

A 13-PART INVESTIGATION

# Punjab: The Whole Truth

*Five thousand years of history, one honest look —  
from the first farmers to the Khalistan question.*

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PART ONE OF THIRTEEN

## The Land Before the Name

From the first villages to about 500 BCE

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LOVEPREET SINGH

THE LIVING ARCHIVE

Written in plain English.

Every disputed number shows its range and its source.

Every side gets its strongest argument before it gets an answer.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

## Who is writing this, and why

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*You are about to read thirteen parts of history. Before you give me that much of your time, you are owed a straight account of who I am, what I am not, and what I am trying to do.*

### What I am not

I am not a historian by training. I hold no degree in history. I have never taught it, never excavated anything, and never read a Persian chronicle in Persian. If you are looking for credentials of that kind, I do not have them, and I would rather say so on the first page than have you discover it on the four hundredth.

I am also Punjabi. I am writing about my own people, my own land, and in Parts 9 and 10, about events that shaped the world my family lived in. That is a conflict of interest and I am declaring it, because a researcher who pretends to have no stake in his subject is either lying or has not understood the subject.

### What I am

I am a researcher and writer. I run **Lovelace**, an independent design and engineering studio, and I am Founder and Managing Director of **Five Rivers Inc.** I have studied at Panjab University and Chandigarh University, and I am in the second year of an MBA in Business Strategy and Analysis. I am a **Certified Ethical Hacker**, and I taught myself to write software. I am now working toward doctoral research.

None of that qualifies me to write about the Battle of the Ten Kings. I know that. But three habits from that work turned out to matter more than I expected, and they are the only credentials I am actually claiming.

**From security work, I learned to attack my own conclusions.** When you test a system, you do not go looking for proof that it is sound. You go looking for the one input that breaks it, and you assume it exists until you have failed to find it. That instinct is the exact opposite of how most people write about Punjab — and it is the instinct behind Rule 3 of this work, where I state every opposing argument in its strongest form before I answer it. An argument that has only ever beaten a weak opponent has not won anything.

**From strategy and analysis, I learned to ask what the numbers actually support.** Not what they can be made to suggest. In Part 12 I run a feasibility audit on Khalistan the way I would run one on a business plan: water, land, capital, revenue, supply lines, exit routes. Emotion is not admissible in that chapter. Neither is sentiment on the other side.

**From teaching myself to code, I learned that you can understand almost anything if you are honest about what you do not yet know.** The failure mode is never ignorance. It is pretending.

### Why I started this

Because everybody in Punjab has an opinion about Punjab, and almost nobody arguing has read anything.

I do not say that to insult anyone. I include myself in it. I grew up hearing confident claims from every direction — that Bhindranwale was a saint, that he was a terrorist, that 1984 was a massacre, that it was an operation against militants, that Khalistan is freedom, that Khalistan is a foreign intelligence project. I could not have defended any of those positions with a source. Neither, when I asked, could the people making them.

So I decided to find out. Not to prove a point I already held — to find out. That distinction is the entire reason this exists.

### What I promise, and what I refuse

**I promise to show you the range.** Where the sources conflict — and on the most important questions in this story they conflict violently — I will give you both figures, name who published each, and explain why they differ. Hiding uncertainty is not confidence. It is dishonesty with better posture.

**I promise to include what damages my own case.** There are facts in Part 10 that are painful for Sikhs to read, and facts in the same part that are painful for the Indian state to read. Both are going in.

**I refuse to insult a people.** Not out of politeness — because it does not work. "Punjabis are fools" cannot explain anything, since it cannot explain change, and Punjab has changed enormously. Every time I was tempted by that kind of sentence, it turned out I had simply not yet found the actual cause. The insult is what you write when you have run out of explanation.

**I refuse to write propaganda in either direction.** Including my own.

### Where this is going

These thirteen parts are the first major work of **The Living Archive**, a long-form research project I am building on Indian history, society, religion, public policy and technology — written from the record, in plain language, with competing views left standing. This is also groundwork. I am working toward doctoral research, and Punjab is where I intend to do it.

Which means I need this to be right more than I need it to be popular. If you find an error, I want to hear about it. My sources are listed at the end of every part precisely so that you can check me.

**One last thing, about the language.** I have written all thirteen parts so that a student in Class 6 can follow every sentence. That is deliberate, and it is not a compromise. Most writing on this subject is difficult on purpose — complexity is how people hide that they are not sure what they are saying. If I cannot explain the Anandpur Sahib Resolution to a fifteen-year-old, I do not understand it well enough to have an opinion about it. Simple language is not simple thinking. It is what is left after the thinking is finished.

— *Lovepreet Singh*  
*The Living Archive*

## BEFORE WE BEGIN

## How to read this book

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*This is Part 1 of 13. Together they try to answer one enormous question: what actually happened to Punjab, and why does everyone argue about it so violently?*

You are going to read a lot of pages about Punjab. Before you do, you should know exactly what kind of book this is, and what rules it follows. If you skip this section, you may misunderstand everything that comes after it.

### What this book is trying to do

Punjab is one of the most argued-about places on earth. Say the word and people immediately reach for a story. One person says Punjab is the sword-arm of India, the land that fed the country and guarded its border. Another says Punjab is a colony that India bled dry. One says Bhindranwale was a saint. Another says he was a terrorist. One says Khalistan is a freedom movement. Another says it is a Pakistani intelligence project run by lawyers in New Jersey.

All of these people can produce facts. That is the problem. Almost every claim in the Punjab argument has *some* evidence behind it. What people do is pick the facts that suit them and hide the rest.

I try to do the opposite. I put all of it on the table — the glory and the shame, what Punjab did to others and what was done to Punjab — and then asks what the full picture actually supports.

#### THE SIMPLEST WAY TO SAY IT

Most writing about Punjab is a lawyer's argument: pick a side, then hunt for evidence. This book tries to be a doctor's report: look at everything, then say what you found — even if nobody likes it.

### My five rules

**Rule 1 — Plain English, always.** If a school student in Class 6 cannot follow a sentence, that sentence is badly written. Every specialist word — *doab*, *Miri-Piri*, *riparian rights*, *Anandpur Sahib Resolution* — gets explained in ordinary words the first time it appears. Simple language is not the same as simple thinking. A senior civil servant reading this should find the analysis sharp; a fifteen-year-old should find the words easy. Those two goals do not conflict. They only look like they conflict because most people write badly.

**Rule 2 — When the numbers are disputed, you see the dispute.** Some of the most important facts in this story have no agreed figure. How many people died in Operation Blue

Star in 1984? The Government of India's White Paper said 493 civilians and militants. Independent estimates run to several thousand. I will not quietly pick one. I will show you both, tell you who said what, and explain why they disagree. You are then free to think for yourself. A book that hides its uncertainty is not being confident. It is being dishonest.

**Rule 3 — Every side gets its best case, not its worst.** It is easy to defeat a stupid version of an argument. It proves nothing. So when I examine the case for Khalistan, I will state that case the way its cleverest supporter would state it — and then answer it. When I examine the Indian state's conduct, I will state the state's justification at full strength — and then test it. An argument that can only beat a weak opponent has not won anything.

**Rule 4 — Groups of people are never the explanation.** "Punjabis are fools." "Sikhs are hot-headed." "Hindus are cowards." These are not analysis; they are insults wearing a lab coat. They also happen to be useless, because they cannot explain change. If Punjabis were simply "like that," Punjab would have looked the same in 2500 BCE, in 1799, in 1965 and in 1988. It did not. It changed enormously, and it changed for reasons — geography, money, water, politics, war, specific decisions by specific named people. Those reasons are what I am hunting for. Blaming a people's character is what you do when you have run out of actual explanations.

**Rule 5 — Nobody in this story is only a hero or only a villain.** The Indian state defeated a genuinely murderous insurgency and also killed innocent people and covered it up. Punjab produced extraordinary courage and also produced men who machine-gunned bus passengers for their religion. Both halves are true. A history that gives you only the flattering half of anybody is a history you should not trust, including mine.

#### A WARNING ABOUT THIS SUBJECT

Punjab's history is used as a weapon almost every day, by many different people, in several countries. Some of what you will read online about Bhindranwale, about 1984, about Khalistan, is fabricated — invented quotes, doctored photographs, casualty figures multiplied by ten, real atrocities denied outright. This happens on *every* side of the argument. So I flag what is documented, what is disputed, and what is simply made up. When we get to Part 9 and Part 10, that flagging becomes the most important thing in the book.

### What Part 1 covers, and why we start so far back

You may be impatient. You want Bhindranwale, 1984, Khalistan, Pannun, the drug crisis. Those are Parts 9 to 13, and they are the longest parts of this work.

But if you start there you will not understand any of it. Here is why.

Every serious argument about modern Punjab eventually comes down to four things: **water, land, who counts as a Punjabi, and who has the right to rule.** The Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal fight is about water. The Chandigarh dispute is about land. The Punjabi Suba movement was about who counts as a Punjabi. Khalistan is about who has the right to rule.

All four of those questions are older than 1984. They are older than 1947. Two of them are older than writing. They are set into the ground Punjab sits on. Part 1 is where I dig them up, so that when they explode later you already know what they are.

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*If you do not understand Punjab's rivers, you cannot understand a single day of Punjab's politics — not in 1500 BCE, not in 1947, not this morning.*

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## What is in Part 1

CHAPTER 1 Where is Punjab, actually? Four different places share one name.

CHAPTER 2 The five rivers — the machine that made Punjab, and the trap inside it.

CHAPTER 3 What Punjab was called before it was called Punjab.

CHAPTER 4 The first Punjabis: Harappa, and the awkward fact hidden inside it.

CHAPTER 5 The Rigveda: Punjab's first book, and India's first named battle.

CHAPTER 6 Why geography is destiny here — four permanent facts.

CHAPTER 7 Scorecard: what Part 1 proves, and what it does not.

## CHAPTER ONE

## Where is Punjab, actually?

*Before we can discuss Punjab's history, we have to solve a problem most people never notice: the word "Punjab" means at least four different places, and arguments about Punjab usually involve people quietly using different ones.*

### Four Punjabs

Say "Punjab" to five people and you may get five maps.

#### THE FOUR THINGS PEOPLE MEAN BY "PUNJAB"

| Which Punjab                                      | Rough size                           | What it includes                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Indian Punjab</b><br>The state, today       | 50,362 sq km<br>~3 crore people      | Amritsar, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Patiala, Bathinda.<br>Shares its capital, Chandigarh, with Haryana. About 1.5% of India's land.                                                           |
| <b>2. Pakistani Punjab</b><br>The province, today | 205,344 sq km<br>~12–13 crore people | Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan, Gujranwala.<br>Pakistan's largest province by population — over half the country.                                                                |
| <b>3. Historical Punjab</b><br>Before 1947        | ~350,000 sq km                       | Both of the above, plus today's Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh and Islamabad, plus parts of Delhi's surroundings. This is the Punjab of Ranjit Singh and of the British province. |
| <b>4. Cultural Punjab</b>                         | No fixed border                      | Wherever Punjabi is spoken and Punjabi life is lived — including Delhi, Southall in London, Surrey in Canada, Fresno in California. Roughly 15 crore Punjabi speakers worldwide.         |

Notice something uncomfortable. Indian Punjab — the one most people mean when they argue about "Punjab" in India — is **less than one-seventh** of historical Punjab. It is a fragment of a fragment. Lahore, the great capital of Punjab for a thousand years, is not in it. Neither is Ranjit Singh's tomb. Neither is Nankana Sahib, where Guru Nanak was born. Neither is Harappa, the city that named an entire civilisation.

#### PUT SIMPLY

Modern Indian Punjab is to historical Punjab roughly what a single slice is to a whole cake. When someone says "Punjab has been reduced to nothing," this is what they are pointing at — and on that narrow point, they are factually correct.



## Why this matters more than it looks

This is not pedantry. Watch how the four definitions get swapped in real arguments:

- Someone says *"Punjab was once a great empire, so it can be a country again."* The empire they mean is historical Punjab (Definition 3), which is mostly in Pakistan today. The country they propose is Indian Punjab (Definition 1). These are not the same place, and the argument silently jumps between them.
- Someone says *"Punjab is a Sikh-majority land."* True of Indian Punjab today (Sikhs are roughly 57–58%). Not true of historical Punjab at any point in its history — Sikhs were never a majority of undivided Punjab. In 1941, undivided Punjab was about 53% Muslim, 30% Hindu and 15% Sikh.
- Someone says *"Punjab gave India its army."* True of British Punjab (Definition 3), which supplied enormous numbers of recruits from areas that are now in Pakistan. Punjabi Muslims from Rawalpindi and Jhelum were a huge share of that army. After 1947 they went to Pakistan's army.

Every one of those slippages is common. Some are honest confusion; some are deliberate. Once you can spot them, half the noise in the Punjab debate falls away.

### REMEMBER THIS FOR PART 12

The single hardest question for any proposal to make Punjab a separate country is: **which Punjab?** The 50,000 sq km one with no port, no capital of its own, and no control of its rivers — or the 350,000 sq km one that would require taking half of Pakistan? Supporters almost never answer this. We will make them answer it.

## The definition this book will use

To avoid confusion, I will be explicit every time. When I say "Punjab" without qualification in the ancient and medieval chapters, I mean **the historical region** — the land of the five rivers, roughly Definition 3. From Part 7 onwards, when partition splits it, I will always say "Indian Punjab" or "Pakistani Punjab." Where a number could apply to either, I will tell you which.

## CHAPTER TWO

## The five rivers: the machine that made Punjab

*Punjab is not a nation, a religion, or a language first. It is a river system. Everything else grew on top of that.*

### Meet the five

The name says five waters. Here they are, running from west to east — which is also the order an invader coming from Afghanistan would cross them.

THE FIVE RIVERS OF PUNJAB, WEST TO EAST

| River         | Old name                                  | Where it is born       | Notes                                                                                                        |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Jhelum</b> | Vitasta<br>(Hydaspes to the Greeks)       | Verinag, Kashmir       | Where Alexander fought Porus in 326 BCE. Entirely in Pakistan and J&K today.                                 |
| <b>Chenab</b> | Asikni<br>(Acesines)                      | Lahaul, Himachal       | The largest of the five by volume. Chenab means "moon river." The river of Heer-Ranjha and Sohni-Mahiwal.    |
| <b>Ravi</b>   | Parushni,<br>later Iravati<br>(Hydraotes) | Bara Bhangal, Himachal | Lahore and Harappa both sit on it. India's first great recorded battle was fought on its banks.              |
| <b>Beas</b>   | Vipas<br>(Hyphasis)                       | Rohtang, Himachal      | The only one of the five that begins and ends inside India. Where Alexander's army mutinied and turned back. |
| <b>Sutlej</b> | Shutudri<br>(Hesidros)                    | Lake Rakshastal, Tibet | The longest of the five. Rises outside India entirely. Ranjit Singh's empire was defined by it.              |

All five eventually pour into a sixth and much larger river, the **Indus**, which carries their combined water down through Sindh and into the Arabian Sea. Strictly speaking Punjab is five rivers feeding one, and the Indus is the trunk of the tree.

### The doabs: the real map of Punjab

Now the single most useful idea in this whole part. When five rivers run roughly parallel across a flat plain, they cut the land into long strips. Each strip is a piece of land with a river on either side.

The Persian word for such a strip is **doab** — *do* means two, *ab* means water. Land between two waters.

Punjab has five of them, and if you learn these five names you will understand more about Punjabi history than most people who have read three books about it.

## THE FIVE DOABS — PUNJAB'S TRUE INTERNAL GEOGRAPHY

| Doab                  | Between which rivers | Main cities, then and now                                                                    |
|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sindh Sagar</b>    | Indus and Jhelum     | Rawalpindi, Islamabad. Dry, rugged, the classic army-recruiting country. In Pakistan.        |
| <b>Chaj</b>           | Jhelum and Chenab    | Gujrat, Sargodha. In Pakistan.                                                               |
| <b>Rechna</b>         | Chenab and Ravi      | Faisalabad (old Lyallpur), Gujranwala — Ranjit Singh's birthplace. In Pakistan.              |
| <b>Bari</b>           | Ravi and Beas        | <b>Lahore and Amritsar.</b> The cultural heart of Punjab. Cut in half by the border in 1947. |
| <b>Bist Jalandhar</b> | Beas and Sutlej      | Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala. In India.                                                 |

Look hard at the Bari Doab row. Lahore and Amritsar are about 50 kilometres apart. They sat in the same strip of land, watered by the same two rivers, for their entire history. They were one economic unit — one market, one canal system, one road. In 1947 a line was drawn between them by a British lawyer who had never been to India before, working from maps and census tables in six weeks.

We will return to that in Part 7. For now, just hold on to the fact that partition did not merely divide a province. It cut a doab down the middle, which is like cutting a body down the middle rather than separating two people.

**PUT SIMPLY**

Imagine five long ribbons of land laid side by side, each with a river on its left and a river on its right. Those are the doabs. Armies marched along them. Canals were dug across them. Cities grew where two of them met a crossing point. Punjab's map is not one blob — it is five ribbons.

**Why the soil here is extraordinary**

Here is the process, in one paragraph. The Himalaya is the youngest and highest mountain range on earth, and it is still rising. Rain, ice and frost grind its rock into fine particles. The rivers pick up those particles and carry them downhill. When the rivers hit the flat plain, they slow down, and slow water cannot carry heavy loads, so it drops what it is carrying. Every year, for millions of years, the rivers have been laying down a fresh coat of ground-up mountain across Punjab.

The result is **alluvial soil** — soil made of river deposits — and in Punjab it is not a thin layer. In places the alluvium is hundreds of metres deep. If you dug straight down in central Punjab you would go through the height of a skyscraper before you hit rock.

This soil is flat, deep, soft, easy to plough with simple tools, and naturally fertile. It is one of the best agricultural surfaces on the planet. This is not a small detail. It is the reason there were cities here in 2600 BCE, the reason every empire wanted the place, and the reason Punjab could feed India in the 1970s.

### The trap: Punjab does not get much rain

Now the part almost everybody misses, and it is the most important sentence in this chapter.

**Punjab is semi-arid.** That means it is a dry place. Most of Punjab receives somewhere between 300 and 700 millimetres of rain a year, and the south-west — Bathinda, Ferozepur, Muktsar, and across the border into Cholistan — gets far less than that and shades into genuine desert. For comparison, Kerala gets around 3,000 mm and Assam's wettest districts get far more.

So Punjab has magnificent soil and not enough rain to use it.

Which leads to the defining fact of Punjabi history:

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*Punjab has never been rich because of rain falling on it. Punjab has been rich because it could move water sideways — out of rivers, into fields.*

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Every prosperous period in Punjab's history is a period when somebody was good at moving water. The Harappans dug channels and wells. Medieval rulers cut inundation canals that filled when rivers flooded. The British built the largest canal network in the world in the late 1800s and turned dry western Punjab into the "canal colonies." Independent India built dams — Bhakra, Pong, Ranjit Sagar — and then, from the 1970s, drilled millions of tubewells and pumped water up from underground.

Every poor or desperate period is a period when the water stopped moving, or moved to somebody else.

#### REMEMBER THIS FOR PARTS 8, 12 AND 13

Three of the biggest fights in modern Punjab are all the same fight in different clothes: the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 (which gave Pakistan the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab, and India the Ravi, Beas and Sutlej); the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal dispute with Haryana; and the collapsing groundwater table under Punjab today. All three are arguments about moving water sideways. A Punjab that loses those arguments does not become slightly poorer. It stops working.

**One more thing the rivers did: they made Punjab open**

A river is a barrier. But a river on a flat plain is a weak barrier. In the dry season, before the monsoon, the five rivers of Punjab can be forded — walked across — in many places. There is no gorge, no cliff, no jungle, no swamp.

Compare this with other Indian regions. The Western Ghats protect the Konkan coast. The Vindhya and Satpura ranges and the Narmada shield the Deccan. Bengal has its delta and its forests. Kashmir has a wall of mountains around it. Nepal has the Himalaya itself.

Punjab has none of that. Punjab is a smooth, rich, flat table set immediately behind the only easy land entrance to the subcontinent. It is, in military terms, indefensible — unless you defend it with an army standing in the open.

