'orientalist'. Professor Grewal pointed out that 'academic or scientific study of Sikh history and Sikh tradition arose not as an alternative to but as a culmination of the earlier motivating interests'. This common ground was 'by now shared by the Indian and Western scholars alike'. Differences in interpretation arose not so much from differences in national perspectives as 'from differences of class, conceptualization, talent and training'.³⁸

The monograph on *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy* was the first serious attempt to grapple with Guru Nanak's attitude towards 'the issue' of gender relations on the basis of an in-depth analysis of his compositions.³⁹ 'The total absence' of misogyny was their most striking feature which was due in part to Guru Nanak's 'acceptance and advocacy of social commitment'.⁴⁰ Professor Grewal concluded:

Guru Nanak appears to create a larger space for women than we find in Kabir or perhaps in the whole range of Indian literature springing from devotional theism.... Guru Nanak's symbolic attack on discrimination against women due to physiological difference carried the idea of equality a long step forward.... He does not say anything which can be used to support inequality of any kind. However, much of the space he creates for women, is created within the patriarchal framework.⁴¹

Hence, there remained some kind of tension between the ideas of equality and the patriarchal family. This nuanced conclusion was closer to the ground realities.

Sometime in late 1995, Professor Grewal was persuaded by S. Parkash Singh Badal to write on the Akalis to mark 75 years of their history. The Cambridge volume on the *Sikhs of the Punjab* (1990) had already extended Professor Grewal's interest to modern and contemporary times. By then, it was evident that the Akali movement was 'intimately linked' with the

Singh Sabha movement, and that the Akalis played a significant role in the politics of the Punjab after 1920. Professor Grewal agreed to undertake this study in the hope that it might shed light on the complexities of the 1980s and make some kind of contribution towards restoration of normalcy in the state. He was enthusiastically helped by some former colleagues and students in bringing this volume out in record time in both English and Punjabi. The book highlighted the idealism, fervor and sacrifices of the early years of the Akali movement, but did not glorify their contemporary leadership.⁴² It, however, anticipated Professor Grewal's *magnum opus* on Master Tara Singh.

Meanwhile, Professor Grewal felt concerned about a bitter international debate that had raged in Sikh studies for over a decade. As the National Fellow of the ICHR during 1994-7, he produced two volumes in an effort to resolve this debate. Central to the issues under debate was the question of Sikh identity which was examined in the first volume (1997) with the following conclusion:

Objective realities and subjective self-image are intermeshed in a consciousness of distinct identity in relation to others in any given historical situation. As the product of these variables, identity cannot be a static or 'fixed' entity. Nor can there be objective uniformity or 'homogeneity' among all the members of a community identified as distinct from others. Neither fluidity nor diversity, thus, invalidates distinct identity. The objective realities of the Sikh Panth and the self-image of the Sikhs from the days of Guru Nanak to the present day have not remained the same, but the consciousness of distinction from the others around has remained constant.

Therefore, the author maintained that, 'strictly as an academic issue, it is imperative to recognize the distinct socio-cultural identity of the Sikhs from the sixteenth to the twentieth century'.⁴³

In the second volume (1998), Professor Grewal examined the positions taken by the 'critical scholars' (located largely in the West), and their critics (located mainly in India), on the core issues: the status of Sikhism as a religious system; search for 'the Nanak of history'; 'militarization' of the Khalsa; the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth; caste and the Sikh community; textual study of the *Adi Granth*; and historical methodology in relation to religious studies. On each of these

Professor Grewal's own views briefly followed his evaluation of the positions taken by the two sets of scholars. He was unhappy with the 'fundamental failure' of the 'Western' scholars to take notice of the objections to their work, howsoever 'poorly articulated', because of the continuing 'orientalist assumptions' on their part. He came to the perceptive conclusion:

The basic difference between the critical scholars and their critics does not arise from any differences in their methodology. But their conception of historiography differs widely and gets related to their world-views and their political imagination. Their attitude towards the Sikh tradition is intimately linked to their conception of history. For the critical historian, the entire Sikh tradition can be subjected to critical analysis for discovering past truths. For their critics, certain aspects of the Sikh tradition are sacrosanct and cannot be the subject of rational analysis.⁴⁴

Professor Grewal maintained that even if they interpreted the evidence differently, 'the critical historian' and 'the believer' would have 'to meet on the common ground of evidence'. In the ultimate analysis, it was not so much a matter of method as of approach:

In historical studies, a crucial role is played by the 'question'. This should be equally true of Sikh studies. Whereas the method is not rooted in culture the question is. The Western scholars may appear to be distinguished by their methodology but actually they are not. They are interested in asking and answering those questions in which their own society is interested. The cultural roots of questions and their social relevance determine the difference between 'the west' and 'the east'.

He hoped that 'awareness of this basic difference may lead to a better mutual understanding'.⁴⁵

In 2004, Professor Grewal published his *Social and Cultural History of the Punjab* from the pre-historic to the early medieval period, which had initially been undertaken for the National Book Trust.⁴⁶ This monograph is the only work so far that studies the Harappan and Rigvedic cultures, subsequent state-formations, growth of trade and urbanization, and their bearing on religious and cultural life from specifically regional angle, at

the same time placing north-western India in a sub-continental perspective. From 1998 to 2008, Professor Grewal continued to take interest in the later history of the Punjab and medieval India, editing, co-editing and revising a dozen books (see Published Work below).

However, two 'massive volumes' edited by him constituted a class apart in the historiography of medieval India. Comprehensively and meaningfully dealing with political, social and religious history of medieval India, the *State and Society* (2005) and *Religious Movements and Institutions* (2006) were a way off from the writings of the British historians. The imprint of editorial autonomy is evident on the themes, thrust, approach and contributors of these volumes. Professor Grewal also took due notice of significant developments in different regions, himself contributing an essay on 'State and Society in Himachal'.⁴⁷ His varied and substantial contributions to Part 2 included: 'Sufism in Medieval India', 'Khanqah, Dargah, and Pir', 'Kabir and the "Kabir-Panthis"', 'Sant Ravidas', 'the Pushtimarg of Vallabhacharya', 'Dadu and the Dadu-Panthis', 'the Sikh movement', 'the Gurdwara', and 'Indigenization of Sufism: The Case of the Punjab'.⁴⁸

The term 'indigenization' here is used for expression of the Sufi ideas, beliefs, and attitudes in Punjabi language. In fact, by the sixteenth or seventeenth century, much of the Sufi writing in medieval India was in the regional languages like Sindhi, Gujarati, Marathi, Awadhi, Bengali and Punjabi. According to Professor Grewal, the compositions of the two earliest Punjabi Sufi poets, Shaikh Farid and Shah Husain, 'made Sufism "native" in terms of physical environment, social configuration, and material culture'. In the poetry of Shah Husain who wrote in Akbar's time, the Sufi ideas got indigenous flavor from 'the Punjabi world, metaphors and symbols', like Heer and Ranjha and the spinning wheel.⁴⁹

All along, Professor Grewal continued to work on Sikh history. By the end of 2006, he had substantially revised and expanded his well-known collection which was published with 30 essays in 2007 as *Sikh Ideology, Polity and Social Order: From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. However, the content and import of yet another collection brought out by the Oxford University Press in 2009 was of a different order. Professor Grewal discussed some central concerns of Sikh history: ideology, institutions, literature, and historiography. According to Professor Gurinder Singh Mann, a rigorous application of historical method yielded rich dividends:

In terms of the range of issues addressed and the depth with which this discussion is handled, there is no comparable book currently available in the area of Sikh studies... These essays present a statement that is distilled from a long academic endeavour characterized by a mastery of a rich array of primary sources and a firm grasp of finer details of scholarly interpretation of the central issues in Sikh history.⁵⁰

Commenting specifically on the last essay in this collection, Professor John Stratton Hawley says that it 'gives us a taste of his typically even-handed approach to evaluating the work of others..... This is delicate work, the sort of broadly informed, well-balanced view for which Grewal has been renowned for many years'.⁵¹

To commemorate 'the tercentenary of the vesting of Guruship in the *Granth Sahib* in 1708', Professor Grewal published a comprehensive study of the Sikh scripture in 2009. Devising his own methodology, he identified the key concepts of the doctrine and discussed their interrelationships. He also studied the history, structure, social content and status of the *Granth Sahib* and analyzed the compositions of Guru Nanak and his successors in terms of their creative responses to their environment. A new socio-religious order, the Sikh Panth, got added to their changing environment. Furthermore, the compositions of each successor in his specific historical context registered his own view of the founder and the followers. In this process, the organic link between the theological ideas and social concerns became clearer, and the idea of liberation-in-life acquired a new meaning. To arrive at this understanding, Professor Grewal had to study *Gurbani* several times to capture its meanings, shades, nuances and significance as well as interrelationships between ideas and their context. This book could thus account for a large part of *Gurbani* and history.⁵²

VIII

Deepening and Widening Research Interests

The international seminar at Amritsar in March 2009 to which reference has been made earlier, had aimed at taking stock of Professor Grewal's work in the context of 'Debates and Trends in Punjab and Sikh Historical Studies since Independence'. He continued to read, reflect and write thereafter. Between 2009 and 2022, he tapped new literary and archival sources, deepened and broadened his interest in religious and secular

literature, revisited the controversies in Sikh studies, and evaluated modern historical writings on the Sikhs. In addition, he produced historical biographies of two exceptional individuals – Master Tara Singh and Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha – both of whom subscribed to the distinctive identity of the Sikhs and were staunch patriots. Another major publication was a study of Guru Gobind Singh, making use of new sources and clarifying and modifying the author's earlier position in a significant way. Just before he passed away, Professor Grewal had finished a fresh study of Guru Nanak, and also devoted considerable time and effort to the writing of textbooks for Punjab schools. Here, we may notice briefly the thrust of each publication in order of appearance.

Continuing his earlier interest in Sufi poetry, Professor Grewal now analyzed poetry in the broad framework of love and gender. A collection of lectures delivered at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (2010) begins with a perceptive analysis of the *Rig Veda* which surprised his audience. Reading closely between the lines he brought out the complexities of the relative position of boys and girls and men and women in courtship and conjugality, rites and rituals, and family and inheritance. He concluded that women could enjoy 'freedom and respect' within a framework that was 'largely patriarchal in terms of structure and values'.⁵³ These lectures also dwelt on Punjabi Sufi poetry and popular love tales which were expanded in another collection (2011) in which the author analyzed the compositions of Shaikh Farid, Shah Husain, Sultan Bahu, Bulleh Shah and Peelu. The narratives of Damodar, Ahmad, Muqbal and Waris Shah were analyzed for their rendering of the story of Heer. All wrote within the Sufi idiom, but had some differences. For example, Shaikh Farid took the patriarchal family for granted, but placed women at par in relation to God. Sultan Bahu's position was close to that of Farid. However, Shah Husain and Bulleh Shah set the patriarchal family aside and regarded the basic relationship between human beings and God as that of love. This, according to Professor Grewal, had radical implications for a society for which the idea of personal love was a form of social deviance. Peelu's tale of love between Mirza and Sahiba underlined the tragic tension between personal love and social norms prevalent during the reign of Akbar. The tales of Heer and Ranjha from the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries placed love between human beings (*ishq-i majazi*) at par with love for God (*ishq-i haqiqi*).⁵⁴

In *History, Literature and Identity* (2011), Professor Grewal reinforced his earlier argument about the distinctiveness of Sikh identity through a

rigorous analysis of fourteen core Sikh texts produced during Mughal, Sikh and colonial rule. Assuming a close connection between the historical context and the texts, he placed them in five parts. First, the deliberate articulation of a new dispensation by Guru Nanak and its conscious elaboration by his first four successors. Then, in the seventeenth century context of confrontation with the Mughal state, distinct identity was emphatically articulated by Bhai Gurdas and Guru Tegh Bahadur, the former using the term *nirmal panth* for this new path. Its distinctiveness was asserted subsequently in the literature related to Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa which was now regarded as a political community. Around 1700, the term *tisar panth* (the third way) made its appearance and thereafter remained in use in the literature produced during the period of Sikh rule. The fifth and the last part analyzed Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha's *Ham Hindu Nahin* (1898) with the conclusion that Bhai Kahn Singh's 'argument was based largely on this literature'.

What was new in his argument was not distinct identity but his insistence that this identity made the Sikhs a political community, a qaum or nationality, which entitled them to a share in political power as an integral part of the Indian Nation.

Thus, far from being a 'polemical pamphlet', Nabha's work is seen as expounding a rational argument in the context of emerging communitarian consciousness in the Punjab under colonial rule, which entitled the Sikhs to be recognized as 'a nationality within the Indian Nation'. Finally, Professor Grewal pointed out that the Parsi, Muslim and Hindu writers from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century 'looked upon the Sikhs in the pre-colonial period as distinct from both Hindus and Muslims'.⁵⁵

Recent Debates in Sikh Studies (2011) was a yet another effort to facilitate a dialogue between scholars taking almost opposite positions in Sikh studies. After his earlier monographs of 1997 and 1998, Professor Grewal had seen almost the entire range of Sikh literature and reconsidered the problems of dating in some cases, which clarified issues and even obliged him to revise his own position in some important respects. He made a careful 'assessment' of the interpretations of over twenty-five Western and Indian scholars in this volume which has been discussed elsewhere.⁵⁶ Here, we confine ourselves to Professor Grewal's own views in *Recent Debates* about the 'fundamental issues in Sikh

studies'. With a few significant exceptions, his differences are more basic with the scholars located in the West, particularly W. H. McLeod and Harjot Oberoi and their students. The onus for a dialogue, however, rests on all the scholars in the field.