Hold that thought. It becomes the explanation for almost everything in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER THREE

## What Punjab was called before it was called Punjab

*The land is roughly five thousand years old as a settled civilisation. The name "Punjab" is roughly seven hundred years old. That gap contains a lesson.*

### The names, in order

#### WHAT THIS REGION HAS BEEN CALLED

| Name                   | Language / source                     | Rough period      | Meaning and note                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sapta Sindhu</b>    | Sanskrit, Rigveda                     | c. 1500–1000 BCE  | "Seven rivers." The oldest name we have for the region, from India's oldest surviving text.                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Hapta Hindu</b>     | Old Iranian, Avesta                   | Similar period    | The Persian version of the same phrase. Sanskrit <i>s</i> becomes Iranian <i>h</i> . Same words, cousin language.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Panchanada</b>      | Sanskrit, Mahabharata and later texts | c. 400 BCE onward | "Five rivers." <i>Pancha</i> = five, <i>nada</i> = river. This is the direct ancestor, in meaning, of "Punjab."                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Pentapotamia</b>    | Greek                                 | c. 300 BCE        | "Five rivers" again, in Greek. Used by writers describing Alexander's campaign.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Punjab / Panjab</b> | Persian                               | c. 1300 CE onward | <i>Panj</i> = five, <i>ab</i> = water. Appears in Ibn Battuta's travels, in Wassaf's history, and in Ayn al-Mulk Mahru's <i>Insha-i-Mahru</i> , which calls it the <i>wilayat</i> (province) of Punjab. Becomes standard under the Mughals; Emperor Jahangir uses it in his memoirs, the <i>Tuzk-i-Jahangiri</i> . |

### "It's a Persian name" — what that does and doesn't mean

People sometimes use the Persian origin of "Punjab" as a debating point: either to say the name is foreign and therefore the identity is fake, or to say the region was named by Muslim conquerors. Both are sloppy.

Here is the accurate position. Persian and Sanskrit are not unrelated languages. They are close cousins, both descended from a common ancestor language spoken thousands of years ago. Look at the actual words:

| Concept | Sanskrit     | Persian     |
|---------|--------------|-------------|
| five    | <i>pañca</i> | <i>panj</i> |
| water   | <i>áp</i>    | <i>āb</i>   |

These are not translations. They are the same words, worn down differently by two thousand years in two different mouths. "Panchanada" and "Panj-ab" mean the same thing in two branches of one family. The name did not arrive from outer space with an invading army. It drifted in from next door and slotted into a slot that was already there.

Also worth knowing: the word **India** comes from exactly the same process, applied to one of these rivers. Sanskrit *Sindhu* (the river we call the Indus) became Iranian *Hindu*, which became Greek *Indos*, which became Latin *India*. The word "Hindu" and the word "India" are both, originally, the name of a Punjabi-Sindhi river with a Persian accent.

#### PUT SIMPLY

"Punjab" is a Persian phrase, but Persian and Sanskrit are cousins, and the Sanskrit version — *Panchanada*, five rivers — meant exactly the same thing more than a thousand years earlier. Arguing that the name is foreign is like arguing that "father" is foreign because Latin says *pater*.

### The lesson hidden in the naming

Notice that every single name for this region, across five languages and three thousand years, is a description of its rivers. Not its kings. Not its gods. Not its people. Its rivers.

No other major Indian region is named this way. Bengal, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan — these are named after peoples, dynasties or directions. Punjab alone is named after its plumbing.

Outsiders and insiders alike, for three thousand years, looked at this land and said: *this is the place where the water is*. That is what it was for. That is what it still is for.

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*Every name Punjab has ever had is a description of its water.  
Nobody ever named it after a king.*

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### And one honest correction

Because the name is only about seven centuries old, be suspicious of any sentence that begins "Punjab has always...". Punjab as a *named* thing is younger than the Delhi Sultanate. Punjab as a *political* unit — a single government ruling the whole five-river country — is younger still, and has existed for only short stretches.

The land is ancient. The soil is ancient. The people have been there continuously for at least five millennia. But "Punjab" as an idea people identify with is a much more recent invention than the arguments about it usually assume. That does not make the identity less real. Identities that are recent can be as strong as any other — Italian and German national

identity are younger than the United States. But it does mean that anyone claiming a five-thousand-year-old Punjabi nation is describing something that did not exist.



## CHAPTER FOUR

## The first Punjabis: Harappa

*Around 2600 BCE, while the Egyptians were building pyramids, the people of Punjab were building something the Egyptians never thought of: a sewer.*

### The timeline in one table

#### THE INDUS VALLEY (HARAPPAN) CIVILISATION

| Phase                       | Dates                   | What was happening                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mehrgarh / earliest farming | c. 7000–3300 BCE        | Farming and herding begin in the region (Mehrgarh itself is in Balochistan, but it belongs to the same developing world). Wheat, barley, cattle, cotton. |
| Early Harappan              | c. 3300–2600 BCE        | Villages grow into towns. Pottery styles spread. Trade networks form.                                                                                    |
| <b>Mature Harappan</b>      | <b>c. 2600–1900 BCE</b> | The famous phase. Planned cities, standard bricks, drains, weights, seals, long-distance trade with Mesopotamia.                                         |
| Late Harappan / decline     | c. 1900–1300 BCE        | Cities shrink and are abandoned. Populations move east and south. Village life continues; urban life stops.                                              |

### How big was it?

Bigger than people assume. Archaeologists have identified **more than a thousand settlements** belonging to this civilisation. Population estimates for its peak run to around **five million people** — an enormous number for the Bronze Age.

In area, the Indus Valley Civilisation covered roughly 1.2 to 1.3 million square kilometres, stretching from north-east Afghanistan through Pakistan and into north-west India. That is larger than ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia put together. It was, on the evidence we have, the largest civilisation in the world at the time.

And its heartland was Punjab and Sindh.

### The cities that matter for our story

#### KEY HARAPPAN SITES IN OR NEAR THE PUNJAB REGION

| Site                 | Where it is today                                   | Why it matters                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Harappa</b>       | Sahiwal district, Pakistani Punjab, on the Ravi     | Excavated first, so the entire civilisation is named after it. Around 150 hectares at its peak; population estimates around 23,500. This is a Punjabi city, on a Punjabi river, that gave its name to a civilisation spanning three modern countries. |
| <b>Mohenjo-daro</b>  | Larkana district, Sindh                             | The best-preserved city. About 300 hectares. Home of the Great Bath and the "Priest-King" statue. Not in Punjab, but the same civilisation.                                                                                                           |
| <b>Rakhigarhi</b>    | Hisar district, Haryana — part of historical Punjab | Possibly the largest site of all. One measurement puts it at around 350 hectares across its mounds, which would exceed Mohenjo-daro. Source of the famous 2019 DNA study.                                                                             |
| <b>Ganweriwala</b>   | Cholistan desert, Pakistani Punjab                  | Ranked around the fifth largest city of the civilisation. Largely unexcavated. Sits on the dried-up bed of the Ghaggar-Hakra river system.                                                                                                            |
| <b>Rupar (Ropar)</b> | Rupnagar district, Indian Punjab, on the Sutlej     | The first Harappan site excavated in independent India, in 1953. Proof that the civilisation reached well into today's Indian Punjab.                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Kalibangan</b>    | Hanumangarh, Rajasthan                              | Famous for the world's earliest known ploughed field.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

## What these people had

The list is genuinely astonishing for 2600 BCE:

- **Grid-planned streets.** Main roads running north-south and east-west, crossing at right angles. Cities laid out on paper before they were built in mud.
- **Standardised bricks.** Baked bricks made to a ratio of roughly 1 : 2 : 4 — thickness to width to length — used at sites more than a thousand kilometres apart. Somebody was enforcing a standard across an area the size of Western Europe.
- **Covered drains and household bathrooms.** Waste water ran from houses into brick-lined sewers under the street, with inspection covers. No other civilisation of that era did sanitation on this scale. Many Indian and Pakistani towns did not match it until the twentieth century.
- **Standard weights.** Cubes of chert in a fixed binary sequence, accurate enough that traders a thousand kilometres apart could deal honestly.
- **Long-distance trade.** Harappan seals have been found in Mesopotamia. Mesopotamian records mention a trading land called Meluhha, which most scholars identify as the Indus region.
- **Granaries, docks and water tanks,** including the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro and the great reservoirs of Dholavira.

- **A script** — about 400 to 600 distinct signs, found on thousands of seals — that **nobody has been able to read**. Every claimed decipherment is disputed. Until it is read, we do not know their language, their gods' names, their kings' names, or their own name for themselves.

### And now the awkward part

Here is what the Harappans did *not* have, and it is the most important paragraph in this chapter.

Archaeologists have dug at Harappan sites for over a hundred years. They have found no palaces. No royal tombs stuffed with gold. No monuments to kings. No carved scenes of a ruler crushing his enemies — the standard artwork of every other Bronze Age state. Almost no swords. Very few weapons of any kind beyond hunting tools. No evidence of a large standing army. Very little sign of city walls built for war, as opposed to embankments built against floods.

Compare this with Egypt, where the pharaoh's face is on everything, or Mesopotamia, whose art is full of bound prisoners and marching soldiers, or later Assyria, which decorated its palaces with flayings.

The first great civilisation of the Punjab plain appears to have been, by the standards of its time, remarkably peaceful and remarkably unhierarchical.

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*The oldest Punjabi civilisation we can dig up is the least warlike ancient civilisation on earth. Whatever made Punjabis fighters, it was not something in the soil.*

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Be careful here, in both directions. "Absence of evidence" is not proof. Wooden weapons rot. Cloth armour rots. Some scholars think Harappan society may have been more stratified and more violent than the romantic picture allows, and there is real skeletal evidence of injury at some sites. The honest statement is this: *compared with every contemporary civilisation we can compare it to, Harappan society left behind strikingly little evidence of organised warfare and glorified kingship*. That is a real finding, and it is inconvenient for a very popular story.

#### CONTESTED: HOW EQUAL WERE THEY?

The traditional reading — no palaces, no kings, standardised everything — suggests something like a merchant republic or a priest-led federation. A minority of archaeologists argue we simply have not found the elite burials yet, and that the standardisation itself implies strong central authority. Both readings are defensible. What almost nobody argues is that Harappa looked like Egypt or Assyria.

## Why did it end?

For about seventy years, Indian schoolbooks taught a simple answer: invading Aryans destroyed the cities. That answer is now rejected by almost all specialists. Here is the current picture, which is messier and more interesting.

**Climate.** Around 2200 BCE the whole belt from Egypt to India experienced a long drying event. The monsoon weakened. In a semi-arid region utterly dependent on water, a few centuries of reduced rainfall and weaker river flow is a slow death sentence for large cities.

**Rivers moving.** Rivers on flat alluvial plains do not stay put. They wander, they jump their banks, they abandon whole channels. The Ghaggar-Hakra system — a river network east of the Indus, along which an extraordinary number of Harappan sites are clustered — dried up or shifted. Cities on a river that leaves are cities that end.

**Trade collapse.** Mesopotamia went through its own upheavals. When your export market disappears, your merchant cities lose their reason to exist.

**Not invasion.** The timing does not work. The cities were already declining from about 1900 BCE. The genetic evidence for the arrival of Central Asian steppe populations points to roughly 2000–1500 BCE and later, and the archaeological record shows no layer of burned cities and battle casualties of the kind an invasion would leave. The famous "massacre" skeletons at Mohenjo-daro, once presented as evidence, have been re-examined and largely explained by other causes.

The people did not vanish. They dispersed — eastward toward the Ganga plain and southward — and village life continued unbroken. Modern South Asians, including modern Punjabis, carry substantial Harappan ancestry. The cities died; the people did not.

### CONTESTED: THE GHAGGAR-HAKRA AND THE "SARASWATI"

The Rigveda praises a mighty river called the **Saraswati**. Many Indian scholars identify it with the Ghaggar-Hakra, and note that a huge share of Harappan sites lie along its dry bed — which, if true, would push the Vedic world and the Harappan world much closer together in time and place, and would suggest an indigenous origin for Vedic culture. Other scholars argue the Ghaggar-Hakra was mainly monsoon-fed and never the vast glacier-fed river the hymns describe, and that "Saraswati" may originally have referred to the Helmand in Afghanistan. This dispute is genuinely unresolved and it is politically charged in India, because it bears on the Aryan migration question. I state it as open, because it is open.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## The Rigveda: Punjab's first book

*India's oldest surviving text is a collection of hymns composed largely in Punjab, about Punjab's rivers, by people fighting over Punjab's land. Almost nobody thinks of it as a Punjabi book. It is.*

### What the Rigveda is

The Rigveda is a collection of 1,028 hymns in an archaic form of Sanskrit, arranged in ten books. It was composed orally and transmitted orally, memorised syllable by syllable with an accuracy that scholars find close to miraculous, for many centuries before anyone wrote it down.

Mainstream scholarship dates its composition to roughly **1500–1000 BCE**, with the oldest core possibly earlier. A number of Indian scholars argue for substantially earlier dates, some placing it before 2000 BCE and linking it to the Harappan world. I use the mainstream range while telling you the argument exists — that is Rule 2.

### Punjab's rivers, in Punjab's oldest book

Read the river hymns and you are reading a map of Punjab.

#### RIGVEDIC RIVER NAMES AND THEIR MODERN EQUIVALENTS

| Rigvedic name            | Modern name                           | Note                                                                 |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sindhu                   | Indus                                 | The trunk river. Gave its name to Hindu, India, Sindh and Hindustan. |
| Vitasta                  | Jhelum                                |                                                                      |
| Asikni                   | Chenab                                | "The dark one."                                                      |
| Parushni (later Iravati) | Ravi                                  | Site of the Battle of the Ten Kings.                                 |
| Vipas                    | Beas                                  |                                                                      |
| Shutudri                 | Sutlej                                | "Swift-flowing."                                                     |
| Saraswati                | Disputed — probably the Ghaggar-Hakra | See the contested box in Chapter 4.                                  |

The region as a whole is called **Sapta Sindhu**, the land of seven rivers. Whether you count the seven as the five plus the Indus plus the Saraswati, or arrange them some other way, the point is settled: the world of the Rigveda is centred on the Punjab plain and the north-west.

## The Battle of the Ten Kings

Now the event, which deserves to be far better known than it is.

Hymns 7.18, 7.33 and 7.83 of the Rigveda describe a war. On one side stood **King Sudas** of the **Bharata** tribe, advised by the priest **Vasishtha**. On the other stood a confederation of ten kings — the Purus, Yadus, Turvashas, Anus, Druhyus, and several smaller peoples with names like Alina, Paktha, Bhalanas, Shiva and Vishanin.

The battle was fought on the banks of the **Parushni** — the Ravi — the third and central river of Punjab. Water was decisive. The hymns describe the river being manipulated, embankments broken, and large numbers of the enemy drowning as they tried to cross.

Sudas and the Bharatas won.

Three things follow from this, and each of them is large.

**First: the earliest named battle in Indian literature was fought in Punjab, on a Punjabi river, and won by controlling the water.** Three thousand years before the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal dispute, the decisive weapon on this plain was already a river.

**Second: the winning tribe was the Bharatas.** The Republic of India's official name in its own Constitution — *Bharat* — traces back to this tribal name. The word by which India names itself has, in its ancestry, a tribe that won a battle on the banks of the Ravi.

**Third: this sets a pattern that will repeat for the next three thousand years.** Punjab is where the north's power is decided. Alexander and Porus, Mahmud of Ghazni, the three battles of Panipat on Punjab's eastern edge, the Anglo-Sikh wars, the tank battles of 1965 and 1971 — the same plain, over and over.

### REMEMBER THIS FOR PART 12

People who argue for Khalistan sometimes describe Punjab as an ancient nation temporarily occupied by India. People who argue against sometimes describe Punjab as merely a province with no separate identity. The Rigveda is bad news for both. It shows Punjab as an old, distinct, self-aware world — *and* shows that world as the origin point of the very name "Bharat." The two histories are not separable. They are the same history.

## The Aryan question, handled honestly

You cannot discuss the Rigveda in India without hitting this, so let us hit it directly and fairly.

**The question:** did the people who composed the Rigveda come into India from outside, or were they always here?

**What was taught for a long time (and is now discarded):** the "Aryan Invasion Theory" — that fair-skinned Aryans rode in on chariots, destroyed the Harappan cities and enslaved

the locals. This version was heavily shaped by nineteenth-century European racial thinking, and the archaeology does not support it. It is dead.

**What most international genetics and linguistics now supports:** a slower *migration*, not an invasion. The large 2019 study by Narasimhan, Patterson and colleagues, using ancient DNA from across Central and South Asia, found that ancestry from Central Asian steppe pastoralists spread into South Asia in roughly the first half of the second millennium BCE — around 2000 to 1500 BCE — after the Harappan cities were already declining, and that it contributes up to around 30% of the ancestry of some modern South Asian groups. On this reading, Indo-European languages, including the ancestor of Sanskrit and eventually of Punjabi and Hindi, spread into South Asia in that period.

**What the Rakhigarhi study found:** in 2019, Shinde, Narasimhan and colleagues published the genome of a single individual from Rakhigarhi. The paper's title is blunt: the genome *lacks* ancestry from steppe pastoralists. In other words, the Harappan person tested had no steppe ancestry at all. The authors themselves caution, in print, that one individual cannot settle the question for a whole civilisation.

**What Indian scholars who dispute the migration model argue:** that the genetic sampling is thin and heavily weighted toward Central Asia; that the Rigveda contains no memory of a foreign homeland; that the river geography in it is purely Indian; that the Saraswati evidence points to a Vedic culture already present in the Harappan period; and that "steppe ancestry" arriving does not automatically prove the language arrived with it.

#### WHERE THIS ACTUALLY STANDS

The invasion version is finished. The migration version is the mainstream international position and is supported by the current genetic data. It is not unanimous, the data set is still small, and some serious Indian scholars contest it. Anyone who tells you this question is *completely* settled — in either direction — is overstating.

#### Why this argument matters less than people think — for our purposes

Here is something worth saying plainly. For the questions this book is really about — Khalistan, 1984, water, Chandigarh, Punjab's future — the Aryan debate changes almost nothing.

Whichever version is true, the outcome is identical: by 1000 BCE there is a settled population on the Punjab plain, speaking an Indo-European language, with a religious literature centred on these rivers, already fighting large organised wars over this land. That population is continuous with the population there today. Nobody in the Punjab of 2026 can claim descent from only one ancient stream, and nobody can be told they do not belong. The genetics, on every reading, show mixture.

People fight about the Aryan question because it is a proxy for a modern political fight about who is "originally" Indian. It is worth understanding, which is why it is here. But it is not load-bearing for anything in Parts 7 to 13.



## CHAPTER SIX

## Why geography is destiny here

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*This is the analytical heart of Part 1. Four permanent facts about the ground itself. They have not changed in five thousand years, and they explain more of Punjab's history than any king, religion or ideology.*

### Fact One: Punjab is the door

The Indian subcontinent is one of the most naturally sealed regions on earth. Ocean on three sides. The Himalaya to the north — the highest wall on the planet. Dense forest and hill country to the east.

There is one practical land entrance: the north-west, through the passes of the Hindu Kush and Sulaiman ranges — the Khyber, the Bolan, the Gomal, the Kurram.

Walk through any of them and you come down onto a plain. That plain is Punjab.

Not Delhi. Not Uttar Pradesh. Not Rajasthan. Punjab is what an invader sees first, and there is nothing between the mouth of the passes and the Punjabi wheat fields.

Now list who came through: Persians under Darius. Alexander of Macedon. Central Asian Scythians and Parthians. The Kushans. The Hunas. Mahmud of Ghazni, seventeen times. Muhammad of Ghor. Timur. Babur. Nadir Shah. Ahmad Shah Abdali, repeatedly. Every one of them entered India by walking into Punjab.

Punjab was not unlucky. Punjab was *positioned*.

### Fact Two: Punjab cannot hide

Some regions absorb invasion by being difficult. The Deccan swallowed armies in its distances and hills. Rajasthan had its desert and its fortress-hills. Assam broke Mughal armies on rivers and jungle. Kashmir sat behind a wall of mountains. Nepal was never conquered by anyone.

Punjab has no such gift. It is flat. Its only obstacles are its five rivers, and rivers on a flat plain can be forded in the dry season. There is no defensible line, no natural fortress, no place to retreat and regroup.

This produces a brutal binary. A society on such ground has exactly two options when an army appears: **submit, or meet it in the open field**. There is no third choice, because there is nowhere to hide.

Now think about what a thousand years of that does to a culture. Communities that could not fight were repeatedly plundered and enslaved. Communities that could fight survived and passed on their institutions, their weapons, their songs and their memory of resistance.

This is not a mystical racial quality. It is straightforward selection pressure applied to a society over an extremely long time.

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*Punjabis did not become fighters because of what was in their blood.  
They became fighters because of what was under their feet.*

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### Fact Three: Punjab is worth taking

Being at the door is only dangerous if the room is worth entering.

Poor, dry, empty land at a frontier gets ignored — nobody has repeatedly invaded the Thar desert. Punjab, by contrast, offered the deepest, flattest, most fertile soil in northern India, watered by five rivers, capable of producing a large food surplus. A large food surplus means a large population, tax revenue, horses, grain to feed an army, and a road onward to Delhi and the riches of the Ganga plain.

So Punjab combined the three worst possible attributes for a piece of real estate: **easy to enter, impossible to defend, extremely valuable.**

That combination is the entire explanation for the next four thousand years.

### Fact Four: Punjab does not control its own water

This is the fact that will decide Parts 8, 12 and 13, so read it twice.

Punjab's wealth is its rivers. But look at where those rivers begin and end.