Turning to Professor Grewal's considered views regarding the core issues in Sikh studies, first and foremost, it was Guru Nanak who founded the Sikh faith and Sikh Panth, and introduced institutionalization. His faith combined spiritual and temporal concerns, and liberation-in life for him 'was a social project for the redemption of others'. *Janamsakhis* were not 'myths'; there were different *Janamsakhi* traditions, and each was a different interpretation of the life and mission of Guru Nanak. The early Sikh identity hinged as much on the 'objective differences' of the 'Sikhs' from the others (both 'Hindus' and Muslims) around as on the 'Sikh subjective awareness' of their distinctiveness. Furthermore, in Professor Grewal's words, 'the most important features of the *rahit* were in place during the time of Guru Gobind Singh or soon afterwards, including the five symbols which later constituted the formulation of 5Ks'. What was generally not known, and as brought out by Professor Grewal, the 'non-Singh Khalsa' were present in the early eighteenth century. By the end of the century, the Khalsa (Singh) identity became the 'dominant Sikh identity'.⁵⁷

This understanding informed Professor Grewal's view of the Singh Sabha movement. He felt convinced that its leaders derived their doctrines, concerns and self-image from the earlier Sikh tradition. As he maintained with reference to Kahn Singh Nabha, what was new in the colonial context was the argument that their 'distinct identity turned the Sikhs into a political community'. Furthermore, far from being an 'invention' of the Singh Sabha movement, the tradition of martyrdom too was a product of Sikh history and ideology, clarified Professor Grewal.⁵⁸

After examining the positions taken by different scholars on the issues of caste and gender, he found that their differences were due to the 'limited' and 'selective' use of evidence; 'flawed' hypotheses, and 'theoretical' assumptions unsubstantiated by sources. In his view, 'a distinction can be made between the pre-Khalsa Sikhs and the Khalsa Singhs for a study of equality and caste'. In fact, this issue called for 'a thorough analysis of the whole range of Sikh literature and other contemporary evidence'.⁵⁹ On the basis of a close reading of the sources Professor Grewal surmised:

There is hardly any doubt that Sikh ideology introduced equalities in the religious, social, and political spheres of the Sikh Panth and [it] was more egalitarian than the traditional social order. At the same time, some of the traditional institutions and practices were taken for granted and the ideal of equality left them unaffected. Consequently, inequalities existed side by side with new equalities. It is nonetheless important that Sikh ideology does not support any notions of hierarchy based on birth and occupation. At the same time, differences of wealth were accepted as God given.⁶⁰

The application of the principle of equality in relation to gender, however, was 'far more complex', because of a constant tension between the ideal of equality and the inegalitarian institution of the family' which was 'taken for granted'.⁶¹

Taking 'a historical view of the process that led to the compilation of the *Kartarpur Pothi*', and on the basis of later research, Professor Grewal pointed out that 'the *Damdami Bir*, based on the *Kartarpur Pothi*, had come into existence in the time of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh before the end of the seventeenth century. Guruship was vested in the *Damdami Bir*'. The 'draft theory' and 'power hypothesis' put forth by some scholars were 'more conjectural than empirical, therefore misleading'. Professor Grewal also found 'no empirical basis' for the view held in some quarters that 'the *Dasam Granth* had come to be regarded as the Guru before the advent of colonial rule in the Punjab'. However, he conceded, it was 'an area yet to be explored'.⁶²

Professor Grewal closed his 'Reflections' in *Recent Debates* with an emphatic statement in support of historical method for studying Sikh history: 'No serious case is made against the use of the historical method in religious studies', he reminded the Sikh scholars, presumably. Despite its origins in the West, historical method like science is part of the common intellectual heritage of the world, relevant equally for the so-called 'critical historians' located mostly in the West, and the 'traditional historians', located in India. What is needed for an objective historical analysis is to separate method from the assumptions and purposes of the writer. A better historical understanding requires ideas or 'mentalities' to be seen in 'a dialectical relationship' with their environment.⁶³ In fact, Professor Grewal made a case for treating ideas as driving force in historical change.

He thus summed up his discussion of 'The Historical Method and Sikh Studies':

The assumption that methodology in itself ensures veracity is false. It is hard to maintain that religious movements cannot be or should not be studied by social scientists. Ideology becomes relevant for the historian when it finds expression in words or actions, and words and actions are the subject matter of history. A valid objection can be raised to the neglect of ideas, assumptions and sentiments or 'mentalities'. Divorced from cosmology, anthropology becomes poorer.⁶⁴

Professor Grewal's concern with ideas is predominant in another volume, entitled *Historical Writings on the Sikhs (1784-2011)* published in 2012. A continuation of his interest in British historiography, this book has been discussed elsewhere.⁶⁵ We may briefly comment here on the author's treatment as a whole. Studying the British, European, American and Indian historians of the Sikhs in the colonial and post-colonial periods, Professor Grewal brought out their background, purposes, assumptions, scope, sources, method and ideological orientations. In each case the degree of reliability of a work and its comparative worth for Sikh history was evaluated. Significantly, in the second half of colonial rule, 'the Indian initiative' overtook the 'Western enterprise'. After Independence, especially since the late 1960s, the number of studies on the Sikhs and the Punjab began to grow. Therefore, in the penultimate chapter (the last giving an overview of 'Recent Controversies'), the author focused on new trends with reference to representative works. The widening range of Sikh studies came to be dominated by Indian, mainly Punjabi, enterprise, whether in the country or in the diaspora. The changing thrust of Sikh studies by and large corresponded to the widening scope of history as a discipline in the second half of the twentieth century.⁶⁶

As the year 2011 progressed, Professor Grewal got immersed in an ambitious project of understanding the life and work of Master Tara Singh, 'arguably the foremost leader of the Sikhs' in the twentieth century. His lasting legacies are saving the East Punjab for India in 1947 and the creation of the Punjabi-speaking state in 1966. His role in both these situations generated considerable controversy. The author, therefore, gave ample space to Master Tara Singh and his detractors. The range of sources used for this book is far wider than in any other work on Master

Tara Singh and his times.⁶⁷ Running over 750 large size pages, this book is divided into two parts, the first dealing with Master Tara Singh's anti-colonial activity in collaboration with the Congress party, and the second with his movement for a Punjabi-speaking state in opposition to the Congress government at the center and in the Punjab. His politics based on Sikh identity lent unity to the two parts and to his response to the Sikh, Punjab and nationalist issues.

To understand Master Tara Singh and to get at his ideological moorings, Professor Grewal analyzed his extensive writings which revealed his 'thoughts, values and attitudes rooted in the Sikh tradition', and afforded insights into his political ideology and 'perspective on important historical situations and events'.⁶⁸ Evidently, he was deeply influenced by Guru Gobind Singh. He believed that since the tenth Guru's time the Sikhs had an identity distinct from Hindus and Muslims. Its recognition was essential for the protection of the religion and institutions of the Sikhs. Master Tara Singh pleaded that their ethics should be based on *Gurbani* and their politics should be based on their faith. Professor Grewal emphasized that there was no contradiction in Master Tara Singh being 'a devout Sikh and a staunch patriot'. 'Faith and patriotism were two sides of the same coin for him'. He believed that 'service of the Panth was the service of the country', or 'to be a Sikh was to be a patriot'. The author underscored that 'this basic conviction and commitment underpinned Master Tara Singh's political activity'. He refused to be daunted by the British and overawed by the Congress leadership. Logically, he believed, that as the Sikhs had been partners in the struggle for freedom they should also be partners in power. Master Tara Singh, therefore, preferred the Swiss model for the Indian constitution. For him, aspiration to domination over others was the essence of 'communalism' and against the spirit of democracy. In the early 1940s, the British had recognized the Sikhs as the third important community (besides Hindus and Muslims), but after Independence the Sikhs were left in a political wilderness. He felt that a majoritarian democracy based on adult suffrage, with no weightage for minorities, held no hopes for the Sikhs as a community. It was in this context that Master Tara Singh's demand for a linguistic state (Punjabi Suba) originated so as to 'ensure' an honorable position for the Sikhs in 'free India'. His demand for a 'Sikh Homeland' was raised subsequently to ensure an equal status for the Sikhs in an autonomous Punjabi-speaking state vis-a-vis a centralizing Indian polity.⁶⁹ It may be noted that in his politics Master Tara Singh 'was not

anti-Hindu but anti-Congress'.⁷⁰ Professor Grewal summed up his position in these words:

Master Tara Singh stood for a state that could ensure freedom for the social and cultural ethnicities of India to enable them to play a significant role in national affairs. Master Tara Singh's vision of free India was very different from that of Nehru. There was, therefore, a clash not only between two strong personalities, but also between two different ideologies, and two different visions of the 'National State in India'.⁷¹

The author's analysis of Master Tara Singh's ideological position and his dealings on a footing of equality with the top rung of Indian leadership - Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Azad and others, has catapulted a controversial and neglected regional politician into a leader of all India stature.

The political biography of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha (2018) brought out the diverse forms of resistance to British paramountcy in the changing political context in India and Britain in the early twentieth century. Consistently challenging the paramount power with his own interpretation of treaty rights, Ripudaman Singh

sought to undermine the importance of symbols, rituals and the semantics of paramountcy. He could enlist active support of the British Left against the diehard imperialists, exemplifying a complex form of resistance to colonial rule. Its complexity was heightened by a deep sense of patriotism, strengthened by his strong Sikh identity.⁷²

His resistance, which cost him his throne, family and liberty, was interwoven with his sympathy with the Singh Sabha movement, appreciation of the Akali struggle for Gurdwara legislation, and support for a diverse range of nationalist causes, including the revolutionary Ghadarites. Certain ethical values informed his concern for education and social reform.

Eventually, the British so contrived that Ripudaman Singh was forced to abdicate in 1923. He was exiled to Dehradun and later on placed under detention at Kodai Kanal (a small hill station) in the Madras Presidency. He remained there for 14 years until his death in 1942. This work fills in the gaps regarding his education, upbringing, ideological position,

activities as a prince, dealings with the paramount power, and interactions with political leaders in India and Britain. It addresses several misconceptions in the existing historiography regarding his public career both as the heir apparent (*tikka*) and the Maharaja. Ripudaman Singh's comparison with the well-known contemporary Maharajas, Sayajirao III of Baroda and Bhupinder Singh of Patiala, is revealing. Written jointly with Indu Banga, this book provides insights into the functioning of the paramount power in all its subtle and not so subtle dimensions and sheds new light on the relationship between British India and princely India. Based on the deconstruction of the archival sources and the state records, and complemented by the Sikh and Congress sources and periodicals, this study was supplemented by fieldwork and interviews.

The following year saw the publication of a fresh work on Guru Gobind Singh with the telling subtitle, 'Master of the White Hawk' (2019). It is different in some important respects from the joint biography of the tenth Guru published in 1967. It is a new study in terms of sources, approach, scope, and conclusions. It has a bearing of the relatively new issues in Sikh studies like identity, martyrdom, caste, gender and literature. Different strands in Guru Gobind Singh's background and context are integrated in this reconstruction of his eventful life. It brings out the interrelationships between the ideology of Guru Nanak, developments under his successors, and active agency of the Mughal state. The geographical and political configuration of the vassal hill states too played a role in this situation. The literary articulation at the Guru's court was meant to inspire people. In Professor Grewal's view, it was 'indispensable for understanding his life and mission'.⁷³ Guru Gobind Singh's own compositions reinforced the Sikh ideology, with social equality and concern for justice and righteousness as its integral parts.

Professor Grewal felt convinced that at least six *Rahitnamas* could be placed in the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh which had significant implications. Their analyses supplemented by other sources of the eighteenth century, enabled the author to establish what happened on the Baisakhi of 1699. Remaining close to the earliest reliable contemporary evidence, he also brought out the richness of the tradition building around the tenth Guru. It is generally not realized that the Guru himself had the norms for the Khalsa way of life laid down. Their scope was 'comprehensive' enough to cover 'social and political aspects'.⁷⁴ In Professor Grewal's words:

Guru Gobind Singh changed the character of the Sikh Panth quite deliberately. The fresh injunctions he gave to the Sikhs on the Baisakhi of 1699 were added to the ideals of the Sikh faith cherished by his predecessors...the old and the new were combined to forge a new kind of order. The Rahitnamas projected this comprehensive objective and not merely the new injunctions. To consolidate and innovate at the same time appears to have been the intention. The old and new norms in combination covered all important aspects of the Khalsa way of life.⁷⁵

Guru Gobind Singh nevertheless favored a 'peaceful settlement' of the issue of Anandpur. His letter to Aurangzeb (*Zafarnama*- 'an epistle of victory') and the effort to see him, and subsequently meeting with his son and successor Bahadur Shah, and moving with him up to a point in the Deccan are placed in this context. When Guru Gobind Singh felt 'disillusioned by the evasive attitude of Bahadur Shah', he declined to go any further with him and went to Nanded. The first thing that he did at Nanded was to commission Banda to go to Punjab and lead the Khalsa in revolt in 'a bid to establish Khalsa Raj'.⁷⁶ In other words, an unjust Mughal state had outlived its justification. Built into the Khalsa ideology, martyrdom was 'an integral part of the struggle for sovereign rule'.⁷⁷ It is important to note that 'the ideal of sovereignty had come into currency before Banda Singh's appearance on the scene and this ideal survived the failure of his enterprise'.⁷⁸

The long struggle of the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh for political power culminated in the establishment of Khalsa Raj. His legacy in the eighteenth century also included a new kind of literary activity, emergence of the *Dasam Granth* as a text of considerable importance, crystallization of the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth with a bearing on the religious, social and political life of the Khalsa, and sharpening of Sikh identity to make the Khalsa visibly the 'third community'. Professor Grewal came to the significant conclusion that 'all these developments ...became a hallmark of the Sikh resurgence in colonial Punjab'.⁷⁹ it may be added that ten Appendices in the book clarify important issues concerning the life and legacy of Guru Gobind Singh.

Until a few years ago, Professor Grewal generally worked on two or three projects at a time and also managed miscellaneous demands on his expertise. After sending the book on Guru Gobind Singh to the press, he picked up work on a long pending study of Guru Nanak. Since his classic

Guru Nanak in History he had re-read the *Gurbani* several times, analyzed other sources and reflected much. His growing understanding of Guru Nanak came to have a bearing on almost the entire body of his work on Sikh history. This book is now under print. Professor Grewal continued to work till the end of July 2022. 'I will stop writing the day I cease to learn', he used to say. He was thinking of his next project when he passed away on August 11, 2022.