- **They are born outside Punjab.** The Jhelum rises in Kashmir. The Chenab, Ravi and Beas rise in Himachal Pradesh and the Lahaul hills. The Sutlej rises in *Tibet*, which means it enters the region from territory controlled by China. Not one of the five rivers has its source inside the Punjab plain.
- **They must leave through somebody else's land.** All five drain into the Indus, and the Indus reaches the sea through Sindh. Punjab has no coastline. It never has had one. There is no port, no harbour, no salt water anywhere in it.

So Punjab is a place whose entire prosperity depends on a resource it does not create and cannot deliver to the sea on its own. It sits in the middle of the pipe, holding neither the tap nor the drain.

For most of history this did not matter much, because the same empire usually held the mountains, the plain and the coast together. It matters enormously the moment borders are drawn across the system. And in the twentieth century, borders were drawn across it twice — once in 1947 between India and Pakistan, and once in 1966 between Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.

## WHO HOLDS WHAT, TODAY

| Part of the system                  | Who controls it now                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Source of the Sutlej                | China (Tibet)                                                                                       |
| Sources of Ravi, Beas, Chenab       | Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir — Indian states, not Punjab                                    |
| Source of the Jhelum                | Jammu & Kashmir                                                                                     |
| Waters of Indus, Jhelum, Chenab     | Allocated to Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty, 1960                                           |
| Waters of Ravi, Beas, Sutlej        | Allocated to India under the same treaty — then divided again between Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan |
| The mouth of the Indus, and the sea | Pakistan (Sindh)                                                                                    |

## THE MOST IMPORTANT BOX IN PART 1

An independent Indian Punjab would be a landlocked territory whose rivers are born in India and China and reach the sea only through Pakistan, and whose farms depend on water shared under agreements it would no longer be party to. This is not an argument invented by opponents of Khalistan. It is a description of the ground, and it has been true since the Bronze Age. Part 12 will do the full arithmetic. Part 1 simply establishes that the arithmetic exists.

## Putting the four together

Four facts, one sentence each:

1. Punjab is the only easy land door into India.
2. Punjab cannot be defended by terrain, only by people standing and fighting.
3. Punjab is rich enough that everyone wants it.
4. Punjab depends on water it does not own, and has no sea of its own.

Facts 1, 2 and 3 together explain the warrior culture, the martyrdom tradition, the constant invasion, the militarisation, and why Punjab has been fought over more than any other part of South Asia.

Fact 4 explains 1947, 1960, 1966, the Chandigarh dispute, the SYL canal, the groundwater crisis, and the hard limit on any independence project.

The rest of this thirteen-part book is, in a sense, just those four facts colliding with human beings for five thousand years.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## Scorecard: what Part 1 proves

*At the end of every part, I test the popular claims against what the evidence in that part actually showed. Here is the first scorecard.*

"Punjab is one of the oldest civilisations on earth."

TRUE

Continuous settlement for at least 5,000 years, and farming in the wider region for closer to 9,000. Harappa, the city that named the Indus Valley Civilisation, sits on the Ravi in Punjab. This civilisation was larger in area than Egypt and Mesopotamia combined. There is no exaggeration needed here; the plain facts are impressive enough.

"Punjabis have always been warriors. It is in their blood."

FALSE AS STATED

The oldest Punjabi civilisation we can excavate left behind almost no weapons, no royal war-art, no evidence of a standing army, and no palaces — it is the least militaristic major Bronze Age culture known. Punjab's warrior tradition is real, but it is a *response*, developed over millennia because the land is the front door of the subcontinent and cannot be defended by terrain.

Why the correction matters: a trait that was *made* by circumstances can be redirected, exploited, or turned against its own people. If courage is a bloodline, nobody is responsible for how it is used. If it is a cultural inheritance shaped by history, then the people who inherit it are responsible for what they do with it — and the people who manipulate it are responsible too. Part 9 and Part 10 will turn on exactly this distinction.

"Punjab was always a separate nation."

NOT SUPPORTED

In this period Punjab is a region, a river system and a cluster of tribes and kingdoms — never a single sovereign state. It is a name that only appears around 1300 CE. As an independent unified state governing the whole five-river country, Punjab exists for roughly fifty years, from 1799 to 1849, out of five thousand. Even at its greatest, the Sikh Empire did not correspond to today's Indian Punjab. This does not make Punjabi identity fake — but it does mean any claim to a continuously existing Punjabi nation is a claim about something that never existed.

**"Punjab is fundamentally Indian" / "Punjab was never Indian."****BOTH ANACHRONISTIC**

For this period, neither statement is meaningful, because neither "India" nor "Punjab" existed as political entities. What can be said is narrower and more interesting: the oldest surviving Indian text was composed largely in Punjab, about Punjab's rivers; and the tribe that won its most famous battle, on the banks of the Ravi, was the Bharatas — the source of the name India uses for itself. Punjab is not a later addition to Indian civilisation. It is one of the rooms the house was built around. That is a historical statement, not a political one, and it does not by itself settle any modern constitutional argument.

**"Punjab's water problems started in 1947 / 1966."****PARTLY TRUE — BUT MUCH OLDER**

The specific disputes are modern. The underlying vulnerability is not. Punjab has always been a semi-arid plain, dependent on rivers born outside it, with no access to the sea. Borders drawn in 1947 and 1966 turned a permanent structural weakness into a permanent political fight. Anyone who says the water problem was created by Delhi is ignoring geology. Anyone who says the borders made no difference is ignoring history.

**What Part 1 could not answer**

Honesty requires listing what remains open after this part:

- We cannot read the Harappan script, so we do not know what those people called themselves, what language they spoke, or how they governed.
- The exact date and origin of the Rigveda remain contested.
- The Saraswati / Ghaggar-Hakra identification is unresolved.
- The precise mechanism by which Indo-European language arrived is still being argued, with the genetic data still thin.

None of these gaps affects the four geographic facts in Chapter 6, which is why I lean on those rather than on the contested prehistory.

**Timeline of Part 1**

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>c. 7000 BCE</b> | Farming begins in the wider north-west region (Mehrgarh).                                                                                                         |
| <b>c. 3300 BCE</b> | Early Harappan phase: villages become towns.                                                                                                                      |
| <b>c. 2600 BCE</b> | Mature Harappan phase begins. Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Ganweriwala, Rakhigarhi. Planned cities, drains, standard bricks and weights, seals, trade with Mesopotamia. |
| <b>c. 2200 BCE</b> | A long drying period affects the whole belt from Egypt to India.                                                                                                  |
| <b>c. 1900 BCE</b> | Harappan cities begin to decline and are gradually abandoned. Ghaggar-Hakra river system fails.                                                                   |

|                    |                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| c. 2000–1500 BCE   | On current genetic evidence, ancestry from Central Asian steppe populations spreads into South Asia.                                                |
| c. 1500–1000 BCE   | The Rigveda is composed, largely in the Punjab region. The land is called Sapta Sindhu.                                                             |
| c. 1400 BCE (est.) | The Battle of the Ten Kings on the Parushni (Ravi). Sudas and the Bharatas defeat a coalition of ten.                                               |
| c. 1000–600 BCE    | Political centre of gravity shifts east to the Ganga plain. The Kuru polity forms. Punjab becomes the frontier rather than the centre.              |
| c. 518 BCE         | The Persian Empire under Darius I annexes the Indus region. Punjab becomes the eastern edge of the largest empire in the world — and Part 2 begins. |

## What happens in Part 2

Part 2, *Porus to the Huns*, covers roughly 500 BCE to 1000 CE. Alexander of Macedon crosses the Jhelum in 326 BCE and meets a Punjabi king the Greeks called Porus in one of the most famous battles in world history — and then his army mutinies on the banks of the Beas and refuses to go further. We will look at what actually happened there, and at what the Greek sources say about Punjabi resistance.

Then: Chandragupta Maurya and Chanakya building India's first great empire from Punjab's edge; Ashoka; the Indo-Greek kingdoms and the strange, brilliant Greco-Buddhist world of Taxila and Gandhara; the Kushans; and finally the Hunas, whose invasions in the fifth and sixth centuries CE shattered north India and set the pattern for everything that came after.

Above all, Part 2 answers a question Part 1 only raised: **how does a land of peaceful city-planners turn into a land famous for producing soldiers?** The answer starts with Alexander.

## REFERENCE

## Sources and further reading — Part 1

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I cite my sources so you can check me. Where a claim is contested, I give the competing sources together.

### On the Indus Valley Civilisation

- Shinde, V., Narasimhan, V. M., et al., "An Ancient Harappan Genome Lacks Ancestry from Steppe Pastoralists or Iranian Farmers," *Cell*, 2019. The Rakhigarhi genome paper, including the authors' own caution about a single-individual sample.
- Narasimhan, V. M., Patterson, N., et al., "The formation of human populations in South and Central Asia," *Science*, 2019. The large ancient-DNA study covering steppe ancestry and its timing.
- Wikipedia, *Indus Valley Civilisation*, *Harappa*, *Rakhigarhi*, *Ganweriwal*, *List of Indus Valley Civilisation sites* — used for site sizes, population estimates and the count of settlements; these entries are heavily sourced to Kenoyer, Possehl, Wright and the Archaeological Survey of India.
- Recommended books: Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*; Gregory Possehl, *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*; Rita Wright, *The Ancient Indus*; Andrew Robinson, *The Indus: Lost Civilizations*.

### On the Rigveda and the Battle of the Ten Kings

- Rigveda, Mandala 7, hymns 18, 33 and 83 — the primary text for the Dasarajna. Jamison and Brereton's 2014 translation is the current scholarly standard in English.
- Wikipedia, *Battle of the Ten Kings* — for the tribal coalition, the location on the Parushni, and the link to the formation of the Kuru polity.
- Michael Witzel's work on Rigvedic geography and river names, and on the location of Vedic tribes.
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### On the name, the rivers and the doabs

- Ibn Battuta, *Rihla* (14th century); Wassaf, *Tarikh-i-Wassaf*; Ayn al-Mulk Mahru, *Insha-i-Mahru* — the earliest usages of "Punjab" as a regional name.
- Jahangir, *Tuzk-i-Jahangiri* — Mughal-era usage.
- Wikipedia, *Punjab*, *Pakistan* and *Punjabis*; Etymonline, *Punjab*; Government of Punjab (India), "Know Punjab — History"; Wikipedia, *Bari Doab* — for etymology, doab boundaries and river data.

### On geography, climate and water

- India Meteorological Department rainfall normals for Punjab districts.
- Indus Waters Treaty, 1960 — full text available from the World Bank, which brokered it.
- Recommended for the long view: Alice Albinia, *Empires of the Indus*; Daniel Haines, *Rivers Divided*.

**A NOTE ON USING WIKIPEDIA**

Several factual figures in this part are drawn from Wikipedia entries. That is appropriate for uncontroversial descriptive facts — site sizes, river names, doab boundaries — where the entries are well sourced to specialist literature. It would not be appropriate for the contested political material in Parts 9 to 13, and I do not use it that way there. When I reach the disputed ground, my sources shift to primary documents, government reports, court judgments, and named scholars on both sides.



## THE LIVING ARCHIVE

## About the author

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*Lovepreet Singh is a researcher and writer working toward doctoral research. He writes long-form work on Indian history, society, religion, public policy and technology — from the record, in plain language, with competing views left standing.*

### Background

He is the founder of **Lovelace**, an independent design and engineering studio building websites, brand systems, 3D and WebGL experiences and digital products, and is **Founder and Managing Director of Five Rivers Inc.**

He has studied at **Panjab University** and **Chandigarh University**, and is in the second year of an **MBA in Business Strategy and Analysis**. He is a **Certified Ethical Hacker** and a self-taught developer working in the MERN stack.

His interests run across history, epistemology, belief and public life — and the common thread, in the security work as much as the research, is a preference for testing a claim to destruction rather than defending it.

### The Living Archive

*Punjab: The Whole Truth* is the first major work of The Living Archive, a long-form research project examining subjects that are argued about constantly and read about rarely. The method is fixed across everything published there: plain language, named sources, disputed figures shown as ranges, and every opposing argument stated at full strength before it is answered.

### What comes next

He is working toward doctoral research, with Punjab — its history, its politics and the contested decades between 1966 and 1995 — as the intended field. These thirteen parts are the groundwork for it.

**Corrections and correspondence are welcome, and taken seriously.**

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*If you find an error of fact in this work, please write. Sources are listed at the end of every part so that any claim here can be checked against the record. A corrected edition is better than a confident one.*

— End of Part 1 —

Part 2: *Porus to the Huns*

A 13-PART INVESTIGATION

# Punjab: The Whole Truth

*Five thousand years of history, one honest look —  
from the first farmers to the Khalistan question.*

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PART TWO OF THIRTEEN

## Porus to the Huns

c. 500 BCE to 1000 CE — fifteen centuries of invasion, and the golden age nobody talks about

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LOVEPREET SINGH

THE LIVING ARCHIVE

Written in plain English.

Every disputed number shows its range and its source.

Every side gets its strongest argument before it gets an answer.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

## Before Part 2

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In Part 1 I set out five rules and declared my interest: I am Punjabi, writing about Punjab, with no formal training in history and a deliberate habit — borrowed from security work — of attacking my own conclusions before anyone else gets the chance. Everything in that note still applies. If you have not read it, Part 1 opens with it.

I want to add one thing specific to this part.

Chapter 2 of Part 2 changed how I think about this whole project. I began this research expecting to write about Punjab as a place that fights. I did not know — and I am reasonably well read, and I am from there — that the greatest grammar ever written was composed by a man from a village near Taxila, that a Greek king ruling from Sialkot became a Buddhist saint in a text still studied in Japan, or that the face on every Buddha statue in Asia was designed in the north-west of this subcontinent.

Nobody taught me that. I want to know why, and Chapter 6 turned out to be the answer. That is the shape of this part: a golden age, and then the thing that erased it so completely that its own descendants forgot it happened.

— *L.S.*

## INTRODUCTION

## The question Part 2 has to answer

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*Part 1 ended with an awkward finding. The oldest Punjabi civilisation we can excavate — Harappa — left behind almost no weapons, no war-art, no palaces and no evidence of an army. So where did the warriors come from?*

Part 2 is the answer. It covers roughly fifteen hundred years, from about 500 BCE to about 1000 CE, and it is the period in which Punjab was turned into what it later became.

Three things happen in these fifteen centuries, and they happen at the same time, which is why Punjab's character ends up so contradictory.

**The first thing is invasion, on repeat.** Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Kushans, Hunas — six waves of outsiders, each entering through the north-western passes, each hitting Punjab first. Not one of them lands anywhere else. By the end of this period, a society has been shaped by fifteen hundred years of standing in a doorway that everybody kicks in.

**The second thing is a golden age.** This is the part almost nobody knows, and it is the reason Part 2 exists. During these same centuries, the north-west — Punjab and the neighbouring region of Gandhara — was one of the most intellectually productive places on the entire planet. It produced the greatest grammar book ever written. It produced Taxila, one of the ancient world's great centres of learning. It produced the first images of the Buddha in human form, which is to say it designed the face that a billion people across Asia have prayed to ever since. If you think Punjab is a place that only produces soldiers and farmers, this part is going to embarrass you — it embarrassed me.

**The third thing is a catastrophe,** in the fifth and sixth centuries CE, which destroys the golden age so completely that most people have never heard it existed. After that catastrophe, Punjab stops being a place of learning and becomes, permanently, a frontier.

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*Punjab did not choose to become a warrior society. It was hammered into one, and we can watch the hammer fall, century by century, in this part.*

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### One more thing Part 2 establishes

There is a pattern that begins in this period and never stops. It will come back in Part 5, dominate Part 6, and become the central tragedy of Parts 9 and 10.

The pattern is this: **Punjab always splits.**

When Alexander arrived in 326 BCE, one Punjabi king joined him and marched against another Punjabi king. That is the first documented instance. It is not the last. Punjabis fought for the Mughals and against them; for the British and against them; for the Indian state and against it. Every single time Punjab faces a crisis, some Punjabis are on each side.

People who want a simple story hate this fact. They want Punjab to be a single actor with a single will — either a heroic resister or a loyal servant. It has never once been that. Knowing this from 326 BCE onward will save you from about half the nonsense written about 1984.

## What is in Part 2

CHAPTER 1 The Persians arrive: Punjab joins the world, 518 BCE.

CHAPTER 2 Panini and Taxila: the greatest thing Punjab ever made was not a sword.

CHAPTER 3 Alexander, 326 BCE: the most famous months in Punjab's history, examined honestly.

CHAPTER 4 Chandragupta and Chanakya: Punjab builds India's first empire.

CHAPTER 5 Four hundred strange years: Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Kushans — and the face of the Buddha.

CHAPTER 6 The Hunas: the hinge on which Indian history turns.

CHAPTER 7 The long decline, and the last shield: the Hindu Shahis.

CHAPTER 8 Scorecard: what Part 2 proves.

## CHAPTER ONE

## The Persians arrive

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*Around 518 BCE, Punjab became a province of the largest empire the world had yet seen — and started getting paid in gold to stay that way.*

### What happened

The Achaemenid Persian Empire, under Cyrus and then Darius I, expanded until it stretched from Greece and Egypt in the west to the Indus in the east. Sometime around 518 BCE, Darius annexed the Indus region.

Two new provinces — the Persians called them *satrapies*, which simply means governorships — appear in Persian records:

- **Gandhara** — the region around Peshawar and Taxila, straddling today's Pakistan–Afghanistan border.
- **Hindush** — the Indus and Punjab country to the south and east.

The Greek historian Herodotus, writing in the 400s BCE, records something remarkable about this province. He says the Indian satrapy was the **richest in the entire Persian Empire**, paying tribute of 360 talents of gold dust — a colossal figure, far more than any other province.

Herodotus was not always reliable and the number may be inflated. But even allowing for exaggeration, the point stands and it confirms what Part 1 predicted from the geography: the five-river plain was *wealthy*, and everyone knew it.

### What Punjab got out of it

Being ruled from Persepolis for roughly two centuries was not just a humiliation. It plugged Punjab into a world system.

WHAT PERSIAN RULE BROUGHT TO THE NORTH-WEST

| What arrived                   | Why it mattered                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The Aramaic script</b>      | The Persian Empire's administrative script. In the north-west it evolved into <b>Kharosthi</b> , which was written right-to-left and became the everyday script of Gandhara and Punjab for the next 700 years. Punjab's first widely used writing system came in on a Persian tax form. |
| <b>Coinage</b>                 | Standardised metal money, replacing barter and bullion-by-weight for many transactions.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Imperial administration</b> | Satrapies, tribute assessment, royal roads, standing garrisons, a postal relay system. Ideas that the Mauryas would later use to run India.                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>A road west</b>             | Punjab became the eastern terminus of a trade and communication network reaching to the Mediterranean.                                                                                                                                                                                  |

There is a detail here that most Indians find surprising. Indian soldiers from these satrapies served in Persian armies *in Europe*. Herodotus lists Indian contingents — infantry with cane bows and iron-tipped arrows, and cavalry with chariots — in Xerxes' great invasion of Greece in 480 BCE. Men from the Indus and Punjab fought at Plataea, in Greece, in 479 BCE.

#### PUT SIMPLY

Two and a half thousand years ago, Punjabi soldiers were fighting in Europe as part of a foreign empire's army, and Punjabi gold was paying that empire's bills. Punjab has never been a sealed-off village. It has been internationally connected — sometimes profitably, sometimes painfully — for as long as we have records.

#### REMEMBER THIS FOR PART 6

Punjabis serving as the fighting arm of a distant empire, in wars that were not theirs, in exchange for pay and status — this begins in 480 BCE. When the British recruit a third of their Indian Army from Punjab in the 1900s and send them to France and Mesopotamia, it is not a new relationship. It is a very old one.



## CHAPTER TWO

## Panini and Taxila

*If you remember one thing from Part 2, make it this chapter. The single greatest thing ever produced in Punjab is not a battle, a fort or an empire. It is a book about grammar, and it is still being studied by computer scientists.*

### Taxila: what it actually was

**Taxila** — Sanskrit *Takshashila* — stood in what is now Rawalpindi district in Pakistani Punjab, about 35 km north-west of Islamabad. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site today.

It was not one city but a sequence of three, each built by a different power, which tells you everything about the region's history:

#### THE THREE CITIES OF TAXILA

| City              | Built by / period                            | Character                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bhir Mound</b> | From the 6th century BCE                     | The original town. Winding, organic streets. The Achaemenid and Mauryan-era city. This is the Taxila that Alexander and Chandragupta saw.                                                                                                            |
| <b>Sirkap</b>     | 2nd century BCE, Greco-Bactrian / Indo-Greek | A completely different thing: a planned grid city on the Greek model, streets crossing at right angles, fortified walls. Inside it, Buddhist stupas stand beside Greek-style temples. The physical evidence of two civilisations sharing one street. |
| <b>Sirsukh</b>    | 1st–2nd century CE, Kushan                   | The Central Asian city, with rounded bastions in the Parthian style.                                                                                                                                                                                 |

Around them lie the great Buddhist complexes: the **Dharmarajika Stupa** — built over relics of the Buddha, traditionally attributed to Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE — and the monasteries of Jaulian, Mohra Muradu, Kalawan and others.