IX

Approach and Method: An Overview

A few aspects of Professor Grewal's approach and method may be recapitulated. He was open to concepts and methods of social sciences and humanities to the extent they helped him understand the past better. Beginning with an open mind, he was always ready to pursue unexpected leads. He published only when he had something new to contribute – a new angle, a fresh insight, or unknown significant facts. He preferred to speak through facts and remain close to the idiom of the sources, to let the reader get the flavor of particular words and terms and judge for herself. His writing remained devoid of ideological crutches, overt theorization and value judgments, and impressionistic and rhetorical statements. Logic, clarity, balance and economy were the hallmarks of his style. Focusing on what he himself had to say, he generally avoided to do battle with historians. He took due notice of the contribution of his predecessors, but approached their evidence afresh, paying close attention to detail and sequence. He maintained that knowledge about the past being progressive and relative, 'no one has said, and can say, the last word'.⁸⁰ Several stereotypes stood discarded in his writings. He did not hesitate to reinterpret or revise his earlier position in the light of new evidence and new understanding.

To understand a text Professor Grewal analyzed it as a whole, at the same time taking into account every word. He placed it in the historical situation in which it was produced, and saw it in conjunction with other sources. This illumined both the period and the work and often led to discoveries. He treated a literary text as a social document, a product of history and signifier of values, attitudes, social relations and daily life. Aesthetic issues remained outside his direct concern. Furthermore, Professor Grewal was particular about the question 'where', and actually tried to see the terrain to the extent possible. He took note of numbers and

relative proportions; numbers counted in history, he often said. For new kinds of subjects like history of historical writing, Persian documents, urban processes, and religious movements, especially Sikh history, he evolved his own methodology. Ideas were as important to him as the ground realities. His work cannot be slotted in any particular kind of history, least of all 'postivist'. Yet, evidence remained the mainstay of his work which he shared with his reader. His books generally have copious notes, references and classified bibliographies, translation and tabulation of documents, maps and pictures, appendices and chronologies, and glossaries and exhaustive indices.

It is important to note that Professor Grewal's explanations were informed by a rational secular worldview, but without any prejudice against religion. He regarded religion as an important part of history. 'To leave out religion would be to leave out a large chunk of life which mattered to the people', he said recently.⁸¹ He believed that ideology, whether secular or religious, was important in human history as a motor force; it remained relevant in the life and action of people. His doctoral work on the British historiography had sharpened his already developed interest in ideas and their historical context. He studied religious movements as the social phenomena, generally respecting tradition but not accepting it on faith. Professor Grewal made a careful distinction between the task of the historian and that of a theologian. He often said that he was not a 'Sikh' historian; his interest was in historical study of the Sikh movement in the same way as he was interested in Islam, Sufism, and other religious systems in medieval India. He even took some interest in the history of Christianity in colonial Punjab.

A substantial chunk of Professor Grewal's work nevertheless related to Sikh history which has not been the same since he entered the field. Covering it from Guru Nanak to the 1990s in over a score of volumes, he gave an 'alternative kind of interpretation' of the 'whole range of Sikh history'. His treatment of the Gurus in human terms illumined the past and actually enhanced their greatness. He came to the significant conclusion that Guru Nanak deliberately founded a new faith and a new Panth. While highlighting the doctrinal continuities in the Sikh movement, Professor Grewal took due notice of the bearing of changing historical circumstances in the seventeenth century. In his studies of Sikh literature, he emphasized the distinctiveness of Sikh identity. His study of Persian sources yielded important methodological insights. He found the Sikh and non-Sikh evidence 'mutually illuminating':

The Sikh sources confirm the observations of the outsiders. If the Sikh sources are indispensable for the Sikh self-image, the non-Sikh sources enable us to see how others looked upon the Sikhs. In both cases, we come upon multiple images and a variety of attitudes towards the Sikhs and their past. Each work has to be seen, therefore, as a whole and in conjunction with other sources, both non-Sikh and Sikh, for proper and meaningful use as evidence. The important question to ask is not 'who says what' but 'what does it mean?'⁸²

With reference to gender and family, however, he cautioned that the 'idea [of equality] is one thing, [and] the extent of its application is quite another...we have to keep in mind both of these in order to assess any given situation'. He placed 'Sikh' (where Sikh ideology and identity were relevant) themes in regional and subcontinental context; the three illuminated one another. He conceded that by the beginning of the present century, Sikh history had 'acquired an autonomy of its own', partly because of its early start and extension beyond the region in terms of the diaspora, ideas and issues, and partly because of 'its complexity, character and comprehensiveness'. Yet, there was 'more to the regional history in terms of space, size and diversity of the population'. Even the trajectory of Sikh movement could be understood better with reference to the Punjab as a geographical and cultural entity and its pan-Indian context. He felt convinced that, 'properly pursued, the scope and potential of regional history is vaster than that of a particular segment of its population'.⁸³

Professor Grewal's conception of regional history as a comprehensive, in-depth and integrated study of the Punjab region and its sub-regional variations in the larger subcontinental context, makes it a rich and meaningful approach. His work shows that regional articulation was the outcome of intra-regional and inter-regional interaction at a particular historical juncture. At such a time, there was a heightened subjective and objective consciousness of differences from others. By encouraging systematic work on the unexplored aspects of the history of north-western India (for example, on social classes, castes, trading communities, artisans, landed classes, custom, crafts, trade, urbanization, agriculture, religious and sectarian movements, art and literature, journalism and politics, social consciousness and historiographical trends), Professor Grewal imparted a form to regional history which it has not acquired anywhere in north India. For him, it was the 'comprehension

of past reality, exhaustive and total',⁸⁴ albeit in the framework of Indian history. Thus, from a generally empire-centric view of medieval India he shifted focus to one of its parts. His own research and that of his students can serve as an important source of ideas for the study of other cultural regions in the sub-continent.

It is pertinent to note that Professor Grewal's contribution to medieval Indian history is generally not realized. He began as a medievalist and much of his work on Sikh and Punjab history remained situated in medieval India. For historical reconstruction, he used new kinds of sources like judicial documents from the *qazi's* court, graffiti and inscriptions on monuments, frescoes in temples, urban morphology, administrative documents, and secular and religious literature. Understanding of medieval Indian history has been enriched by his studies of British historiography, urbanization and urban social interactions, functioning of the *qazi's* office in the *pargana*, existence of proprietary rights in land, ownership of property by women and the lower-class people, indigenization of Sufism, and significant differences between Kabir and Guru Nanak. Equally significant were his conclusions about Guru Nanak as the founder of a new faith and a new Panth, Guru Gobind Singh as the originator of the idea of sovereignty, and the eighteenth century Sikh polity having non-territorial and territorial phases (with implications for the nature of the *gurmata*, *dal Khalsa*, *misl* and the *rakhi*). Furthermore, Professor Grewal's work on early medieval and colonial periods added depth to his studies of medieval India in terms of continuities and changes.

Study of the past and concern for the present and future are intertwined in Professor Grewal's approach. In his Presidential Address to the Medieval Section of the Indian History Congress in 1977 he maintained: 'Interpretations of the past are invidiously tied up with the present. Since history is a rational form of knowledge, a secular outlook on the past is the fundamental condition of its progress'. He prophetically concluded: 'In a very real sense, the future of medieval studies depends on the future of our country'.⁸⁵ He reminded that the historian's 'responsibility to the present obliges him to cultivate a sense of responsibility to his discipline'.⁸⁶ Professor Grewal believed that intellectual freedom and social responsibility went together. He was sensitive to the contemporary developments. He participated in a large number of seminars and other academic programs on national integration. His nuanced distinction between 'communitarian' and

'communal' is closer to the changing historical reality of colonial Punjab. It had a bearing also on his discussion of militancy after Independence. His concern for the future of Sikh studies as an academic field impelled him to constructively moderate between opposing views. He could attempt that on the strength of his command of medieval and regional history and mastery of Persian and Sikh sources. Professor Grewal's endeavors for history teaching in schools and colleges also arose from his concern for the discipline of history and future of society. His research and that of his students increasingly included questions about women, peasantry and the low-castes. He took every assignment, every task as an opportunity to do something worthwhile. As a whole, the problems that he chose for his own research and encouraged others to take up, and the seminars and projects that he proposed over the years, were informed by humanistic sympathies and a sense of responsibility towards society.

On Professor Grewal's retirement from the Institute of Advanced Study at Shimla in 1993, Professor Satish Chandra, a distinguished medievalist and a former Chairman of the University Grants Commission, thus summed up his academic contribution:

As a historian, he showed a rare capacity for using original Persian sources for purposes of social and economic history. In his work on the Sikh Gurus and the development of Sikh movement, he showed how careful and meticulous historical methodology can bring to light complex aspects of religious life and movements. He played a pioneering role in the development of urban studies in the country. He founded and has been closely associated as President and in various other capacities with the Urban History Association of India. As Vice-Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University, he fostered interdisciplinary studies. As Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, he infused new life into the institution and made it a centre of relevant research and interaction between scholars drawn from various disciplines and backgrounds concerning contemporary problem of our country.⁸⁷

Finally, in his professional journey, Professor Grewal appears to have absorbed much from his rich and eventful environment. Unobtrusively, but surely, the themes chosen by him and their treatment had an imprint of the catholicity of his early environment and education, experience of

Partition and Independence, and subsequently of militancy and the events of 1984. He imbibed the values of social equality and social justice as much from his early exposure to Sikhism in the village as from the élan and idealism of the last decade of the Freedom Struggle and of the post-Independence decades. The bearing of his interest in literature was evident in his analyses of literary sources and creative literature. His somewhat exceptional interest in the ground situation and demography was perhaps inspired by his training in geography. The study of mathematics and physics had probably been behind his inclination towards inferences from statistical data and historical explanation in natural and rational terms. While working on the British historical writing Professor Grewal was particularly struck by the influence of the Newtonian Physics on the emergence of scientific outlook in Europe. Yet, the innovations and departures so characteristic of his historical research cannot be explained without reference to his own creative response to the experiences and opportunities that came his way. After he discovered his abiding interest in history his insatiable keenness to learn kept him going for over six decades. When Professor Grewal was half way through his professional journey, Professor Goswamy evocatively recalled his intellectual strengths:

He chartered out courses that others were to follow. But all that he has done and achieved over these years has been marked precisely by what I had seen in such measure in the years that we had been working together: wit, urbanity, friendliness, breadth of outlook, marked clarity of thought, the ability to seize on details while not losing sight of the whole, raising the very level of the field that one enters through one's endeavours.⁸⁸

X

Personal Reminiscences

My own association with Professor Grewal went back to the year 1964 when I joined M.A. program at the Panjab University at Chandigarh. Something of what I observed as a student, researcher, colleague, and co-author has already figured in these pages. Yet, several aspects about his professional dealings at Chandigarh, Amritsar, Shimla, and Patiala got left out. He was a gentleman scholar, conscientious teacher, friendly colleague, compassionate head, and a firm administrator. His poise,

confidence, unassuming temperament and persuasive power enabled him to deal with stalwarts in different fields with ease. His women colleagues and feminist scholars found him confident, generous, and refreshingly human, with no affected attempts at either intellectualism or at friendliness. His subtle humor from the chair enlivened the proceedings of a seminar or a meeting. He was cordial and warm with the well-meaning and firm with the shirkers. Himself a hard task master, he set an example for hard work for everyone. Though not used to physical labor in his childhood, he was not deterred by it if the need arose. He lent a helping hand in the shifting of the Department from one second floor to the third floor which enthused his clerical staff, colleagues and students to pitch in. As Vice-Chancellor, he would see any member of the faculty without appointment. He always had time for students. He helped them in different ways but never reminded them of his kindnesses. Nor did he downgrade anyone; he was especially kind to the underprivileged. He motivated many from a humble background to study further and to evolve and grow.

While taking all responsibilities seriously and giving his best, Professor Grewal never compromised his dignity and integrity. In his various administrative capacities, he tried to do the right thing, which sometimes offended people. He was sensitive to the issues entailing academic freedom and institutional autonomy, and even staked his job and personal safety in their defense. Academic leadership came naturally to him and he seized every opportunity for institution building, be it the History Department and the University at Amritsar, or the Institute at Shimla, or the World Punjabi Centre at Patiala, or the Institute of Punjab Studies at Chandigarh. His imagination, initiative, purposefulness, organizational ability and global outreach were evident everywhere. He had almost a detached and stoical attitude towards trappings of power, taking change in his stride, and never giving up his optimism, or slackening his commitment to scientific history. As he stated in a recent interview, he had 'no regrets'; for he 'found his vocation and did justice to it' (*Hindustan Times*, April 26, 2019). Several awards, including *Padamshree*, came his way for his intellectual and academic contributions, extensive studies of Sufism, promotion of social sciences, and path-breaking work in Punjab and Sikh history. Professor Grewal took them all in his stride.

I may conclude this essay with the recollections of a young scholar, Dr Karamjit K. Malhotra, who was Professor Grewal's last student informally, and his last co-author formally. Dr Malhotra recalls:

As an enthusiastic M.A. student in late 2003, I was keen to meet Professor Grewal. I had read his *Guru Nanak in History, Sikhs of the Punjab* and seminal essays in *Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, and made up my mind to do research in Sikh history. Professor Indu Banga arranged my meeting with him. The day is etched in my memory. I was pleasantly surprised by his modesty and kindness. When I mentioned that I wanted to work on Sikh history, Professor Grewal smiled gently and said that it was a good idea, but why not focus on M.A. first? I felt inspired, topped in the Panjab University and met him again. He welcomed my keenness to do research but cautioned me: 'You cannot become a historian in just a few years; it's a lifelong vocation which needs passion'.

Undaunted, I chose to work on the eighteenth century in Sikh history with Professor Banga as my supervisor. I saw Professor Grewal frequently in connection with my ongoing research work. He was generous with his time and library. He discussed and clarified several complex issues, making me think and rethink. He was always patient with me and gentle in his criticism. He never imposed his own views. Rather, he felt happy if I disagreed with him sometimes, and a gentle smile lit his eyes. I read the core texts with him and marveled at his capacity for close reading. I continued to work on Sikh literature and discuss things with him even after the completion of my doctoral work (published by the OUP in 2016 as *The Eighteenth Century in Sikh History*).