### Was Taxila a "university"? An honest correction

You will often read that Taxila was "the world's first university," founded in 700 BCE, with 10,500 students from all over Asia. Treat those specifics with caution. They come largely from later Buddhist stories (the Jatakas) rather than from documents or inscriptions.

What the evidence supports is this: Taxila was a **concentration of renowned individual teachers** who took on students, in a city rich enough and connected enough to attract them from across the subcontinent and beyond. There was no single campus, no central administration, no degrees, no examinations in the modern sense. It was closer to Athens in the time of Socrates than to Oxford.

That is still extraordinary. But I do not need to inflate anything, so I will not.

Who studied or taught there, according to tradition and to some reasonably good sources:

- **Chanakya** (also called Kautilya), the political strategist who wrote the *Arthashastra* and engineered the Mauryan Empire — Chapter 4.
- **Jivaka**, the physician of the Buddha's time, remembered across the Buddhist world as the model doctor.
- **Chandragupta Maurya**, reportedly educated there before he became emperor.
- And, from the same region, **Panini**.

### Panini: the greatest mind Punjab ever produced

Panini was born at **Salatura**, a village in Gandhara near the confluence of the Indus and Kabul rivers, close to Taxila. He probably lived in the 5th or 4th century BCE, though the date is debated.

He wrote a book called the **Ashtadhyayi** — "Eight Chapters."

Here is what it is. In roughly **3,959 short rules**, Panini describes the complete grammar of Sanskrit. Not a description in the sense of "here are some examples and patterns." A description in the sense of *a formal system that generates the language*. You feed it roots and rules, and correct Sanskrit comes out. Rules are ordered, they reference each other, some override others, and Panini invented a compressed technical notation to state them — including a metalanguage, a set of symbols for talking about the rules themselves.

To put that in plain terms: Panini did for a human language what a modern programmer does when they write the formal specification for a programming language. In the 4th century BCE. With no writing — the text was composed to be memorised.

#### PUT SIMPLY

Imagine someone wrote a rulebook so precise that a machine could follow it and produce perfect Hindi or English, every time, with no exceptions unaccounted for. Nobody has ever fully managed that for English. Panini did it for Sanskrit two and a half thousand years ago, and his rulebook is still the standard reference.

Modern linguists do not treat this as a historical curiosity. Leonard Bloomfield, one of the founders of modern linguistics, called the *Ashtadhyayi* "one of the greatest monuments of human intelligence." The American linguist Noam Chomsky's approach to generative grammar has been repeatedly compared to Panini's method. In computer science, the notation used to define the syntax of programming languages — Backus–Naur Form — is so similar in spirit to Panini's system that some scholars have proposed calling it "Panini–Backus Form."

Sanskrit, as a formal literary language, is essentially *Panini's Sanskrit*. Every classical Sanskrit text written after him follows his rules. A man from a village in Gandhara fixed the grammar of the language of Indian civilisation, and it has not needed changing since.

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*Punjab's greatest export to the world is not the sword. It is a grammar book, and it is still in use.*

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### Why this chapter is here

Two very different insults get thrown at Punjab, and this chapter kills both.

The first insult is the flattering one: *Punjabis are simple, brave fighting people*. It sounds like a compliment. It is not. It quietly says: strong bodies, no brains. Panini answers that.

The second insult is the direct one: *Punjab has no intellectual tradition, it is all farmers and soldiers and loud music*. Taxila, the Ashtadhyayi, the *Milinda Panha* and Gandhara art answer that.

Both insults survive only because most people, including most Punjabis, have never been taught that this period existed. That is a consequence of Chapter 6, where the whole thing gets destroyed.

## CHAPTER THREE

## Alexander, 326 BCE

*Everybody has heard of Alexander in India. Almost nobody knows what actually happened, in either direction. Here is the whole of it — the wins, the losses, the fabrications, and the part where his army told him no.*

### Before anything else: a warning about the sources

This is the single most important paragraph in the chapter, so read it before the exciting bits.

**There is not one Indian account of Alexander's invasion. Not one.** No Punjabi chronicle, no inscription, no Sanskrit text describes it. Everything we know comes from Greek and Roman writers: Arrian, Curtius Rufus, Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch, Justin.

And none of them was there. They were writing **three to five hundred years after the events**, working from earlier accounts — some by Alexander's own officers, who had obvious reasons to make their king look good.

So when this chapter gives you a number, understand what kind of number it is: a figure written by a member of the winning civilisation, centuries later, based on a report by someone on the winner's payroll. That does not make it worthless. It does mean I handle it the way I would handle a company's own press release about its own performance.

#### WHY THE NUMBERS SWING SO WILDLY

For the same battle, Arrian says Porus had 200 elephants and 30,000 infantry; Diodorus says 130 elephants and 50,000 infantry. Indian casualties are given as anywhere from 12,000 to 23,000; Macedonian losses from about 200 to over 1,000. When ancient sources disagree by a factor of two or five, the honest response is to report the range, not to pick the flattering end. I report the range.

### The campaign, step by step

**327–326 BCE: Alexander crosses into the north-west.** He has already destroyed the Persian Empire. He fights his way through the hill country and takes the fortress of Aornos.

**Spring 326 BCE: Taxila surrenders without a fight.** Its king — the Greeks call him Taxiles or Omphis; Indian tradition calls him **Ambhi** — comes out to meet Alexander with gifts, elephants and troops, and offers his alliance. His reason was straightforward: he had a rival across the Jhelum, and a Macedonian army was a useful thing to point at him.

Hold on to that. The very first Punjabi ruler Alexander met joined him, and then helped him attack another Punjabi ruler.

**May 326 BCE: the Battle of the Hydaspes.** The Jhelum, swollen by early monsoon rain, separates Alexander from King Porus — *Puru* or *Paurava* in Indian terms, a king of the Bari and Chaj doab country.

#### THE BATTLE OF THE HYDASPES — THE FORCES, AS REPORTED

| Side                                                                             | According to Arrian                                                   | According to Diodorus                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Porus</b>                                                                     | 200 elephants; 300–420 chariots; 4,000–6,000 cavalry; 30,000 infantry | 130 elephants; 1,000 chariots; 3,000 cavalry; 50,000 infantry |
| <b>Alexander</b> (the strike force he took across the river, not his whole army) | c. 6,000 infantry; c. 5,000 cavalry                                   | —                                                             |

**How Alexander won.** Not by breaking through. By deception. He spent days making noisy fake crossing attempts up and down the bank until Porus stopped reacting to them. Then, on a night of heavy storm, he took a picked force roughly 27 kilometres upstream and crossed in the dark, in the rain, with the thunder covering the noise. He came down on Porus's flank at dawn.

The elephants — Porus's main weapon — turned into his main problem. Wounded, panicked and hemmed in, they trampled backwards through their own infantry. Macedonian troops had learnt to open lanes and let them through, then attack their handlers.

**Casualties.** Indian dead are reported between about 12,000 and 23,000, including two of Porus's sons. Macedonian losses are reported between about 200 and over 1,000. Even taking the Greek sources at their word, this was a costlier fight than Gaugamela, where Alexander had destroyed the entire Persian imperial army.

**The aftermath, and the strangest part.** Porus, wounded, surrendered only after his army was destroyed. Brought before Alexander, he was asked how he wished to be treated. His reply, as the Greeks recorded it: *"As a king treats a king."*

Alexander then did something he did nowhere else in his career. He restored Porus to his throne as a subordinate ally — and *enlarged* his territory.

## TWO READINGS OF WHAT THAT MEANS

**Reading A (the traditional one):** Alexander was genuinely impressed by Porus's courage and bearing, and behaved with the magnanimity the Greek sources love to attribute to him.

**Reading B (the sceptical one):** Alexander's army was badly hurt, he was deep in hostile country with unfordable rivers behind him, and he urgently needed a strong local ally to hold the region while he pushed on. Restoring Porus was not sentiment; it was necessity — and the Greek sources dressed it up.

Both readings are held by serious historians, and I cannot decisively settle it. What the episode *does* tell us is that the fight was hard enough that Alexander's best option afterwards was to keep his defeated enemy in power.

### Sangala: the battle nobody mentions

After the Hydaspes, Alexander moved east and ran into a people the Greeks called the **Cathaeans**, at a fortified town called **Sangala** — its location is disputed but it was somewhere in central Punjab.

They did not negotiate. They ringed their position with wagons and fought. Arrian records that the resistance was fierce enough to maul Alexander's cavalry badly; the Macedonians had to take the place by infantry assault and siege. Alexander then razed Sangala to the ground. Arrian's figures — around 17,000 Indians killed and 70,000 captured — are almost certainly inflated, but the destruction was real.

Sangala is worth knowing about because it is the counter-example to the polite version of the campaign. This was not a tour with occasional duels between noble kings. In places it was a war of extermination against towns that refused to submit.

### The mutiny on the Beas

Summer 326 BCE. Alexander reaches the **Hyphasis** — the Beas, the fourth of the five rivers. He wants to keep going east, across the Sutlej and on to the Ganga.

His army refuses.

They had been marching and fighting for eight years. They were thousands of kilometres from home, soaked by monsoon rain that rotted their equipment, and they had just been told what was waiting beyond the Ganga: the **Nanda Empire** of Magadha, whose army was reported to include something on the order of 200,000 infantry, 20,000 cavalry, thousands of chariots and several thousand war elephants. Whatever the true figure, the reports were terrifying, and they had just seen at the Hydaspes what 130 to 200 elephants could do.

An officer named **Coenus** — a respected veteran, not a malcontent — stood up and spoke for the men. Arrian preserves the substance of the speech: they had done everything he asked, most of their friends were dead, and they wanted to see their homes.

Alexander argued. Then he shut himself in his tent for three days, waiting for them to change their minds. They did not.

He turned back. Before leaving he built twelve enormous altars on the bank of the Beas to mark the eastern limit of his empire.

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*The empire of Alexander the Great ends at a river in Punjab. Not because he was defeated there — because his soldiers, standing in Punjabi mud in the rain, refused to find out what was on the other side.*

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### The way back: the Malli campaign, and the wound

Turning back did not mean going home in peace. Alexander went south down the Jhelum and Indus, fighting the whole way.

From November 326 to February 325 BCE he attacked the **Malli** — the Malava — a confederation living around the meeting point of the Jhelum, Chenab and Ravi. Their principal town is generally identified with modern **Multan**.

The Malli campaign was savage. And at Multan it nearly ended Alexander's life.

Impatient with a slow assault, Alexander went up a scaling ladder and jumped down *inside* the enemy wall with only two or three companions. Cut off, he was hit by an arrow that punched through his breastplate and into his lung. He collapsed, coughing blood.

His army, believing their king was dead, broke into the citadel in a fury and killed everyone inside — men, women and children. It was one of the worst massacres of the entire campaign.

Alexander survived the arrow, but the wound never properly healed and he was in pain for the rest of his life. He died in Babylon less than two years later, aged 32. A number of historians consider the Multan wound a contributing cause.

### The honest scorecard on Alexander in Punjab

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

| Claim                                 | Reality                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Alexander conquered India."          | He entered the north-west and Punjab. He never crossed the Beas. He never saw the Ganga, Magadha, or 95% of the subcontinent.                                                                                                                                |
| "Alexander was defeated by Porus."    | Every surviving source says Porus lost the battle. This claim is popular online and it is not supported. What is defensible is that the battle was unusually costly and Alexander's subsequent behaviour suggests a harder fight than the propaganda admits. |
| "Alexander's conquest was permanent." | It lasted about twenty years. By roughly 305 BCE the Mauryas had taken all of it, and the Greeks formally gave it up by treaty — see Chapter 4.                                                                                                              |
| "Punjab united to resist him."        | No. Ambhi of Taxila allied with him and fought against Porus. Some kings submitted, some fought, some were annihilated. Punjab split.                                                                                                                        |
| "It was an easy campaign."            | He lost heavily at the Hydaspes and Sangala, his cavalry was mauled, his army mutinied, and he took a near-fatal wound at Multan. The Indian campaign broke Alexander's momentum and arguably broke Alexander.                                               |

#### THE PATTERN, FIRST SIGHTING

Ambhi joined the invader. Porus fought him. The Cathaeans died rather than surrender. The Malli nearly killed him. All four were Punjabis, at the same time, in the same crisis, on different sides. Write this down, because you will see it again in 1849, in 1919, in 1947 and — most painfully — in 1988. Punjab has never faced anything as one body.



## CHAPTER FOUR

## Chandragupta and Chanakya

*Within twenty years of Alexander's death, a man from the north-west and his teacher from Taxila had built the largest empire India would see for two thousand years — and had taken the Greeks' Indian provinces back by force.*

### The rise

Alexander died in Babylon in 323 BCE. His generals immediately began carving up his empire. The Macedonian garrisons in the north-west were suddenly a long way from anywhere, with no one coming to help them.

Into that vacuum stepped **Chandragupta Maurya**, advised by **Chanakya** — also known as Kautilya or Vishnugupta — a strategist traditionally associated with Taxila.

The details of Chandragupta's origins are genuinely uncertain and the ancient traditions disagree about his caste and birth. What is well attested is the sequence: he built a power base in the north-west, cleared out the remaining Macedonian positions, and then marched east and destroyed the **Nanda dynasty** of Magadha — the very empire whose reputation had turned Alexander's army back — around 322 to 321 BCE.

Note the direction of travel. The empire that first unified India was assembled starting from **Punjab and Gandhara**, and moved east. Not the other way round.

### The rematch: Seleucus, 305–303 BCE

One of Alexander's generals, **Seleucus I Nicator**, took the Asian half of the empire and, around 305 BCE, marched east to reclaim the Indian provinces.

He did not reclaim them.

The details of the fighting are poorly recorded — which itself suggests it did not go well for him — but the outcome is clear and is recorded on both sides. A peace treaty was concluded around 303 BCE with these terms:

- Seleucus **ceded** the eastern territories — broadly Gandhara, the Paropamisadae (the Kabul region), Arachosia (Kandahar) and Gedrosia (Balochistan). The Mauryan frontier was fixed at the **Hindu Kush**.
- Chandragupta gave Seleucus **500 war elephants**.
- Some form of marriage alliance was agreed.
- Seleucus sent an ambassador, **Megasthenes**, to the Mauryan court at Pataliputra. His account, the *Indika*, survives only in fragments quoted by later writers, but it is our best outside description of Mauryan India.

Consider what that treaty means. Alexander's own successor came back with a professional Macedonian army to retake Punjab, and went home having given away Afghanistan.

#### THE ELEPHANTS THAT CHANGED EUROPE

Those 500 elephants did not sit in a stable. Seleucus took them west and used them at the **Battle of Ipsus** in 301 BCE in Anatolia, where they played a decisive role in destroying his rival Antigonos. The balance of power in the Mediterranean world was altered by animals handed over in a treaty on India's north-west frontier. It is one of the great forgotten connections in world history.

### Chanakya's Arthashastra

The *Arthashastra* — roughly, "the science of material gain" — is a manual on how to run a state. It covers taxation, law, agriculture, mining, currency, famine relief, diplomacy, war and, extensively, espionage.

It is startlingly unsentimental. It discusses when to break a treaty, how to run a spy network using disguised monks and courtesans, when assassination is the cheaper option, and how to manage a king's own household as a security risk. It is often compared to Machiavelli's *The Prince* — written about eighteen hundred years later, and considerably less thorough.

Scholars debate how much of the surviving text is by one hand and how much accumulated later; the text as we have it was probably compiled over centuries. But the tradition connecting it to Chanakya and to the north-western intellectual world of Taxila is old and strong.

### Ashoka and the north-west

Chandragupta's grandson **Ashoka** (reigned roughly 268–232 BCE) is the emperor everyone knows — the one who, after the bloodbath at Kalinga, turned to Buddhism and inscribed his moral policy on rocks and pillars across the empire.

What is less known is how much of that programme is written in the north-west, and in what languages:

- The rock edicts at **Shahbazgarhi** and **Mansehra**, in Gandhara, are written in the **Kharosthi** script — the Aramaic-descended script that Persian rule had introduced. Everywhere else in India, Ashoka's edicts are in Brahmi. The north-west had its own writing system and the emperor used it.
- At **Kandahar**, Ashoka issued edicts in **Greek and Aramaic** — for the Greek-speaking population living in his empire.
- The **Dharmarajika Stupa** at Taxila is traditionally attributed to Ashoka, built over relics of the Buddha.

An Indian emperor publishing his laws in Greek, in Aramaic, and in a right-to-left script derived from Persian administration, is a good picture of what the north-west actually was: not a border, but a junction.

**SOMETHING WORTH NOTICING**

Two of the four or five most consequential figures in ancient Indian history — Panini and Chanakya — came out of the same small region in the north-west, within roughly a century of each other. Chandragupta, who built the empire, was reportedly educated there. Whatever was happening around Taxila in the 4th century BCE, it was not a backwater.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## Four hundred strange years

*Between roughly 200 BCE and 300 CE, Punjab and Gandhara were ruled by Greeks, then Scythians, then Parthians, then Central Asians — and in that chaos produced the most influential art in Asian history.*

### The Indo-Greeks: a Greek king who became a Buddhist saint

The Mauryan Empire collapsed around 185 BCE. The north-west fragmented, and Greek kingdoms from Bactria (northern Afghanistan) came down through the passes.

The greatest of these Indo-Greek rulers was **Menander I** — known in Indian sources as **Milinda** — who reigned roughly 165 to 145 BCE. His capital was **Sagala**, which is modern **Sialkot**, in Pakistani Punjab.

Menander was a successful conqueror. But that is not why he is remembered.

There survives a Buddhist text called the ***Milinda Panha*** — "The Questions of King Milinda." It records a long philosophical dialogue between Menander and a Buddhist monk named **Nagasena**. The king asks hard questions: if there is no permanent self, who is re-born? What is the self, if you take away the body and the mind? Nagasena answers with the famous chariot argument — take a chariot apart and point to the chariot; you cannot, and yet the chariot is real.

It is a genuine classic of philosophy, and it is still read across the Buddhist world. According to the text, Menander became a Buddhist, and it says he attained *arhatship* — liberation — and was cremated and buried in a stupa, in the manner reserved for a holy man.

#### PUT SIMPLY

A Greek king, ruling from Sialkot in Punjab, argued philosophy with an Indian monk — and the record of that argument became a sacred text that Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Japan still study today. That is what Punjab was in 150 BCE.

### Then: Scythians, Parthians, Kushans

The Indo-Greeks were pushed out by waves from Central Asia.

- **Indo-Scythians (Sakas)**, from around the 1st century BCE. Rulers like Maues and Azes.
- **Indo-Parthians**, notably **Gondophares**, in the 1st century CE.
- **Kushans**, from the 1st to 3rd centuries CE — the big one. At its height under **Kanishka**, the Kushan Empire ran from Central Asia through Afghanistan and Punjab

into the Ganga plain, with capitals at Purushapura (Peshawar) and Mathura. Sirsukh, the third city of Taxila, is theirs.

The Kushans sat astride the Silk Road at exactly the point where the routes from China, Persia, India and the Roman world met. They grew immensely rich on it. Roman gold coins have been found in quantity in their territory.

### Gandhara: where the Buddha got a face

Now the thing that matters most in this chapter.

For the first several centuries of Buddhism, **the Buddha was never shown as a person.** Early Buddhist art represents him only by symbols: an empty throne, a pair of footprints, a wheel, a parasol, a tree. To make an image of him was thought inappropriate.

In Gandhara — in the workshops of Taxila, Peshawar, Swat and the surrounding country, under Indo-Greek and then Kushan patronage — that changed. Artists working in a Hellenistic sculptural tradition, carving for Buddhist patrons, began producing the Buddha as a human figure.

And they carved him the way Greek sculptors carved gods: a calm idealised face, wavy hair, and above all those heavy, deeply cut folds of drapery that look exactly like a Greek *himation* because that is precisely what the sculptors knew how to carve.

That image travelled. Along the Silk Road into Central Asia, into China, into Korea, into Japan; and southward through the Indian tradition into Sri Lanka and South-East Asia. Every Buddha statue on earth is a descendant, at some remove, of what was worked out in the north-west of the subcontinent in the first few centuries CE.

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*The face of the Buddha — the single most widely reproduced religious image in Asia — was designed in the north-west, by sculptors who had learnt their craft from Greeks.*

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A note of precision: art historians argue about whether Gandhara or Mathura produced the very first human Buddha image, and the two traditions probably developed close together and influenced each other. Gandhara's claim is strong and its influence on the eastward spread is not in doubt.

### The blender

Here is what these four centuries actually show.

Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Parthians and Kushans all came into Punjab and Gandhara as conquerors. And within a few generations, most of them were sponsoring Buddhist monas-

teries, minting coins with Indian deities alongside Greek ones, taking Indian names and titles, and being written into Indian texts.

Menander the Greek becomes a Buddhist saint. Kanishka the Central Asian convenes a Buddhist council. The Sakas produce Indian-style inscriptions. The invaders were absorbed.