It was amazing to observe Professor Grewal at work. I attended over sixty of his lectures on different aspects of Punjab and Sikh history which he delivered as a Visiting Professor at the Punjabi University. He was meticulous in their preparation; he enjoyed his interactions with the faculty and students. As the Founder-Director of the World Punjabi Centre, he was keen to build the institution from a scratch and made tireless effort to give it a meaningful program. Around 2010, he worked for about 12 to 14 hours a day, starting his day early. He had seen every book on his shelves. He felt excited whenever he made a discovery which

he often did. He would discuss it with me and Professor Banga. He kept an open house for students and scholars visiting him. Often, old students and colleagues came to him with professional and personal problems and went back smiling; no problem seemed insurmountable. He did not encourage gossip. He advised me to stay away from it and not to be affected by petty politics around. He had a remarkable ability to concentrate amidst noise and chatter. I sometimes felt that he remained in a state of *sehaj*, to use a term from *Gurbani*. At the same time, if he disapproved of something or someone, he conveyed it in no uncertain terms, but without getting visibly angry. He never lost his poise and sense of humor.

At the end of a long and fruitful day, Professor Grewal liked to relax by watching television. He listened to the news and occasionally watched a movie, but especially enjoyed Sufi music; he once wrote a paper on Nustrat Fateh Ali Khan's *qawwalis*. He also enjoyed Punjabi folk music. He rendered the *ghazals* of Faiz Ahmad Faiz beautifully. Generally economical in speech, amongst friends and in small informal gatherings, Professor Grewal often quoted Ghalib, Iqbal and Faiz with effect. I gradually became aware of his remarkable aesthetic sense for poetry, music, painting, and films. Though rarely, he himself wrote poetry. In the early days of my association, I was dismayed to notice Professor Grewal having *khichadi* daily for lunch, and thought in my naiveté that perhaps it was necessary for a historian! I later found to my relief that he was fond of good food, though he generally ate simply; it was a delight to see him when he indulged in mangoes in the summer season.

A wonderful human being, Professor Grewal was caring, compassionate and courteous. His optimism was exceptional. Four days before he passed away, he spoke to me on phone and asked me to be in '*chardi kala*', and that he would get well soon and talk about his next project. I recall that when I last met him on July 29, 2022, he had developed fever but was in his study checking footnotes of his just finished book on Guru Nanak. Professor Grewal's extraordinary optimism and passion for history would remain a source of inspiration for me.⁸⁹

Lastly, Professor Grewal's innate optimism to which Dr Malhotra made a reference, probably accounted for his positive outlook on the past. He looked for new beginnings, new ideas and signs of change without losing sight of continuities. What, how and why of change were more important to him than the weight of the millennia. He was concerned about the degree of dents made in the social situation and the motivating ideas at a particular historical juncture. Interconnections between social and political forces and ideas were especially evident in his work on Sikh history. One cannot agree more with Professor Mann that Professor Grewal 'was a larger than life figure in the area of Sikh studies'. Furthermore, 'From Baba Nanak to contemporary Sikh affairs, there is no facet of the Sikh Panth, on which this great scholar did not leave his mark' (*The Tribune*, August 12, 2022).

Notes

1. This is a substantially revised and enlarged version of *Making of the Historian: J.S. Grewal* by Indu Banga, written in association with Karamjit K. Malhotra. New Delhi: Manohar, 2009. Professor Grewal's interviews by Dr Malhotra and myself for the *Sahapedia* (www.sahapedia.org), made available in 2019, have also been used.
2. For the outline of the early phase, I have drawn upon Tripta Wahi, 'A Profile', in *Words From Friends and Colleagues for Professor J.S. Grewal*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993, pp. 10-12.
3. Published in 1960 from London under the same title.
4. B.N. Goswamy, in *Words*, pp. 24-25.
5. J.S. Grewal, 'Eighteenth-Century Sikh Polity', later included in the collection entitled, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU), 1972, pp.92-100. It may be added that the fourth edition of this influential collection was published by Manohar in 2007 as *Sikh Ideology, Polity and Social Order*.
6. J.S. Grewal, 'Ahmad Shah of Batala on Sikh Polity' and 'Ganesh Das on Sikh Polity'. In *ibid.*, pp.84-91 and 101-8.
7. J.S. Grewal and S.S. Bal, *Guru Gobind Singh: A Biographical Study*. Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1967, Appendix, pp. 188-89.
8. J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*. Chandigarh: Panjab University, 2nd edn. 1979, rep 1998, Preface, p. vi.
9. *Ibid.*, p. vii.

10. John C.B. Webster, 'Modern Historical Scholarship and Sikh Religious Tradition: Some Exploratory Remarks'. *Studies in Local and Regional History* (ed. J.S. Grewal). Amritsar: GN(D)U, 1974, pp. 130, 132.
11. Harjeet S. Gill, 'Historiography and *Guru Nanak in History*'. Paper for the ICHR and ICSSR sponsored seminar on 'Debates and Trends in Punjab and Sikh Historical Studies since Independence', organized in March 2009 at Amritsar by the Department of History, GNDU.
12. S. Nurul Hasan. Foreword. *Guru Nanak in History*, p. xi.
13. J.S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India: The Assessments of British Historians*. Oxford: OUP, 1970, Preface, p. vii.
14. Peter Hardy, Foreword. *Muslim Rule in India*, pp. xi and xii.
15. *Ibid.*, p. xiv. According to Hardy, Grewal's own deep involvement was evident from the fact that 'the subject was his own, conceived by himself and pursued with rare enthusiasm and disregard for the clock'.
16. Irfan Habib, 'Professor J.S. Grewal and the History and Historiography of Medieval India'. Note for the seminar on 'Debates and Trends in Punjab and Sikh Historical Studies since Independence', GNDU, 2009.
17. J.S. Grewal, 'The Qazi in the Pargana'. *The Historian's Panjab: Miscellaneous Articles*. Amritsar: GN(D)U, 1974, pp.48-49.
18. *In the By-Lanes of History: Some Persian Documents from a Punjab Town*. Shimla: IAS, 1975. Professor Grewal recalled that this reconstruction of urban social relations in the *By-Lanes* came to be regarded as the only work of its kind by J.F. Richards, a medievalist. Interview with J.S. Grewal, *Sahapedia*, transcript, p.20.
19. *The Historian's Panjab*, pp. 10-11.
20. J.S. Grewal, *Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Persian Chroniclers*. Amritsar: GNDU, 1976, p. 84.
21. The translation of a portion of the history of the Punjab in Persian by Ganesh Das Wadehra was published as *Early Nineteenth Century Panjab: From Ganesh Das's Char Bagh-i-Panjab* (trs. and eds. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga). Amritsar, GNDU: 1975. Its revised and enlarged edition was brought out by Routledge in 2016.
22. Lithographed in the 1880s, the five units or *daftar*s of the *Umdat-ut Tawarikh* have 1737 pages and over 7,00,000 words.
23. *Umdat-ut Tawarikh*, Daftar II (eds. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, Punjabi tr. Amarwant Singh). Amritsar: GNDU, 1987, p. 15.
24. Published by GNDU in 1987 and translated and edited by J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, this collection of 'military' *parwanas* was located and initially acquired by Sita Ram Kohli.
25. This new approach to the reign of Ranjit Singh was evident in the proceedings of the seminar on his second birth centenary. *Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his Times* (eds J. S Grewal and Indu Banga). Amritsar: GNDU, 1980.

26. J.S. Grewal, *The Reign of Maharaja Singh: Structure of Power, Economy and Society*. Sita Ram Kohli Memorial Lectures. Patiala: Punjabi University, 1981, p. 35.
27. *Ibid.*, p.37. It may be added that in 1982 Professor Grewal brought out a short biography of Ranjit Singh 'meant for the young', with 'quite a few things of interest' for the specialists as well. A revised and consolidated version of these two works, *The Reign* and the biography, appeared as *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Polity, Economy and Society*, Amritsar: GNDU, 2001.
28. J.S. Grewal, 'Emergence of Punjabi Drama: Cultural Response to Colonial Rule'. *Journal of Regional History*, Vol V, 1984, p. 117. Its revised version is published in the *Historical Studies of Punjabi Literature* (2011).
29. J.S. Grewal, 'Literary Evidence: The Case of Hir-Waris'. *Journal of Regional History*, Vol IV, 1983, p. 1. Its revised version is included in the *Historical Studies of Punjabi Literature* (2011).
30. J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 (first published 1990). Preface, p. xiii.
31. Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire: Panjab in the Seventeenth Century*. Delhi: OUP, 1991, p. 3.
32. R.R. Sethi, Foreword, *History for College Students* (ed. John C.B. Webster). Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1966.
33. J.S. Grewal, 'Examination Reform in an Affiliating University'. Paper presented at the Vice-Chancellors' Conference organized by the Association of Indian Universities, Kanpur 1983.
34. *History Teaching in India: Perspectives and Programmes for the Eighties*. Delhi: UGC, 1978, p. 77.
35. Barun De, 'Problems of the Study of the Indian History with particular reference to the Interpretation of the 18th century'. Address of the General President, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Dharwad, 1988, p. 38.
36. For conspicuous changes at the Institute under Professor Grewal's direction, Jaidev, 'The Tenure', in *Words*, pp. 7-9.
37. The citation given by the Fellows at Professor Grewal's retirement as Director of the Institute of Advanced Study at Shimla in 1993.
38. J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in Western Scholarship*. Shimla: IAS, 1992, Preface.
39. J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy*. Shimla: IAS, 1993, Preface.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
42. J.S. Grewal, *The Akalis: A Short History*. Chandigarh: Punjab Studies Publication, 1996, Preface.
43. J.S. Grewal, *Historical Perspectives on Sikh Identity*. Patiala: Punjabi University, 1997, p.75.
44. J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1998, pp. 292-93.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

46. J.S. Grewal, *Social and Cultural History of the Punjab*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2004 (reissued in 2019 under Manohar Classics).
47. J.S. Grewal and Veena Sachdeva, 'State and Society in Himachal', *The State and Society in Medieval India* (ed. J.S.Grewal). History of Science Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization, Vol VII, Part 1. New Delhi: OUP,2006, pp. 313-48.
48. J.S. Grewal (ed.) *Religious Movements and Institutions in Medieval India*. History of Science Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization, Vol VII, Part 2. New Delhi: OUP, 2005, pp. 201-27, 318-473, 505-47.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 353, 377.
50. This statement by Gurinder Singh Mann appears on the dust jacket of *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions, and Identity* by J. S. Grewal. New Delhi: OUP, 2009.
51. John Stratton Hawley stated this in his paper presented at the seminar on 'Debates and Trends in Punjab and Sikh Historical Studies since Independence', GNDU, 2009.
52. J.S. Grewal, *A Study of Guru Granth Sahib: Doctrine, Social Content, History, Structure and Status*. Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2009.
53. J.S. Grewal, 'Love and Gender in the Rig Veda', *Love and Gender in the Rig Veda and Medieval Punjabi Literature*, Shimla: IAS, pp. 9-25.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 27- 82. Also, J.S. Grewal, *Historical Studies in Punjabi Literature*, Patiala: Punjabi University, pp. 32-236.
55. J.S. Grewal, *History, Literature, and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*. New Delhi: OUP, 2011, pp. 1-4, 293, 306.
56. Indu Banga, 'J.S. Grewal on Sikh History, Historiography and Recent Debates', *Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 20, 2013, pp. 302-12.
57. J.S. Grewal, *Recent Debates in Sikh Studies: An Assessment*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2011, pp. 291-94.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 295-96.
59. *Ibid.*, p.294.
60. *Ibid.*, p.147.
61. *Ibid.*, p.295.
62. *Ibid.*, p.296. For a discussion, *ibid.*, pp. 243-64.
63. *Ibid.*, p.297.
64. *Ibid.*, p.287.
65. Banga, 'J.S. Grewal on Sikh History, Historiography and Recent Debates', pp.314-22.
66. J.S. Grewal, *Historical Writings on the Sikhs (1784-2011): Western Enterprise and Indian Response*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2012, pp. 473-92.
67. The major categories of sources used for studying *Master Tara Singh* included documents of the colonial and Indian governments, the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal, and the Congress Party, periodicals and correspondence. The author went through over 200 volumes of the collected and selected works of the towering Indian leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Patel,

Rajendra Prasad and Jinnah. Also tapped were the autobiographies and accounts of Master Tara Singh's older and younger contemporaries, besides his own writings – memoirs, essays, historical novels, pamphlets, addresses and travelogue.

68. J.S. Grewal, *Master Tara Singh in Indian History: Colonialism, Nationalism, and the Politics of Sikh Identity*, New Delhi: OUP/ Punjabi University, 2017, p.9.
69. *Ibid.*, p.10.
70. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
71. *Ibid.*, p.644.
72. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, *A Political Biography of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha (1883-1942): Paramountcy, Patriotism, and the Panth*. New Delhi: OUP, 2018, p.xi.
73. J.S. Grewal, *Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708): Master of the White Hawk*, New Delhi: OUP, 2019, p. 105.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 215, 239-42.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 239, 248.
80. J.S. Grewal, 'Freedom and Responsibility in Historical Scholarship', *Journal of Sikh Studies*, Vol.II, 1975, pp. 124-25.
81. Interview with J.S. Grewal, *Sahapedia*, transcript, p. 14.
82. J.S. Grewal, 'Introduction', *Sikh History from Persian Sources* (eds. J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib). New Delhi: Tulika/Indian History Congress, 2001, pp. 37, 38.
83. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, 'The Study of Regional History'. *Different Types of History* (ed. Bharati Ray). History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization, Volume XIV, Part 4. New Delhi: Pearson Education, 2009, p. 219.
84. J.S. Grewal, Presidential Address, Medieval Section, Indian History Congress, Bhubneswar, 1997, p.5.
85. *Ibid.*, p.7.
86. Grewal, 'Freedom and Responsibility in Historical Scholarship', p.125.
87. Satish Chandra, in *Words*, p. 41.
88. B.N. Goswamy, in *Words*, p. 25.
89. Communicated to me by Dr Karamjit K. Malhotra, presently Assistant Professor, Department of History and Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala.

Published Work by J.S. Grewal

A. BOOKS AND MONOGRAPHS

- 1967a *Guru Gobind Singh: A Biographical Study* (with S.S. Bal). Chandigarh: Panjab University.
- 1969 *Guru Nanak in History*. Chandigarh: Panjab University (2nd. edn. 1979, reprint 1998).
- 1970 *Muslim Rule in India: The Assessments of British Historians*. Oxford: OUP.
- 1971 *The Key Concepts of Guru Nanak*. Amritsar: GNDU (English, Punjabi and Hindi).
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