#### DON'T ROMANTICISE THIS

The "India absorbs all invaders" story is popular and it is partly true. But it is often told as though absorption were gentle. It was not. Each of these waves arrived by force, killed people, destroyed towns and displaced rulers. Absorption happened over generations, *after* the killing, and it happened because the conquerors were vastly outnumbered by the people they ruled. Both halves belong in the story: the violence and the eventual synthesis.

## CHAPTER SIX

## The Hunas: the hinge

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*In the fifth and sixth centuries CE, something came through the passes that Punjab could not absorb. What happened next changed the direction of Indian history, and it is the reason you were never taught Chapter 2.*

### Who they were

Indian sources call them the **Hunas**. Modern scholarship generally identifies the group that mattered most for India as the **Alchon Huns** — a Central Asian people, connected to the broader Hunnic movements that were simultaneously wrecking the Roman world at the other end of Eurasia.

They began pressing on the north-west from the mid-5th century CE. The Gupta emperor **Skandagupta** fought them off around 455–460 CE and boasted about it in an inscription, but the effort drained the treasury and the army.

### Toramana and Mihirakula

By around 500 CE the Hunas were not raiding. They were ruling.

**Toramana** (reigned roughly 500–520 CE) established a genuine kingdom, and — this is the detail that matters for us — **its base was the Punjab region**. His inscriptions show him using the titles and administrative style of an Indian monarch. Central Asian nomads had become a settled Indian dynasty ruling from the five-river plain.

His son **Mihirakula** (reigned roughly 520–550 CE) is remembered very differently.

The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim **Xuanzang**, travelling through India in the 7th century, recorded a tradition that Mihirakula was initially interested in Buddhism, felt slighted by the monasteries, and turned on them — destroying monastic establishments across his territory. Other sources, including the Kashmiri chronicle *Rajatarangini*, describe him as exceptionally cruel.

**HOW MUCH OF THIS IS TRUE?**

Be careful. Xuanzang was writing roughly a century after the events, from Buddhist informants, about a man Buddhists regarded as a persecutor. Hostile traditions exaggerate. Some modern historians think Mihirakula's reputation has been blackened beyond the facts, and note that he issued coins with Hindu imagery and may simply have been a Shaivite ruler who withdrew patronage rather than a systematic destroyer.

**But** — and this is why the tradition cannot be dismissed — the archaeology of Gandhara does show large-scale destruction and abandonment of Buddhist monastic sites in roughly this period, followed by no recovery. Something happened. The scale of the disaster is not in doubt even if the villain's exact role is.

**The end of the Hunas — and the price**

Around 528 CE, at the **Battle of Sondani** in central India, a coalition led by **Yashodharman** of Malwa, alongside the Gupta ruler Narasimhagupta, defeated Mihirakula decisively. Yashodharman erected victory pillars that survive and boast of humbling a king whose head had bowed to no one else.

The Alchon remnants were pushed back and confined to Kashmir and Gandhara, and faded out over the following century.

India won. But look at what the war cost.

**Four consequences, and they are enormous**

**1. The Gupta Empire died.** Already weakened by the earlier Huna wars, the Gupta state fragmented and was effectively finished by around 550 CE. North India then broke into competing regional kingdoms and stayed broken, with one brief exception, for the next six hundred years. When Mahmud of Ghazni arrives in Part 3, there is no north Indian empire to meet him — and this is why.

**2. Gandhara's civilisation was destroyed.** The monasteries of Taxila, the workshops, the libraries, the whole Greco-Buddhist world described in Chapters 2 and 5 — it ended here. Taxila had survived Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Parthians and Kushans. It did not survive this. When Xuanzang passed through in the 630s CE, he described a region of ruined and deserted monasteries.

**3. The north-west stopped being India's intellectual capital, permanently.** The centre of learning moved east — to Nalanda in Bihar, to Vikramashila, to Valabhi in Gujarat. Punjab, which had produced Panini and hosted Chanakya, would not be a centre of scholarship again on anything like that scale. What it would be instead is a frontier.

**4. Buddhism in the north-west was broken.** The region that had given the Buddha his face largely ceased to be Buddhist. Over the following centuries the north-west's religious landscape reformed around Hindu Shaiva traditions and, later, Islam.



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*Before the Hunas, Punjab was a place where people wrote books. After the Hunas, Punjab was a place where people held a line. That switch is the most important thing that ever happened to this region, and almost nobody knows it happened.*

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#### WHY THIS MATTERS FOR THE WHOLE BOOK

People argue endlessly about whether Punjab's warrior culture is a glory or a curse. Both sides usually treat it as something eternal and given. It is not. Chapter 6 is where you can watch it being installed. A cosmopolitan, literate, mercantile, monastic region gets hit hard enough, often enough, that the parts of it which could not fight stopped existing. What survived was the part that could.

That is not romantic and it is not shameful. It is what happens to any society placed where this one is placed.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## The long decline, and the last shield

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*Between 600 and 1000 CE, Punjab is quiet in the history books. It is the quiet of a region that has been hollowed out and is now, without much help, holding a door shut.*

### Harsha: the last flicker

**Harshavardhana** (reigned 606–647 CE) briefly reassembled much of north India. His capital was at **Thanesar** — Kurukshetra, in today's Haryana, which is to say inside historical Punjab — before he moved to Kannauj.

Harsha was a genuine ruler of the old style: a patron of scholars, host to Xuanzang, subject of a biography by the writer Bana. But he was checked in the south by the Chalukyas, and when he died without an heir in 647 CE his empire dissolved immediately.

After Harsha, no one rules north India as a single unit until the Delhi Sultanate, more than five hundred years later.

### Xuanzang's Punjab

Xuanzang, the Chinese monk, travelled through the region in the 630s CE. His account is one of the best snapshots we have, and it is melancholy. He describes Taxila as subject to Kashmir and much diminished; he describes monastery after monastery in the north-west as ruined, deserted, or occupied by a handful of monks where hundreds had lived.

He was walking through the wreckage of Chapter 2 and did not know it.

### The Hindu Shahis: three hundred years of holding the door

From around 850 CE, a dynasty known as the **Hindu Shahis** (or Kabul Shahis) ruled a kingdom covering eastern Afghanistan, Gandhara and western Punjab, from capitals at **Udabhandapura** (Hund, on the Indus) and later **Nandana** in the Salt Range.

Their significance is simple and heroic and almost entirely forgotten: **for about 170 years they were the only organised force standing between the Central Asian powers and the north Indian plain.** And they did it alone. The kingdoms of the Ganga valley — rich, populous, endlessly quarrelling with each other — sent them essentially nothing.

The end came in stages:

#### THE FALL OF THE SHAHIS

| Date            | Event                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 986–988 CE      | <b>Jayapala</b> attacks Ghazni pre-emptively — he could see what was coming — and is defeated by Sabuktigin. Forced to pay a heavy indemnity.                                                                                           |
| 1001 CE         | Jayapala is defeated again, this time by Sabuktigin's son <b>Mahmud of Ghazni</b> , near Peshawar, and captured. Released and publicly humiliated, he abdicates and, according to the sources, ends his own life on a funeral pyre.     |
| 1008–09 CE      | His son <b>Anandapala</b> assembles a confederacy of north Indian rulers and meets Mahmud at Chach, near Waihind. The Shahi army comes close to winning; then Anandapala's elephant panics, the line collapses, and the battle is lost. |
| c. 1013–1026 CE | <b>Trilochanapala</b> and his son fight on from Nandana and the Kashmir hills. By around 1026 the dynasty is extinguished.                                                                                                              |

The Muslim scholar **Al-Biruni**, who came to India with Mahmud's court and had no reason to flatter them, wrote about the Shahis with real respect — praising their nobility and lamenting their fall. When an enemy's own chronicler writes your obituary kindly, you did something right.

#### THE STRUCTURAL POINT, AND IT IS A BITTER ONE

For nearly two centuries, a frontier kingdom in Punjab and Gandhara absorbed every attack from the north-west while the wealthy heartland kingdoms of north India — Pratiharas, Palas, Rashtrakutas, and their successors — spent their strength fighting each other over Kannauj. When the frontier finally broke, there was nothing behind it.

That is the shape of the next thousand years, and Part 3 is about what came through the broken door.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## Scorecard: what Part 2 proves

"Alexander the Great conquered India."

**FALSE**

He entered the north-west and Punjab in 326 BCE, won his battles there, and never crossed the Beas. He saw perhaps five per cent of the subcontinent. His army mutinied rather than go further. His hold on what he did take lasted about twenty years, and Seleucus formally surrendered it by treaty around 303 BCE in exchange for elephants. He also took the worst wound of his life at Multan, from which he arguably never recovered.

"Porus defeated Alexander at the Jhelum."

**NOT SUPPORTED**

This is popular online and it is not what any surviving source says. Porus lost. His army was destroyed and two of his sons were killed.

What *is* defensible, and worth saying: every source we have is Greek or Roman, written 300 to 500 years later, ultimately drawing on accounts by Alexander's own officers. The reported Macedonian casualties exceed those at Gaugamela. And Alexander's response — restoring his defeated enemy to the throne and enlarging his kingdom — is unique in his career and suggests a fight far harder than a clean victory. The honest position is: Porus lost the battle, and the Greek account of how comfortably he lost it should be read with scepticism. Inventing a victory is not necessary; the truth is impressive enough.

"Punjab is a land of soldiers and farmers with no intellectual tradition."

**FALSE, AND BADLY SO**

Panini, from a village near Taxila, wrote the most sophisticated grammar produced anywhere in the world before the twentieth century, and it is still the standard reference for Sanskrit. Chanakya, associated with Taxila, wrote the *Arthashastra*. The *Milinda Panha*, a philosophical classic still read across Buddhist Asia, records a debate held in Sialkot. And the first human images of the Buddha — the template for every Buddha statue from Kabul to Kyoto — were developed in Gandhara.

For roughly a thousand years, this region was one of the most intellectually productive places on earth. The reason nobody knows this is Chapter 6.

**"Punjab always stood united against invaders."****FALSE — AND THIS IS THE IMPORTANT ONE**

In 326 BCE, Ambhi of Taxila allied with Alexander and marched against Porus. Porus fought. The Cathaeans of Sangala fought to annihilation. The Malli fought so hard they nearly killed Alexander. Four Punjabi responses to one crisis, all at the same time.

Punjab has never faced anything as a single body. Not Alexander, not the Mughals, not the British, not 1947, and not 1984. Anyone selling you a story in which "Punjab" or "the Sikhs" or "the Hindus" acted as one is selling you a story.

**"Punjab's warrior culture is ancient and deep."****TRUE BY 1000 CE — BUT IT WAS BUILT, NOT INHERITED**

Part 1 showed that the region's oldest civilisation was strikingly unmilitary. Part 2 shows the machinery that changed that: Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Kushans, Hunas, and finally the Ghaznavids — six or seven waves in fifteen centuries, every one of them arriving through the same corridor. By the time the Hindu Shahis are holding the line alone around 1000 CE, the warrior society exists and is doing the job.

Keep hold of the distinction. A culture that was *made* by circumstances belongs to the people who carry it, and they are answerable for what they do with it. A culture that is simply "in the blood" belongs to nobody and excuses everything. I will need this in Part 9.

**"India absorbed all its invaders peacefully."****HALF TRUE**

Absorption genuinely happened — a Greek king of Sialkot became a Buddhist saint, Central Asian dynasties took Indian titles and funded Indian temples. But it happened *after* conquest, over generations, and it happened partly because small conquering elites were outnumbered. It also failed at least once, catastrophically: the Hunas were not absorbed. They were fought off, and the region they had ruled never recovered. The pleasant version of this story leaves out the corpses and the ruins.

**Timeline of Part 2**

|                       |                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>c. 518 BCE</b>     | Darius I annexes the Indus region. Gandhara and Hindush become Persian satrapies. Kharosthi script and coinage arrive. |
| <b>c. 500–400 BCE</b> | Panini, of Salatura near Taxila, composes the <i>Ashtadhyayi</i> .                                                     |
| <b>480–479 BCE</b>    | Indian contingents serve in Xerxes' army in Greece.                                                                    |
| <b>327–326 BCE</b>    | Alexander enters the north-west. Ambhi of Taxila submits and allies with him.                                          |
| <b>May 326 BCE</b>    | Battle of the Hydaspes (Jhelum). Porus defeated, then restored and given more territory.                               |

|                           |                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Summer 326 BCE</b>     | Siege of Sangala. Then the mutiny on the Hyphasis (Beas). Alexander turns back and builds twelve altars.                              |
| <b>326–325 BCE</b>        | The Malli campaign. Alexander is shot through the lung at Multan; his army massacres the town.                                        |
| <b>323 BCE</b>            | Alexander dies in Babylon, aged 32.                                                                                                   |
| <b>c. 322–321 BCE</b>     | Chandragupta Maurya, advised by Chanakya, clears the north-west and destroys the Nanda dynasty.                                       |
| <b>305–303 BCE</b>        | Seleucid–Mauryan war. Seleucus cedes Gandhara, Kabul, Kandahar and Balochistan for 500 war elephants. Megasthenes sent as ambassador. |
| <b>301 BCE</b>            | Those elephants help decide the Battle of Ipsus in Anatolia.                                                                          |
| <b>c. 268–232 BCE</b>     | Ashoka. Edicts at Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra in Kharosthi; at Kandahar in Greek and Aramaic. Dharmarajika Stupa at Taxila.             |
| <b>c. 185 BCE</b>         | Mauryan collapse. The north-west fragments.                                                                                           |
| <b>c. 165–145 BCE</b>     | Menander I (Milinda) rules from Sagala (Sialkot). The <i>Milinda Panha</i> .                                                          |
| <b>c. 100 BCE – 50 CE</b> | Indo-Scythians and Indo-Parthians rule the north-west.                                                                                |
| <b>c. 50–250 CE</b>       | Kushan Empire. Kanishka. Sirsukh built at Taxila. Gandhara art flowers; the first human images of the Buddha.                         |
| <b>c. 320–550 CE</b>      | Gupta Empire in the east. Punjab is a frontier province.                                                                              |
| <b>c. 455–460 CE</b>      | Skandagupta repels the first Huna attacks, at heavy cost.                                                                             |
| <b>c. 500–520 CE</b>      | Toramana establishes a Huna kingdom based in the Punjab region.                                                                       |
| <b>c. 520–550 CE</b>      | Mihirakula. Widespread destruction of Buddhist monasteries in the north-west.                                                         |
| <b>528 CE</b>             | Battle of Sondani. Yashodharman and Narasimhagupta defeat Mihirakula.                                                                 |
| <b>c. 550 CE</b>          | The Gupta Empire ends. North India fragments for six centuries.                                                                       |
| <b>606–647 CE</b>         | Harsha rules north India from Thanesar, then Kannauj. Dies heirless; empire dissolves.                                                |
| <b>630s CE</b>            | Xuanzang travels through a north-west of ruined monasteries.                                                                          |
| <b>c. 850–1026 CE</b>     | The Hindu Shahis hold the north-western frontier alone.                                                                               |
| <b>986–1026 CE</b>        | Jayapala, Anandapala and Trilochanapala are defeated in turn by Ghazni. The door opens — and Part 3 begins.                           |

## What happens in Part 3

Part 3, *The Invasion Highway*, covers roughly 1000 to 1500 CE — the five hundred years in which Punjab is hit harder and more often than any comparable region on earth.

Mahmud of Ghazni raids India seventeen times, every single time through Punjab, and makes Lahore a provincial capital of an Afghan empire. Muhammad of Ghor defeats

Prithviraj Chauhan at Tarain in 1192 and the Delhi Sultanate begins. The Mongols arrive at the Indus and Punjab becomes a permanent war zone for a century. Timur sacks Delhi in 1398, marching in and out through Punjab and leaving, by his own chronicler's account, pyramids of skulls.

Part 3 also covers what Punjab built while all this was happening: the Sufi tradition of Baba Farid and the beginnings of Punjabi as a literary language; the Bhakti movement; and the social conditions — caste rigidity, forced conversion, and an exhausted, plundered peasantry — that made the Punjab of 1469 the exact place where a man named Nanak would say something new.

## REFERENCE

## Sources and further reading — Part 2

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- **Quintus Curtius Rufus**, *History of Alexander*; **Diodorus Siculus**, *Bibliotheca Historica* Book 17; **Plutarch**, *Life of Alexander*; **Justin**, *Epitome*. These give the alternative and often larger figures.
- **Herodotus**, *Histories*, Books 3 and 7 — the Indian satrapy's gold tribute, and Indian troops in Xerxes' army.
- **Megasthenes**, *Indika* — surviving only in fragments quoted by Arrian, Strabo and Diodorus.
- **Milinda Panha** — "The Questions of King Milinda." T. W. Rhys Davids' translation is the standard English one.
- **Xuanzang**, *Records of the Western Regions (Da Tang Xiyu Ji)* — the 630s CE account of the north-west, including Mihirakula and the ruined monasteries.
- **Al-Biruni**, *Tahqiq ma li-l-Hind* ("India") — on the Hindu Shahis, written by a scholar in Mahmud of Ghazni's own entourage.
- **Kalhana**, *Rajatarangini* — the Kashmiri chronicle, on Mihirakula.
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- Timothy Howe and Sabine Müller, "Mission Accomplished: Alexander at the Hyphasis," *Ancient History Bulletin* 26 (2012) — a revisionist reading of the mutiny.

### Books worth reading

- Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* — the standard scholarly survey.
- Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India* — thorough, well illustrated, good on archaeology.
- A. K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks* — still the key work on Menander and his successors.
- Peter Green, *Alexander of Macedon* — a hostile and very useful biography that takes the Indian campaign's difficulties seriously.
- Frank Lee Holt, *Into the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan* — on how badly the eastern campaign actually went.
- Michel Danino and others on Indian responses to the Alexander sources — for the case that the Greek accounts are systematically self-serving.



## THE LIVING ARCHIVE

## About the author

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*Lovepreet Singh is a researcher and writer working toward doctoral research. He writes long-form work on Indian history, society, religion, public policy and technology — from the record, in plain language, with competing views left standing.*

### Background

He is the founder of **Lovelace**, an independent design and engineering studio building websites, brand systems, 3D and WebGL experiences and digital products, and is **Founder and Managing Director of Five Rivers Inc.**

He has studied at **Panjab University** and **Chandigarh University**, and is in the second year of an **MBA in Business Strategy and Analysis**. He is a **Certified Ethical Hacker** and a self-taught developer working in the MERN stack.

His interests run across history, epistemology, belief and public life — and the common thread, in the security work as much as the research, is a preference for testing a claim to destruction rather than defending it.

### The Living Archive

*Punjab: The Whole Truth* is the first major work of The Living Archive, a long-form research project examining subjects that are argued about constantly and read about rarely. The method is fixed across everything published there: plain language, named sources, disputed figures shown as ranges, and every opposing argument stated at full strength before it is answered.

### What comes next

He is working toward doctoral research, with Punjab — its history, its politics and the contested decades between 1966 and 1995 — as the intended field. These thirteen parts are the groundwork for it.

**Corrections and correspondence are welcome, and taken seriously.**

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*If you find an error of fact in this work, please write. Sources are listed at the end of every part so that any claim here can be checked against the record. A corrected edition is better than a confident one.*

— End of Part 2 —

Part 3: *The Invasion Highway*

A 13-PART INVESTIGATION

# Punjab: The Whole Truth

*Five thousand years of history, one honest look —  
from the first farmers to the Khalistan question.*

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PART THREE OF THIRTEEN

## The Invasion Highway

c. 1000 to 1500 CE — five centuries of being walked over, and what grew anyway

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LOVEPREET SINGH

THE LIVING ARCHIVE

Written in plain English.

Every disputed number shows its range and its source.

Every side gets its strongest argument before it gets an answer.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

## Before Part 3

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This is the part where I had to be most careful with myself.

Part 3 covers temple destruction, forced conversion, mass killing, and how Punjab became Muslim-majority — which is to say it covers the four subjects most actively weaponised in Indian public argument right now. Both of the popular positions on them contain real facts and real distortions, and both have organised constituencies that will tell you the other side is lying about everything.

My rule here was simple and I applied it in both directions. Where an atrocity is recorded by the perpetrator's own chronicler — as Somnath is, as Timur's order at Loni is — I state it plainly and I do not soften it. Where a popular explanation does not survive contact with the evidence — as "converted entirely by the sword" does not, because Uttar Pradesh was ruled longer and did not convert — I say so, and I show the working.

Neither of those moves will satisfy someone who arrived with a conclusion. That is not a flaw in the method. It is the method.

One finding in this part genuinely surprised me, and it is in Chapter 6. I knew Baba Farid's verses were in the Guru Granth Sahib. I had not stopped to think about what that means: the founding scripture of Sikhism contains the poetry of a Muslim Sufi, a Hindu weaver and a Dalit leather-worker, deliberately gathered by the fifth Guru and placed beside his own father's compositions. Whatever anyone tells you about eternal enmity in Punjab, it has to get past that book, and it cannot.

— L.S.

## INTRODUCTION

## The five hundred worst years

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*Part 2 ended with the Hindu Shahis destroyed and the north-western door standing open. Part 3 is about what came through it, and about the fact that Punjab built something remarkable anyway.*

Between roughly 1000 and 1500 CE, Punjab was invaded, occupied, sacked, garrisoned and fought over more consistently than almost any comparable region on earth. Not once. Not in a bad century. For five hundred years, more or less without a break.

Here is the roll-call, and it is worth reading slowly:

- **Mahmud of Ghazni** raids India roughly seventeen times between 1000 and 1027 CE. Every single raid comes through Punjab.
- **Muhammad of Ghor** takes Lahore in 1186 and wins at Tarain in 1192, founding six centuries of Delhi-based Muslim rule.
- **The Mongols** arrive at the Indus in 1221 and then raid Punjab repeatedly for the next eighty-odd years. Lahore is sacked in 1241.
- **Timur** crosses the Indus in 1398 with something like 92,000 cavalry, kills roughly 100,000 prisoners in a single order, and leaves Delhi a ruin.
- And in 1526, just outside our window, **Babur** comes through the same passes and founds the Mughal Empire.

Every one of these entered India through Punjab. Not one of them landed on a coast, or came through Bengal, or crossed the Himalaya. Punjab was the road, and everyone used it.

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*For five hundred years, Punjab was not a place people lived in so much as a place armies walked through. And people lived there anyway.*

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### But that is only half of Part 3

If this part were only a list of massacres it would be depressing and not very useful. The more interesting question is the one nobody asks:

### What did Punjab build while all this was happening?

The answer turns out to be substantial, and it is the direct setup for Part 4. During these same five centuries:

- Punjabi became a written literary language, for the first time, in the poetry of a Muslim Sufi saint.
- A shared shrine culture developed in which Hindus and Muslims visited the same holy places and revered the same saints.
- A tradition of religious protest grew up — in the local language, addressed to ordinary people — arguing that God does not care about your caste, your rituals, or which book you carry.
- And a society formed with a permanent habit of not relying on the state for protection, because the state had never once protected it.

Put those four things together and you have described, almost exactly, the conditions that produced Guru Nanak in 1469 and the Khalsa in 1699.

### A note on how this part is written

Chapter 5 and Chapter 8 deal with religion, conversion and temple destruction. These are live political subjects in India today, and both major positions on them contain real facts and real distortions.

My approach, following Rule 3, is to give each position its strongest form. Temple destruction happened, it was recorded and boasted about by the perpetrators' own chroniclers, and pretending otherwise is dishonest. It is also true that the same rulers sacked Muslim cities, that Timur attacked a Muslim state, and that religion functioned largely as justification for what was fundamentally a business in loot and power. Both of those are true at once. Anybody who needs you to believe only one of them is selling something.

CHAPTER 1 Mahmud of Ghazni: seventeen times through the same door.

CHAPTER 2 Ghor and Tarain: the battle that decided six hundred years.

CHAPTER 3 The Mongols: eighty years of living in a war zone.

CHAPTER 4 Timur, 1398: the worst single thing that happened.

CHAPTER 5 How Punjab became Muslim — and why that decided 1947.

CHAPTER 6 What Punjab built: Baba Farid and the invention of Punjabi literature.

CHAPTER 7 The soil in which Nanak grew.

CHAPTER 8 Scorecard: what Part 3 proves.

## CHAPTER ONE

## Mahmud of Ghazni

---

*Seventeen invasions in twenty-seven years. Not one of them was an attempt to rule India. All of them were a business — and Punjab was the one thing he decided to keep.*

### The business model

Mahmud ruled from Ghazni, in what is now eastern Afghanistan. Between roughly 1000 and 1027 CE he raided India about seventeen times.

Understand what these raids were. They were not conquests. Mahmud almost never tried to hold Indian territory east of Punjab. The pattern was:

1. Assemble an army after the harvest, when there is fodder and the rivers are low.
2. Come down through the passes into Punjab.
3. Strike fast at a wealthy target — a rich city, a great temple with a treasury.
4. Take gold, jewels, and thousands of captives to be sold as slaves.
5. Be back in Ghazni before the monsoon makes the rivers impassable.

Mahmud used this money to build Ghazni into a magnificent capital, to pay a large standing army, and to fund a court that included the scholar **Al-Biruni** and the poet **Firdausi**. India paid for the Afghan golden age.

### The targets

SOME OF MAHMUD'S PRINCIPAL INDIAN CAMPAIGNS

| Date    | Target                            | Note                                                                                                           |
|---------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1001    | Peshawar / Jayapala               | Defeats the Hindu Shahi king, who later kills himself.                                                         |
| 1008–09 | Anandapala's confederacy at Chach | The last organised north Indian resistance in the north-west is broken.                                        |
| 1010    | Multan                            | A <b>Muslim</b> city, ruled by Ismaili Shias, whom Mahmud regarded as heretics. Sacked.                        |
| 1014    | Thanesar                          | Temple town in today's Haryana.                                                                                |
| 1018    | Mathura and Kannauj               | Mathura's temples plundered; Kannauj, the great imperial city of north India, taken.                           |
| 1025    | <b>Somnath</b> , Gujarat          | His most famous raid. Reported plunder of around two million dinars. The temple's <i> jyotirlinga </i> broken. |
| 1027    | Battle of the Indus               | Against the Jats of the Indus valley. His last Indian campaign.                                                |

### Somnath, and how to think about it

The 1025 raid on Somnath is the single most politically charged event in this chapter, so let us handle it carefully.

**What is not in dispute:** Mahmud attacked the temple at Somnath, killed a great many defenders, looted an enormous treasure, and destroyed the idol. His own court chroniclers describe it, and they describe it as a boast. They were proud of it. There is no serious case for denying that it happened.

**What is disputed:** what it meant, and how it was remembered. The historian Romila Thapar's study *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* shows something that surprises most readers: the raid does not loom large in most contemporary Indian sources. Jain and Sanskrit records from Gujarat carry on discussing trade and temple endowments; some record the temple being rebuilt and functioning again. The idea of Somnath as *the* defining wound of Hindu India took its modern shape much later — substantially in the nineteenth century, in British parliamentary debate and colonial historiography, and then in twentieth-century Indian politics.

Both of these are true. A terrible thing happened, and the way it is remembered today was shaped by people with much later purposes.



**WAS MAHMUD A RELIGIOUS FANATIC OR A ROBBER?**

**The case for religious motive:** he took the title of an idol-breaker, his chroniclers framed the raids as holy war, he obtained formal recognition from the Caliph, and he specifically targeted major temples rather than only treasuries.

**The case for the loot motive:** he sacked Muslim Multan and massacred Ismaili Muslims he considered heretics; he employed Hindu troops and Hindu commanders in his own army, some in senior positions; he minted coins at Lahore with Sanskrit inscriptions; and he spent the rest of his career fighting Muslim rivals in Persia and Central Asia. Temples were targets partly because temples were where the gold was.

**The honest answer:** both, inseparably. He was a Muslim ruler in an age when plunder needed religious legitimization, and religious legitimization was most profitable when aimed at rich temples. Trying to separate the greed from the ideology is a modern instinct that does not fit an eleventh-century warlord.

**The part that actually matters for this book**

Forget Somnath for a moment. The most consequential thing Mahmud did was much quieter.

**He did not keep Kannauj. He did not keep Mathura. He did not keep Gujarat. He kept Punjab.**

Lahore was annexed and made a Ghaznavid provincial capital. And when the Ghaznavids later lost their western territories to the Seljuk Turks, Lahore became the effective capital of what was left of their empire.

Which produces this fact, and it is one of the most important facts in the entire book:

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*Punjab came under permanent Muslim rule around 1030 CE. Delhi did not until 1192. Punjab was governed by Muslim states for roughly 160 years longer than the rest of north India — and in the end, for over 900 years continuously.*

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Sit with that number. From about 1030 until the rise of the Sikh misls in the mid-1700s — **seven hundred years** — Punjab was ruled by Muslim states almost without interruption. Under the British it was ruled by Christians. A Punjabi in 1700 would have to go back twenty-five generations to find an ancestor who lived under a ruler of the local religion.

This single fact explains an extraordinary amount of what follows:

- Why Punjab's Muslim population became so large, especially in the west.

- Why Punjabi absorbed so much Persian vocabulary that a Punjabi speaker today uses Persian words constantly without noticing.
- Why Punjabi culture is so thoroughly blended.
- Why undivided Punjab was Muslim-majority in 1941 — and therefore why it had to be partitioned in 1947.
- And why, when a Punjabi religious movement finally did take political power in 1799, it felt to its participants like something that had not happened in seven centuries. Because it had not.

## CHAPTER TWO

## Ghor and Tarain

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*In 1192, on a plain in what is now Haryana, a battle was fought that set the political shape of north India for the next six hundred years. It was fought in historical Punjab.*

### The Ghurids replace the Ghaznavids

By the later 1100s the Ghaznavids were finished as a great power, clinging to Lahore. A rival Afghan dynasty, the **Ghurids** — from Ghor, in central Afghanistan — pushed them out. **Muhammad of Ghor** (Muizz-ud-din Muhammad) took Lahore in 1186.

Unlike Mahmud, Ghori wanted territory, not just loot. And beyond Punjab lay the Chauhan kingdom of Ajmer and Delhi, ruled by **Prithviraj Chauhan**.

### The two battles of Tarain

They met at Tarain — modern Taraori, near Karnal — on the flat country between the Sutlej and the Yamuna. In our terms: the eastern edge of historical Punjab.

#### **First Battle of Tarain, 1191. Prithviraj won.**

This is worth stating plainly because it is often skipped. The Indian side won. Ghori's centre was broken by a massed Rajput charge, Ghori himself was wounded and had to be carried from the field, and his army fled.

Prithviraj then did not pursue him back to Afghanistan.

#### **Second Battle of Tarain, 1192. Ghori won, decisively.**

He came back the following year with a reorganised army, and he had thought hard about the first defeat. The Ghurid force relied on large numbers of **mounted archers** — light cavalry who could shoot from horseback, harass, retreat, and never close with the enemy. Against them, the Rajput system of heavy cavalry and elephants charging in a mass was close to useless. You cannot charge something that will not stand still.

The standard account has Ghori using feigned retreats to draw out and exhaust the Rajput cavalry through the day, then committing a fresh reserve of heavy cavalry at the decisive moment. The Chauhan army broke. Prithviraj was captured and killed.

**A WORD ABOUT THE PRITHVIRAJ LEGENDS**

You may have heard the story in which Prithviraj, blinded and held captive in Ghazni, kills Ghori with an arrow shot guided by sound. It is a wonderful story. It comes from the *Prithviraj Raso*, a poem composed in something close to its surviving form **centuries** after the events, and historians do not treat it as a reliable record. Muhammad of Ghor was in fact assassinated in 1206, in Punjab, near the Jhelum — most probably by Ismaili or Khokhar assailants.

I flag legends like this not to spoil them but because the same habit — a satisfying story replacing an inconvenient record — is exactly what I will have to fight my way through in Part 9.

**What followed**

Ghori returned to Afghanistan and left his slave-general **Qutb-ud-din Aibak** in charge of the Indian territories. When Ghori was assassinated in 1206, Aibak declared himself sultan at Lahore, and the **Delhi Sultanate** began.

Five dynasties would follow over the next three centuries — Mamluk (Slave), Khalji, Tughlaq, Sayyid, Lodi — until Babur ended the last of them at Panipat in 1526.

**Punjab's new job description**

Under the Sultanate, Punjab's role became fixed, and it is a role Punjab has occupied ever since in one form or another.

Punjab was a **province**. It was governed from Delhi. It paid revenue to Delhi. And its function was to be the **shield** — to absorb whatever came through the passes, so that Delhi did not have to.

This is the arrangement that Chapter 3 shows in its most brutal form.

**REMEMBER THIS FOR PARTS 8 AND 12**

Punjab as the province that pays for the centre and takes the hits for the centre is not a 1966 invention or a Congress-era grievance. It is a job description that begins in 1192 and has been renewed, with different capitals and different flags, ever since. Whether that is exploitation or simply geography is one of the real arguments in this book — and it has two serious sides.

## CHAPTER THREE

## The Mongols

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*For roughly eighty years, large parts of Punjab were not really governed by anybody. They were a raiding ground. This is where Punjab learns the habit of arming itself.*

### Genghis Khan looks at India and turns around

In 1221, **Genghis Khan** reached the Indus, chasing the last prince of the Khwarezmian empire, Jalal ad-Din Mingburnu, whom he had already destroyed. Jalal ad-Din swam his horse across the Indus and escaped into Punjab.

Genghis stood on the bank, considered marching through India, and decided against it — the heat, the disease, the distance, and reports of what lay ahead. He went back west.

India got lucky. It would not stay lucky.

### Eighty years of raiding

From the 1240s, the Mongols of the **Chagatai Khanate** — based in Central Asia — turned Punjab into a regular target. Major incursions came in **1241, 1245, 1257 and 1285**, and then, under Alauddin Khalji, in a much heavier series through the 1290s and 1300s.

**In 1241 they sacked Lahore.** The city that had been an imperial capital for two centuries was taken and devastated.

For long stretches, the Delhi Sultanate's real frontier was not the Indus at all. It was the Beas or the Sutlej. Everything west of that — much of central and western Punjab — was a contested zone where Delhi's writ was thin and Mongol raiding parties came and went.

### How Delhi responded

**Balban** (reigned 1266–1287) understood the problem and built for it. He established a chain of forts between Multan and Lahore and along the line of the Beas, garrisoned them, and pursued a forward-defensive policy rather than pulling back to Delhi. He also devastated some frontier areas deliberately, to deny raiders supplies.

**Alauddin Khalji** (reigned 1296–1316) faced the worst of it. In 1303 a Mongol force under Taraghai besieged Delhi itself for more than two months and looted its suburbs while Alauddin sat inside his own capital, unable to fight them off.

He responded by rebuilding the entire frontier system: repairing and building forts, stockpiling weapons and supplies in them, and posting his best generals to the Punjab frontier commands at **Dipalpur** and **Samana**. His famous economic measures — price controls, market regulation — were largely designed to let him maintain an enormous standing army cheaply, precisely because of this threat.

It worked. At the **Battle of Amroha in 1305**, Delhi's forces destroyed a major Mongol army, and Alauddin had thousands of Mongol prisoners trampled to death by elephants outside Delhi as a public demonstration. The raids tapered off through the 1300s.

### What eighty years of that does to a society

This is the analytical point of the chapter, and it matters enormously for Part 5.

If you live in a place where:

- a raiding army may arrive in any given year,
- the government's army is stationed 400 km away and exists to protect the capital, not you,
- the nearest fort is a garrison for the state's troops, not a refuge for your village, and
- anyone who is captured is sold as a slave —

then you do one of three things. You leave. You die. Or you arm yourself and organise your own defence around the people you actually trust: your extended family, your clan, your village.

That third option is what happened, over and over, and it produced a specific kind of society:

#### THE FRONTIER SOCIETY PUNJAB BECAME

| Feature                         | Consequence                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Armed villages                  | Weapons in ordinary homes were normal, not exceptional. Villages had walls and watchmen.                                                                                                           |
| Clan-based organisation         | The unit that mattered was the <i>biradari</i> — the kin group — because it was the unit that would actually turn out to fight for you. Punjab's clan and caste politics today still runs on this. |
| Local strongmen                 | Whoever could protect a stretch of country effectively became its real ruler, whatever Delhi's paperwork said.                                                                                     |
| Deep scepticism about the state | The state took your revenue and did not save you. Paying it was extortion, not citizenship.                                                                                                        |
| A high tolerance for violence   | Not as a moral flaw — as an adaptation. Societies where violence is common produce people who are not shocked by it.                                                                               |

**REMEMBER THIS FOR PART 5**

When the Mughal Empire collapses in the 1700s, Punjab does not descend into chaos. It reorganises almost overnight into the **misls** — twelve armed confederacies, clan-based, each holding a territory, each raising its own cavalry, cooperating loosely against outsiders and fighting each other in between.

People often describe this as a new Sikh invention. It was not. It was Punjab reverting to the survival structure it had been building since the 1240s, now with a new religion at the centre of it. The Khalsa gave the structure a soul. The structure itself was six hundred years old.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Timur, 1398

*Of everything in this part, this is the worst. It is also, in its details, a useful corrective to anyone who thinks these invasions were simply religion against religion.*

### The invasion

**Timur** — Tamerlane — ruled from Samarkand and had already conquered Persia, Central Asia and much of the Middle East. In August 1398 he marched on India with a force reported at around 92,000 cavalry.

On **30 September 1398** he crossed the Indus. His route ran straight through Punjab: Tullamba, which he sacked and whose inhabitants he massacred; then Multan; then east across the doabs toward Delhi, taking and destroying towns as he went.

### The pretext, and why it does not survive examination

Timur's stated justification was that the Sultan of Delhi, Nasir-ud-din Mahmud Tughlaq, was being too tolerant of his Hindu subjects, and that a properly Islamic ruler was needed.

Most historians regard this as a transparent excuse, and it is worth understanding why, because it teaches you how to read this whole period.

- Delhi in 1398 was a **Muslim sultanate**. Timur was a Muslim ruler attacking a Muslim state, sacking a Muslim capital, and killing a great many Muslims in the process.
- His route through Punjab destroyed Muslim and Hindu towns without much discrimination.
- Timur had spent his career attacking Muslim powers — the Ottomans, the Mamluks of Egypt, the Golden Horde. India was not a special religious project. It was the richest available target that had just become weak.

The Tughlaq dynasty had been falling apart for a decade. Timur attacked because Delhi was rich and Delhi was weak. The religious framing was, as it usually was, the wrapper.

### Loni: the order

By the time Timur's army reached the outskirts of Delhi in December 1398, it had accumulated an enormous number of captives — perhaps **100,000** people, taken across Punjab and marched along with the army to be sold as slaves.

Timur was about to fight the Sultan's army, which included war elephants. He calculated that during the battle his captives might break loose and attack his rear.

So at **Loni**, before the battle, he gave an order: kill them all. His army did.



This is recorded in Timur's own memoirs and by his court chronicler. It was not hidden or denied. It was written down as a sensible military precaution.

It is one of the largest single mass killings in premodern history, and the overwhelming majority of the victims were Punjabis who had been rounded up on the road east.

#### WHY I STATE IT SO BLUNTLY

Because it is documented by the perpetrator, in his own words, and because atrocity denial in either direction is one of the diseases this work exists to treat. When I reach 1984, I will state what happened to Sikhs in Delhi in November with exactly the same bluntness, and I will state what happened to Hindu bus passengers in Punjab in the years afterwards with exactly the same bluntness. The rule has to be applied consistently or it is not a rule.

## Delhi

On **17 December 1398**, Timur destroyed the Tughlaq army outside Delhi. The Sultan's war elephants — armoured, with poisoned tusks — were countered by driving loaded camels at them and setting the loads alight; the elephants panicked and turned on their own lines.

Delhi was then sacked for roughly fifteen days. The killing was on a scale that contemporaries struggled to describe. Timur's chroniclers record towers built of the heads of the dead. Accounts suggest the city was so thoroughly destroyed and depopulated that it took the better part of a century to recover.

Timur left after about a fortnight, carrying loot and, notably, skilled craftsmen — masons and artisans taken back to Samarkand, where they worked on his great buildings.

## The Punjab footnote that became a dynasty

On his way out, Timur appointed a local governor over **Multan, Lahore and Dipalpur**: a man named **Khizr Khan**.

The Delhi Sultanate was in ruins. Over the following years Khizr Khan built up his power base in Punjab, and in **1414** he took Delhi and founded the **Sayyid dynasty**, which ruled for about thirty-seven years.

So the dynasty that governed north India for the first half of the fifteenth century came out of Punjab — installed by a Central Asian conqueror as a provincial appointment.

#### PUT SIMPLY

Punjab was the road every invader used, the province that paid for Delhi, the shield that took the blows for Delhi, and occasionally — when Delhi collapsed entirely — the place the next rulers of Delhi came from. All four of those roles at once. That is what being the front door means.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## How Punjab became Muslim

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*This chapter answers a question that decided the fate of fifteen million people in 1947. It is handled here carefully, because both of the popular answers are wrong.*

### The fact to be explained

By the 1941 census, undivided Punjab was roughly **53% Muslim, 30% Hindu and 15% Sikh**.

That Muslim majority is why Punjab had to be partitioned in 1947 — and the geography of that majority is why the line fell where it did. So the question of how it came about is not an academic one. It is the direct cause of the largest forced migration in human history.

### The two popular answers, and why both fail

**Popular answer 1: "Punjab was converted by the sword."** Force alone cannot explain it. If conversion were simply a function of Muslim political rule, then Uttar Pradesh — ruled from Delhi and Agra by Muslim states for just as long, sitting under the seat of imperial power — would be Muslim-majority. It is not; it was around 15% Muslim. Bihar was ruled just as long and remained overwhelmingly Hindu. Meanwhile Bengal, at the far end of the empire and the least directly governed, became Muslim-majority. Political rule and conversion do not line up.

**Popular answer 2: "It was all peaceful and voluntary."** Also false. Forced conversion happened. It is documented in Muslim court chronicles that boast of it, in Sikh tradition and history, and in accounts of specific campaigns. The execution of Guru Arjan in 1606 and of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675 — Part 4 — are not folklore; they are historical events with an identifiable political and religious context. Jizya, the tax on non-Muslims, was real, was on-and-off enforced, and was a real material pressure.

### What actually happened: five mechanisms at once

WHY PEOPLE CONVERTED, IN ROUGH ORDER OF SCALE

| Mechanism                          | How it worked                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Sufi missionary activity</b> | The biggest single factor in Punjab. Chishti and Suhrawardi Sufi masters settled in the countryside, spoke the local language, offered a direct emotional relationship with God without an intermediary priesthood, fed the poor, and healed the sick. Their shrines became community centres. Conversion often happened over generations, around a shrine, without any dramatic moment. |
| <b>2. Escape from caste</b>        | For groups at the bottom of the caste system — barred from temples, from wells, from touching others — a religion that said all believers pray in one line, shoulder to shoulder, was a genuine offer of dignity. This was not cynical. It was rational.                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>3. Career and patronage</b>     | For centuries the state was Muslim. Office, land grants, army commissions and legal advantage flowed more easily to Muslims. Elite conversion often had a strong practical component.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>4. Force and pressure</b>       | Real, documented, and concentrated in particular reigns and particular campaigns rather than applied continuously. Jizya, destruction of local shrines, and coerced conversion of captives and prisoners all occurred.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>5. Time and proximity</b>       | Nine hundred years. Inter-marriage, shared festivals, shared shrines, and simple drift. Most conversion in most places is not an event; it is a slow slide across generations.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

### The geography — and this is the crucial bit

Now look at *where* Punjab became Muslim, because the pattern is extremely informative.

- **Western Punjab** — Multan, Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Lahore division, the Sindh Sagar and Chaj and Rechna doabs — became heavily Muslim, in many districts over 80%.
- **Eastern Punjab** — the Bist Jalandhar Doab, Ambala, Ludhiana, the Malwa country south of the Sutlej — stayed largely Hindu and Sikh.

Why the split? Three reinforcing reasons. The west was under Muslim rule longest and most continuously — from 1030, versus 1192 for the east. The great Sufi centres were in the west: Pakpattan, Multan, Uch Sharif. And Brahminical institutional infrastructure — temples, endowments, established priestly networks — was thinner in the west and denser in the east, closer to the Gangetic heartland.

So Punjab in 1900 was not a Muslim province with Hindu minorities. It was **a Muslim west and a Hindu-Sikh east, joined together in one administrative unit by the British.**

**REMEMBER THIS FOR PART 7 — IT IS THE WHOLE REASON FOR THE RADCLIFFE LINE**

When Cyril Radcliffe was given six weeks in 1947 to divide Punjab, he was not inventing a division. He was tracing one that had been forming since the eleventh century. His line ran, roughly, down the middle of the Bari Doab — between Lahore and Amritsar — because that is approximately where the Muslim-majority west met the Hindu-Sikh-majority east.

The line was drawn badly, hastily, and by the wrong person. But the fault line it followed was nine hundred years old, and it was created by the process described in this chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

## What Punjab built: Baba Farid

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*While the armies came through, a man in a small town on the Sutlej did something quietly enormous: he started writing poetry in the language ordinary people spoke.*

### Who he was

**Fariduddin Masud Ganjshakar** — universally known as **Baba Farid** — lived from 1179 to 1266. The name *Ganjshakar* means "treasury of sugar," or of sweetness.

He was a Sufi of the **Chishti order**, and one of its founding figures in South Asia. When his master Khwaja Bakhtiyar Kaki died in 1235, Farid became his spiritual successor. And here he did something significant: instead of taking up residence in Delhi, at the centre of power and patronage, he went home to Punjab and settled at **Ajodhan** — today **Pakpattan**, in Pakistani Punjab.

He lived, by all accounts, in extreme simplicity, and his shrine at Pakpattan remains one of the most visited in South Asia.

### The thing he did that changed everything

Baba Farid is **generally recognised as the first major poet of the Punjabi language**.

Understand what that means. Before Farid, the languages of writing in Punjab were Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic — the languages of priests, of government and of scholarship. Punjabi was what people spoke at home, in the fields, to their children. Nobody wrote serious literature in it.

Farid did. He wrote about God, death, longing, the shortness of life and the vanity of the world, in the language a farmer in Ajodhan actually used.

By doing that, he made Punjabi a literary language. Everything afterwards — Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah's *Heer*, Shah Hussain, the Punjabi of the Sikh Gurus, and Punjabi literature down to the present day — stands on ground he cleared.

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*Punjabi became a language you could write God's name in because a Muslim Sufi in a small town decided to stop writing in Persian.*

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### And now the fact that should stop you

In 1604, Guru Arjan compiled the **Adi Granth** — the scripture that became the **Guru Granth Sahib**, which Sikhs today revere as their living Guru.

Into it, he included the compositions of Baba Farid: four hymns and a large body of couplets — the commonly cited figure is 112 *saloks*, though counts vary slightly between traditions.

So: **the verses of a Muslim Sufi saint who died in 1266 are sung as sacred scripture in Sikh gurdwaras, every day, all over the world, in 2026.**

Farid is not alone in there. The Guru Granth Sahib contains the work of fifteen *bhagats* — saints from outside the line of Sikh Gurus — including:

- **Kabir**, a weaver from Banaras, born Muslim, claimed by Hindus and Muslims both, who spent his life mocking the certainties of each.
- **Namdev**, a calico-printer from Maharashtra.
- **Ravidas**, a leather-worker from Banaras — an untouchable by the rules of his time — whose hymns sit in the scripture alongside those of the Gurus.
- **Sheikh Farid**, a Muslim Sufi from Punjab.

A Muslim mystic, a Hindu weaver, a Dalit cobbler and a Maharashtrian printer, gathered by a Punjabi Guru into one book, in the sixteenth century.

#### KEEP THIS IN YOUR HAND FOR PARTS 9 TO 12

Every argument that Sikh and Hindu and Muslim traditions in Punjab were always separate, always hostile, and always at war has to get past that book. It cannot. The founding scripture of Sikhism was deliberately built as a shared inheritance, by a Guru who went looking for the words of a Muslim and an untouchable and put them next to his own father's.

This does not mean there was no conflict — Part 4 contains two executions of Sikh Gurus by the Mughal state, and Part 10 contains massacres in both directions. It means that anyone who claims eternal, essential enmity is contradicted by the single most authoritative document either tradition possesses.

## The shrine culture

Farid was one node in a network. Medieval Punjab was covered in Sufi shrines — *dargahs* — and they were the real religious geography of the region:

- **Pakpattan** — Baba Farid.
- **Multan** — Bahauddin Zakariya and Shah Rukn-e-Alam, of the Suhrawardi order, whose tombs are among the finest medieval buildings in South Asia.
- **Uch Sharif** — a whole complex of shrines.
- **Lahore** — Data Ganj Bakhsh (Ali Hujwiri), whose shrine is still the busiest in the city.

And crucially: **Hindus went to these shrines too.** Not as a curiosity — as a normal part of religious life. People of all communities came for healing, for children, for justice, for the

annual festivals. The shrine was where you went when you had a problem, regardless of what you called God.

That is what Punjabi religion actually looked like on the ground for most of these five centuries, whatever the court chronicles and the theologians were saying.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## The soil in which Nanak grew

*Part 4 is about the Sikh Gurus. This chapter explains why they appeared where and when they did — because Guru Nanak was not born into a vacuum. He was born into a very specific set of conditions, and every one of them shows up in what he said.*

### Punjab in 1469, in six facts

**1. The state was foreign, and had been for four hundred years.** No Punjabi in 1469 had a living memory, or a grandparent's memory, or a great-great-grandparent's memory, of Punjab being ruled by Punjabis. Government meant Persian-speaking officials, Turkish and Afghan soldiers, and a revenue demand.

**2. Violence was normal and periodic.** Timur had come through seventy years earlier. The Mongol raids were within cultural memory. Nobody expected safety, and nobody expected the state to provide it.

**3. Two religious establishments had hardened.** On one side, a Brahminical order preoccupied with ritual purity, caste rules, pilgrimage and sacred thread. On the other, an Islamic establishment of qazis and mullahs attached to state power. Nanak would attack both, in almost identical terms, for the same fault: mistaking the outward form for the thing itself.

**4. Caste had become brutal.** Untouchability, exclusion from wells and temples, occupational imprisonment. A large fraction of the population was told, by their own religion, that they were polluting.

**5. Women were near-invisible in religious life.** Excluded from scripture, from ritual authority, and in elite practice from public life.

**6. But there was already a language of protest, and it was in Punjabi.** The Sufi tradition of Farid and the Bhakti tradition of Kabir and Ravidas had been saying, for two hundred years, in the local tongue, to ordinary people: God is not in the temple or the mosque, God does not check your caste, and your ritual is worth nothing without an honest heart.

#### PUT SIMPLY

Punjab in 1469 was a place where the government was foreign, violence was routine, the priests of both religions were doing well while ordinary people were not, and a tradition already existed of saying so out loud in the local language. Something was going to be said. In 1469, in a village called Talwandi near Lahore, someone said it.



## The bridge into Part 4

Here is the connection between this part and the next, and it is a direct one.

Guru Nanak lived from 1469 to 1539. In 1520–21, **Babur** invaded Punjab on his way to founding the Mughal Empire, sacking towns including Saidpur (Eminabad), which Nanak appears to have witnessed.

Nanak wrote about it. Four compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib are known as the ***Babarvani*** — "the utterances concerning Babur." They are extraordinary: an eyewitness account of an invasion, written as scripture, in Punjabi.

And they are not a nationalist war-cry. Nanak describes the horror in unsparing terms — women's hair torn, homes destroyed, the powerful reduced to nothing — and then turns and asks God why He allowed it, and also turns on the Indian rulers whose incompetence and self-indulgence left their people defenceless.

He blames the invader. He also blames the local elite. He also demands an answer from God. In three verses.

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*The founder of Sikhism watched an invasion of Punjab with his own eyes and wrote it into scripture. Part 3 and Part 4 are not two separate stories. Part 4 is Punjab's answer to Part 3.*

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

## Scorecard: what Part 3 proves

"Punjab was invaded more than anywhere else in India."

TRUE, AND DEMONSTRABLY SO

Ghaznavids seventeen times, Ghurids, Mongols across eighty years, Timur, then the Mughals — every land invasion of India between 1000 and 1526 entered through Punjab. No other region in the subcontinent comes close. This is not a claim about Punjabi suffering being more noble than anyone else's; it is a claim about a road, and the road is on the map.

"These invasions were religious wars — Islam against Hinduism."

MOSTLY FALSE AS A FRAMING

Mahmud of Ghazni sacked Muslim Multan and massacred Ismaili Muslims. He employed Hindu commanders and minted coins with Sanskrit inscriptions at Lahore. Timur — whose stated pretext was that Delhi's Sultan was too soft on Hindus — attacked a Muslim sultanate, sacked a Muslim capital and killed enormous numbers of Muslims. The Mongols attacked Muslim Delhi. The driver throughout was wealth and power; religion supplied the justification and the vocabulary.

BUT DO NOT OVERCORRECT

Temple destruction was real, and the perpetrators' own chroniclers recorded it with pride. Jizya was real. Iconoclasm was a genuine ideological commitment for some rulers, not just a cover story. The honest position is that religion and greed were fused, not that one was fake.

"Punjab was converted to Islam by the sword."

NOT SUPPORTED AS A COMPLETE EXPLANATION

If Muslim political rule caused conversion, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar — ruled from the imperial capitals for just as long — would be Muslim-majority. They are not. Bengal, the furthest and least directly governed province, became Muslim-majority. The pattern does not fit.

What fits is a combination: Sufi missionary work in the local language, escape from caste exclusion, career advantage under a Muslim state, real coercion in specific times and places, and nine centuries of proximity. Force was one mechanism among five, and probably not the largest.

**"Punjab's Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were always enemies."****FALSE FOR THIS PERIOD, AND THE EVIDENCE IS UNANSWERABLE**

The Sikh scripture — compiled in 1604 by the fifth Guru — contains the poetry of a Muslim Sufi saint, a Hindu weaver, and a Dalit leather-worker, placed beside the Gurus' own compositions. Hindus and Muslims worshipped at the same shrines as a matter of ordinary practice. Punjabi as a literary language was created by a Muslim and carried forward by Sikhs.

Conflict existed and was sometimes lethal — Part 4 contains the executions of two Gurus by the Mughal state. But "always enemies" is refuted by the founding document of Sikhism itself.

**"Nothing was created in Punjab during these centuries."****FALSE**

Punjabi became a written literary language. The Sufi shrine network became the region's real social infrastructure. The Bhakti and Sufi traditions produced poetry still sung today. And a distinctive frontier society formed — armed, clan-organised, sceptical of the state — which is the structure the Sikh misls would later inherit. A society under permanent attack kept making things.

**"India kept losing because Indians were weak or cowardly."****FALSE — AND THE REAL REASONS ARE MORE USEFUL**

North India in this period had more people and more wealth than any of its attackers. It lost anyway, for four structural reasons:

**No unified command.** After the Guptas fell in 550 CE, north India had no single state. Invaders faced one kingdom at a time while the others watched.

**Cavalry.**

India's climate and fodder made it very difficult to breed high-quality warhorses. India *imported* them, at enormous cost — and the supply routes ran through Central Asia and Afghanistan, which is to say through the invaders' own territory. The attackers had unlimited good horses; the defenders had to buy theirs from the attackers' neighbours.

**Tactical mismatch.** Indian armies were built around heavy cavalry charges and war elephants. Central Asian armies were built around mounted archers — fast, dispersed, refusing close combat. Elephants, spectacular against infantry, panic under sustained arrow fire and trample their own side. Tarain in 1192 and Delhi in 1398 were both decided this way.

**Restricted recruitment.** Caste rules limited who could bear arms in many Indian armies. The invaders recruited anyone who could ride and shoot.

Courage was not the variable. Horses, command structure and tactical doctrine were. I labour this because "we lost because we were weak" leads to fantasy politics, while "we lost because of horses and disunity" leads to actual understanding.

## Timeline of Part 3

|                         |                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>c. 1000–1027</b>     | Mahmud of Ghazni raids India roughly seventeen times, all through Punjab.                                             |
| <b>1010</b>             | Mahmud sacks Muslim Multan.                                                                                           |
| <b>c. 1030</b>          | Lahore annexed as a Ghaznavid provincial capital. Punjab enters permanent Muslim rule — 160 years before Delhi.       |
| <b>1025</b>             | Sack of Somnath.                                                                                                      |
| <b>1179–1266</b>        | Life of Baba Farid. Punjabi becomes a literary language.                                                              |
| <b>1186</b>             | Muhammad of Ghor takes Lahore, ending Ghaznavid rule.                                                                 |
| <b>1191</b>             | First Battle of Tarain. <b>Prithviraj Chauhan wins.</b>                                                               |
| <b>1192</b>             | Second Battle of Tarain. Ghoris wins with mounted archers and feigned retreat. Prithviraj killed.                     |
| <b>1206</b>             | Ghoris assassinated near the Jhelum. Qutb-ud-din Aibak declares himself sultan at Lahore. The Delhi Sultanate begins. |
| <b>1221</b>             | Genghis Khan reaches the Indus, looks at India, and turns back.                                                       |
| <b>1241</b>             | The Mongols sack Lahore.                                                                                              |
| <b>1245, 1257, 1285</b> | Further major Mongol invasions.                                                                                       |
| <b>1266–1287</b>        | Balban builds a fort chain from Multan to Lahore and along the Beas.                                                  |
| <b>1296–1316</b>        | Alauddin Khalji. Mongols besiege Delhi itself in 1303. Frontier commands built up at Dipalpur and Samana.             |
| <b>1305</b>             | Battle of Amroha. Mongol army destroyed; prisoners trampled by elephants at Delhi.                                    |
| <b>30 Sept 1398</b>     | Timur crosses the Indus. Tulamba and Multan sacked.                                                                   |
| <b>Dec 1398</b>         | The Loni massacre — roughly 100,000 captives killed on Timur's order.                                                 |
| <b>17 Dec 1398</b>      | Timur destroys the Tughlaq army. Delhi sacked for fifteen days.                                                       |
| <b>1414</b>             | Khizr Khan, Timur's governor of Multan, Lahore and Dipalpur, takes Delhi and founds the Sayyid dynasty.               |
| <b>1469</b>             | <b>Guru Nanak is born at Talwandi, near Lahore.</b>                                                                   |
| <b>1520–21</b>          | Babur invades Punjab. Nanak witnesses it and composes the <i>Babarvani</i> .                                          |
| <b>1526</b>             | First Battle of Panipat. Babur defeats Ibrahim Lodi. The Mughal Empire begins — and Part 4 is well under way.         |

## What happens in Part 4

Part 4, *Gurus and the Khalsa*, covers 1469 to 1708 — and it is where this book's central subject finally arrives.

Ten Gurus across 239 years. We will follow the whole arc: Nanak's radical simplicity and his attack on ritual and caste; the institutions that made Sikhism a society rather than a philosophy — *langar*, *sangat*, the city of Amritsar, the scripture itself; the execution of Guru Arjan in 1606 under Jahangir, which changed everything; Guru Hargobind's doctrine of **Miri-Piri**, worldly power alongside spiritual power, and the two swords; the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur in Delhi in 1675 — which he accepted, on the evidence, in defence of the religious freedom of *Kashmiri Hindus*, not of Sikhs; and finally Guru Gobind Singh and the founding of the **Khalsa** at Anandpur in 1699.

Above all, Part 4 answers the question this book has been circling since Part 1: **where does the Punjabi tradition of martyrdom actually come from?** Why is *shaheedi* — being killed for a cause — not merely tolerated in Punjabi culture but understood as the highest achievement available to a human being?

The answer is specific, it is theological, it is historically datable, and it has been used and misused by almost everyone in this story since. Getting it right in Part 4 is what will let me judge Part 9 fairly.

## REFERENCE

## Sources and further reading — Part 3

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- **Utbi**, *Tarikh-i-Yamini*; **Baihaqi**, *Tarikh-i-Baihaqi* — Ghaznavid court histories, including the boasts about temple destruction.
- **Minhaj-i-Siraj**, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* — the key thirteenth-century source for the Ghurid conquest and the early Sultanate.
- **Ziauddin Barani**, *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* — on Balban and Alauddin Khalji, including the Mongol wars and the frontier system.
- **Amir Khusrau** — poet and eyewitness to the Khalji period.
- **Timur**, *Tuzk-i-Timuri* (the memoirs attributed to him) and **Sharafuddin Yazdi**, *Zafarnama* — for the 1398 campaign, the Loni order, and the sack of Delhi, recorded by the perpetrator's own side.
- **Guru Granth Sahib** — the compositions of Sheikh Farid, and the *Babarvani* of Guru Nanak. Multiple translations available; Sant Singh Khalsa's and Gopal Singh's are widely used in English.

### Modern scholarship

- **Romila Thapar**, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (2004) — the essential study of what actually happened at Somnath and how the memory of it was constructed much later.
- **Richard M. Eaton**, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier* and his essays on temple desecration in medieval India — the standard modern analysis of conversion mechanisms and of when and why temples were actually destroyed. Eaton's work is the best answer to both of the popular positions in Chapter 5.
- **Simon Digby**, *War-Horse and Elephant in the Delhi Sultanate* — on the horse-supply problem and its military consequences.
- **Jos Gommans**, *Mughal Warfare* and *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire* — on the military ecology of the north-west frontier.
- **Peter Jackson**, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* — the standard work, excellent on the Mongol wars.
- **André Wink**, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*.
- **Muzaffar Alam** and **Sanjay Subrahmanyam** on Persianate culture in India.
- On Punjabi literature and Sufism: **Christopher Shackle**'s work on Farid and on early Punjabi; **Denis Matringe** on Punjabi Sufi poetry.

### Reference sources used for dates and figures

- Britannica, "Sack of Delhi (1398)"; Wikipedia, *Sack of Somnath*, *Sack of Delhi (1398)*, *Battle of the Indus (1027)*, *Mongol invasion of India (1297–98)* and (1303), *Battle of Amroha*, *Alauddin Khalji's conquest of Multan*, *Baba Farid*.
- Aqaf and Religious Affairs Department, Government of Punjab (Pakistan) — official pages on the shrine of Baba Farid at Pakpattan.
- Vajiram & Ravi and other Indian civil-service preparation resources for the standard Tarain and Sultanate chronology — cross-checked against Peter Jackson.

#### ON THE CASUALTY AND PLUNDER FIGURES IN THIS PART

Nearly every large number in Chapters 1 and 4 — two million dinars at Somnath, 100,000 killed at Loni, 92,000 cavalry, towers of skulls — comes from chroniclers writing to glorify a conqueror. Medieval court historians inflated routinely, and inflating an atrocity was a way of praising your patron's power. These figures should be read as indicating *order of magnitude and intent*, not as audited counts. What is not in doubt is that the events happened and were catastrophic; the precise arithmetic is unrecoverable.

## THE LIVING ARCHIVE

## About the author

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*Lovepreet Singh is a researcher and writer working toward doctoral research. He writes long-form work on Indian history, society, religion, public policy and technology — from the record, in plain language, with competing views left standing.*

### Background

He is the founder of **Lovelace**, an independent design and engineering studio building websites, brand systems, 3D and WebGL experiences and digital products, and is **Founder and Managing Director of Five Rivers Inc.**

He has studied at **Panjab University** and **Chandigarh University**, and is in the second year of an **MBA in Business Strategy and Analysis**. He is a **Certified Ethical Hacker** and a self-taught developer working in the MERN stack.

His interests run across history, epistemology, belief and public life — and the common thread, in the security work as much as the research, is a preference for testing a claim to destruction rather than defending it.

### The Living Archive

*Punjab: The Whole Truth* is the first major work of The Living Archive, a long-form research project examining subjects that are argued about constantly and read about rarely. The method is fixed across everything published there: plain language, named sources, disputed figures shown as ranges, and every opposing argument stated at full strength before it is answered.

### What comes next

He is working toward doctoral research, with Punjab — its history, its politics and the contested decades between 1966 and 1995 — as the intended field. These thirteen parts are the groundwork for it.

**Corrections and correspondence are welcome, and taken seriously.**

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*If you find an error of fact in this work, please write. Sources are listed at the end of every part so that any claim here can be checked against the record. A corrected edition is better than a confident one.*

— End of Part 3 —

Part 4: *Gurus and the Khalsa*



A 13-PART INVESTIGATION

# Punjab: The Whole Truth

*Five thousand years of history, one honest look —  
from the first farmers to the Khalistan question.*

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PART FOUR OF THIRTEEN

## Gurus and the Khalsa

1469 to 1708 — ten Gurus, two executions, four dead children, and the origin of *shaheedi*

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LOVEPREET SINGH

THE LIVING ARCHIVE

Written in plain English.

Every disputed number shows its range and its source.

Every side gets its strongest argument before it gets an answer.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

## Before Part 4

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This is the part I was most afraid of writing.

Everything so far has been about dead empires. Nobody's faith depends on what I concluded about Porus or Mihirakula. Part 4 is different. It is about a living religion, one I was raised in, and about people whom millions of us regard not as historical figures but as Gurus.

So let me be exact about what I am doing, because if I am not, I will offend people for the wrong reasons.

**I am writing history, not devotion, and not theology.** I am not assessing whether the Gurus' teachings are true. That is not a question historical method can answer, and I would not trust anyone who claimed otherwise. What I am doing is treating the Gurus as people who made decisions in real circumstances, and tracing what those decisions caused. Some Sikh readers will find that flat. It is the cost of the method, and I would rather pay it openly than pretend to a neutrality I do not have.

**And I have a specific reason for needing this part to be accurate.** Part 9 of this work is about Bhindranwale. Almost every argument in that part — on both sides — is conducted in the vocabulary invented between 1606 and 1708. *Miri-Piri*. *Sant-sipahi*. *Shaheedi*. The Akal Takht. The authority of the Panth. People who have never read the Zafarnama quote its most famous line at each other.

I cannot judge how those words were used in 1984 unless I first establish, carefully and from the record, what they actually meant when they were made. That is what Part 4 is for. Chapter 8 is the one that Part 9 will rest on, and I have tried to write it without flinching in either direction.

One promise. There is a scorecard entry near the end of this part about caste — about the distance between what the Khalsa abolished in principle and what still happens in Punjabi villages. It was uncomfortable to write. It is going in anyway, because a tradition worth defending is one you can be honest about.

— L.S.

## INTRODUCTION

## Two hundred and thirty-nine years

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*Part 3 left Punjab in 1469: a place with a foreign government, routine violence, two religious establishments that had hardened into rival businesses, a brutal caste system, and an existing habit of saying so out loud in the local language. Part 4 is Punjab's answer.*

Ten Gurus, from Nanak's birth in 1469 to Gobind Singh's death in 1708. Two hundred and thirty-nine years.

In that time a movement goes from one man walking around arguing with priests, to a scripture, a capital city, a bank, an army, a uniform, a code of conduct, and a form of collective sovereignty that has no exact parallel anywhere else. Two of the ten Gurus are executed by the state. All four sons of the tenth are killed, two of them children aged nine and seven.

And at the end of it, the tenth Guru does something that no other founder of a major religion has done: he ends the line of living Gurus altogether and hands authority to a book and to the community jointly.

### The question this part has to answer

I have been circling one question since Part 1, and this is where I have to answer it.

### Where does *shaheedi* come from?

Every culture honours people who die for something. Punjab is different in degree and in kind. In Punjabi culture, being killed for a cause is not merely respected — it is widely understood as the highest thing a human being can achieve. Higher than long life. Higher than wealth. Higher than success.

Where does that come from? Not from the soil — Part 1 showed that the oldest Punjabi civilisation was strikingly unwarlike. Not from blood or race, which explains nothing because it cannot explain change.

The answer is in this part. It is specific, it is datable, it is theological, and it was built deliberately by identifiable people for identifiable reasons between 1606 and 1708. Chapter 8 lays it out, including the part that is uncomfortable: what that inheritance protects a people from, and what it exposes them to.

## A NOTE FOR NON-SIKH READERS

Two things will make the rest of this part easier to follow. First, the **Guru Granth Sahib** is not a book about the religion; for Sikhs it *is* the Guru — a living authority, treated with the courtesies given to a person. When I describe Guru Gobind Singh installing it in 1708, understand that he was not publishing a text. He was naming a successor.

Second, **Guru** in this tradition does not mean "teacher" in the loose modern sense. There were ten, they are understood to have carried one light through ten bodies, and the line is closed. Nobody has been a Sikh Guru since 1708, and any living person who claims the title is, by definition, outside the tradition. That fact will matter in Part 9.

CHAPTER 1 Nanak: what he actually said, and what he built.

CHAPTER 2 The institution-builders: Gurus two to five.

CHAPTER 3 1606: the execution that changed everything.

CHAPTER 4 Miri-Piri: the doctrine that made modern Punjab — and the question it left open.

CHAPTER 5 1675: the Guru who was beheaded defending Hindus.

CHAPTER 6 1699: the Khalsa.

CHAPTER 7 The price: Anandpur, Chamkaur, Sirhind, Nanded.

CHAPTER 8 Where *shaheedi* comes from — and what it costs.

CHAPTER 9 Scorecard: what Part 4 proves.

## CHAPTER ONE

# Nanak

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*Guru Nanak lived from 1469 to 1539. He never raised an army, never called for a state, and never preached violence. Everything military in this part comes later, and comes as a response. Getting that order right matters more than almost anything else in this book.*

## The beginning

He was born in 1469 at Talwandi, a village near Lahore — today **Nankana Sahib**, in Pakistani Punjab. His father was a village accountant. He worked as a storekeeper at Sultanpur Lodhi.

The formative episode, as Sikh tradition records it: one morning he went to the river to bathe and did not come back. He was missing for three days. When he reappeared, his first words were:

*"Na koi Hindu, na koi Musalman."  
There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim.*

People misread this constantly, so let me be careful. He was not saying the religions do not exist, and he was not saying they are all the same. He was making a much sharper point: **the labels are not what count.** Being born a Hindu does not make you good. Being born a Muslim does not make you good. What you actually do is what counts, and by that standard he could not see many real Hindus or real Muslims around him.

In 1469, in a society organised entirely around exactly those labels, that was not a gentle observation. It was an attack on the whole arrangement.

## The journeys

He then spent roughly two decades travelling — the *udasis*. Traditional accounts take him to Mecca, Baghdad, Sri Lanka, Tibet and across India. Historians disagree about how far he actually got, and I cannot settle it.

What matters is the pattern, and the pattern is well attested: he went to religious centres and argued with the people running them. Pilgrimage sites, temples, mosques, the seats of Yogis. He did not build a following by sitting in one place and receiving visitors. He went to where the authority was and questioned it.

## What he taught, in plain words

### NANAK'S CORE TEACHING

| Idea                        | What it means                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ik Onkar</b>             | One reality, one creator, present throughout creation. The very first characters of the Sikh scripture. Not a god who lives in a building and can be visited.                  |
| <b>No intermediaries</b>    | You do not need a priest, a Brahmin, a mullah or a ritual specialist to reach God. This removes an entire profession's reason to exist, which is why that profession objected. |
| <b>Caste is meaningless</b> | Not "caste is unfortunate." Meaningless. Before the creator there is no high birth and no low birth.                                                                           |
| <b>Ritual saves nobody</b>  | Pilgrimage, idol worship, sacred thread, fasting, ritual bathing — all worthless without honest conduct.                                                                       |
| <b>Women are equal</b>      | His line is direct: " <i>So kyon manda aakhiye, jit jamme rajaan</i> " — why call her inferior, when she gives birth to kings?                                                 |

And then the three pillars, which is where he separates from almost every religious teacher India had produced:

- **Naam Japna** — remember the creator.
- **Kirat Karni** — earn your living by honest work.
- **Vand Chhakna** — share what you earn.

### The revolutionary bit is the second pillar

Look at *Kirat Karni* again. Earn by honest work.

The dominant Indian religious model held that the highest spiritual life meant renunciation: leave the household, abandon work and family, beg for food, withdraw. The holy man was, by definition, someone who had stopped participating.

Nanak rejected that outright. He said: do not become a monk. Work. Marry. Have children. Pay your way. Be in the world and be good *in* it. He lived it himself — he spent his last years at Kartarpur farming.

The consequence is enormous and it is the reason this movement produced soldiers and farmers and traders rather than ascetics. A religion of working householders is a religion with an economy, a population, and something to defend.

### The institutions — why this survived when other movements did not

Here is the analytical point of the chapter. The Bhakti movement produced many extraordinary teachers who said things very close to what Nanak said. Kabir said them. Ravidas said them. Almost all of those movements faded into devotional sects or were absorbed.

Sikhism did not. The difference is not the ideas. It is that Nanak built **machinery**.

**Langar.** The free kitchen, where everyone sits on the floor in a line — *pangat* — and eats the same food, regardless of caste, religion, wealth or gender. I want to be precise about why this is radical rather than merely kind. In a caste society, the rules about who may eat with whom, and who may accept food from whom, are the machinery by which caste is enforced every single day. Caste does not live mainly in books. It lives at the point of the mouth. Langar attacks it exactly there. It is not charity with a spiritual justification; it is a social technology aimed at the load-bearing wall.

**Sangat.** The congregation — a standing local community that meets, not a crowd that gathers for a festival.

**Kartarpur.** An actual town on the Ravi, founded by Nanak, where the teaching was practised as a working farming community rather than discussed.

**And the succession.** This is the innovation I would rank highest. Nanak had two sons. He passed over both. He tested his followers, and appointed one of them — **Bhai Lehna**, who became **Guru Angad** — and made his own sons bow to the man he had chosen.

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*A movement that appoints its leader on merit rather than blood is a movement that can survive its founder. That single decision, in 1539, is why there is a Part 4 at all.*

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### **Babarvani: Nanak watches an invasion**

In 1520–21, Babur invaded Punjab on his way to founding the Mughal Empire, sacking towns including Saidpur (Eminabad). Nanak appears to have witnessed it, and possibly to have been briefly held.

He wrote about it. Those compositions, in the Guru Granth Sahib, are known as the **Babarvani** — the utterances concerning Babur. They are one of the very few eyewitness accounts of a Mughal invasion written by a non-combatant civilian, and they are astonishing.

They do three things at once, and the combination is the whole of Nanak's moral method:

1. **They condemn the invader** without softening anything — the killing, the destruction, the humiliation of women.
2. **They condemn the local rulers** for the incompetence, luxury and self-absorption that left their people defenceless. He does not give the Indian side a pass because it lost.
3. **They demand an answer from God.** He asks, directly, how the creator could watch this and not feel pain.

What they are *not* is a call to arms, and they are not a nationalist text. They are a moral accounting in which nobody with power escapes.

**FIX THIS IN YOUR MIND BEFORE PART 9**

For seventy years, from 1469 to 1539, Sikhism has no military dimension whatsoever. Nanak witnessed an invasion and responded with poetry and a question to God, not with a militia.

The sword enters this story in 1606, and it enters as a direct response to a state execution. Anyone who tells you Sikhism was militant from the beginning has the chronology backwards — and the chronology is the whole argument.



## CHAPTER TWO

## The institution-builders

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*Between 1539 and 1606, four Gurus turned a teaching into a society. By the end of it the Sikhs had their own script, their own ceremonies, their own capital city, their own scripture and their own revenue system. That is also, precisely, why the state killed the fifth one.*

### Guru Angad (1539–1552): the script

Angad's contribution sounds technical and is actually enormous. He standardised and popularised **Gurmukhi** — literally "from the Guru's mouth" — the script in which Punjabi is written to this day.

Think about what a script does politically. Before Gurmukhi, writing in Punjab meant Sanskrit in Devanagari, controlled by Brahmins, or Persian in the Nastaliq script, controlled by the state. Both were the property of an elite, and both required going through that elite to read anything sacred or official.

A script of your own means your scripture can be written down, copied, and read by ordinary people in their own language, with nobody's permission. It is an independence movement conducted through the alphabet.

He also collected Nanak's hymns and began the process that would end in the Adi Granth, and he ran schools and a wrestling arena — physical training alongside literacy.

### Guru Amar Das (1552–1574): the society

Amar Das is the Guru who turns a following into a structure.

- He made **langar compulsory before an audience**. Anybody who wanted to meet the Guru — including, by tradition, the Emperor Akbar — first had to sit on the floor and eat with everyone else.
- He built the **baoli** at Goindwal, a stepwell with eighty-four steps, which became the first Sikh pilgrimage site.
- He created the **manji** system — twenty-two territorial seats, each with an appointed representative, to administer the growing community. An organisational chart.
- He appointed **women as preachers**, and campaigned against *sati* — the burning of widows — and against *purdah*.
- And most consequentially, he established **distinct Sikh ceremonies** for birth, marriage and death.

That last point is the moment of separation. When a community stops using another community's rituals for the three events that structure every human life, it has stopped being a reform movement inside that community. It has become a separate society. Everything in the endless "are Sikhs Hindus" argument, which I will deal with in the scorecard, traces back to a decision made here.

### **Guru Ram Das (1574–1581): the city**

He founded a town called Ramdaspur, around a pool he had excavated. The town grew into **Amritsar** — "the pool of nectar" — and became the centre of the Sikh world.

He also composed the **Lavan**, the four hymns that constitute the Sikh marriage ceremony and are still sung at every Sikh wedding.

### **Guru Arjan (1581–1606): the peak**

Arjan is where all of it comes together, and where the state starts paying attention.

**He completed the Harmandir Sahib** — the building the world calls the Golden Temple. Two design decisions in it are theology made out of brick, and both are deliberate:

- **Four doors, one on each side.** Every temple in India has one entrance. Four doors means open from all four directions, to all four castes, to anyone.
- **You walk down to it.** Every other place of worship in India is raised — you climb steps to approach the divine. The Harmandir Sahib sits *lower* than the surrounding ground, in the middle of water. You descend to reach it. The message is not subtle and it was not meant to be.

**He compiled the Adi Granth in 1604**, installing it in the Harmandir Sahib. He included his own compositions and those of the four Gurus before him — and then he went looking for other people's. Into the scripture went fifteen *bhagats*: Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Sheikh Farid and others. A Muslim Sufi. A Dalit leather-worker. A Maharashtrian calico-printer.

I made this point in Part 3 and I will keep making it, because it is the single hardest fact for anyone selling communal history in Punjab: the founding scripture of Sikhism was *deliberately built* as a shared inheritance.

**He built an economy.** New towns — Tarn Taran, Kartarpur in Jalandhar district, Hargobindpur. Wells and irrigation. Encouragement of trade, including horse trading with Central Asia. And a formalised system of collection through appointed agents, the *masands*, who gathered contributions and brought them to Amritsar.

So by 1605, the Sikhs had: a scripture, a holy city, a distinct set of ceremonies, a script, a network of towns, a revenue system, and a rapidly growing following of both Hindus and Muslims.

They were no longer a sect. They were a parallel society with its own treasury.

Which is exactly why the next chapter happens.

## CHAPTER THREE

## 1606

*On 30 May 1606, Guru Arjan was executed at Lahore on the orders of the Emperor Jahangir. This is the hinge of the entire part, and unusually for events of this age, we have the killer's own written account of why he did it.*

### What we know, and from whom

There are three independent bodies of evidence, which is unusually good for the period. I want to separate them clearly, because people routinely quote one and attribute it to another.

#### THE THREE SOURCES FOR 1606

| Source                                                    | What it says                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Jahangir's own memoirs</b><br><i>Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri</i> | The perpetrator's written account. He describes Arjan as "a Hindu in the garments of sainthood," complains that great numbers of "simple-hearted Hindus and ignorant, foolish Muslims" had been drawn to him, notes that this "shop" had been kept warm for three or four generations, and states that he ordered it ended. He mentions that Arjan had received the fugitive prince Khusrau. |
| <b>A Jesuit letter from Lahore</b>                        | A contemporary Portuguese Jesuit account from Lahore records the death. This matters enormously as method: it is a third-party European witness with no stake in either the Mughal or the Sikh version.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Sikh tradition</b>                                     | Supplies the details of the torture — that he was seated on a heated iron plate while burning sand was poured over him, over several days, and that he was then taken to the Ravi, entered the water, and was not seen again.                                                                                                                                                                |

#### BEING PRECISE ABOUT WHICH SOURCE SAYS WHAT

Jahangir's memoirs record the order and the reasoning; they use the term *yasa*, a formal political execution. They do not describe hot sand. The torture details come from Sikh tradition. Both are part of the record, and I am telling you which is which rather than blending them into one seamless story — because in Part 9 I will have to do exactly this with 1984, and it is better to establish the habit here.

### The Khusrau connection

In April 1606, Jahangir's eldest son **Khusrau** rebelled, was defeated, and fled north through Punjab. He stopped at Goindwal, on the Beas, where he met Guru Arjan. Arjan, by most accounts, blessed him and may have given him money.

Jahangir was a brand-new emperor whose own son had just tried to take his throne. Aiding that son was treason.

## Why he was really killed: three readings

**Reading A — treason.** Arjan helped a rebel prince. Any empire in history executes for that. The religion was incidental; the crime was political.

**Reading B — religious persecution.** Read Jahangir's own paragraph and notice its proportions. Most of it is about Arjan's *religious* success — the crowds, the conversions of Muslims, the fact that this had been going on for generations and had been tolerated too long. Khusrau appears almost as the occasion rather than the cause. Akbar's policy of tolerance had died with Akbar in 1605, and the orthodox faction at court — associated with Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, called the Mujaddid — welcomed the execution in writing.

**Reading C — a rival power centre.** Strip out theology entirely. A large, wealthy, rapidly growing organisation with its own capital city, its own revenue collectors and its own following across two religions is a competing authority. Empires do not tolerate those, whatever they believe.

### MY ASSESSMENT

These are not three competing options; they are three layers of one thing, and Jahangir's own text contains all three. The most defensible reading is that the Khusrau meeting supplied the occasion and the legal pretext for a decision that was already forming, and that the underlying driver was Reading C wearing the clothes of Reading B: Sikhism had become a parallel society with its own money, and the new emperor's religious politics made ending it both attractive and easy to justify.

What I will not do is what partisans on both sides do — treat it as *purely* a political execution with no religious dimension, or as *purely* religious persecution with no political trigger. The primary source rules out both simplifications, which is a good reason to read primary sources.

## What it changed

Everything. Sikh tradition records Arjan's final instruction to his eleven-year-old son: let him sit fully armed upon his throne, and maintain an army to the best of his ability.

From 1469 to 1606 — one hundred and thirty-seven years — Sikhism had no military dimension at all. From 1606 onward it has one permanently.

The state made that decision, not the Gurus. I want that stated flatly, because it is the single most important causal claim in this part.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Miri-Piri

*This chapter contains the most consequential idea in Punjabi history, and the unresolved question buried inside it. Read it twice. Part 9 will be unintelligible without it.*

### Two swords

**Guru Hargobind** (Guru from 1606 to 1644) was eleven years old when his father was executed.

At his investiture he did something the previous five Gurus had not. The ceremony traditionally involved the *seli*, a woollen cord associated with renunciation. He declined it, and asked instead to be girded with **two swords**:

- **Miri** — from the Persian *amir*, a ruler. Temporal power. Worldly authority. The right and duty to act in the political world.
- **Piri** — from *pir*, a spiritual master. Spiritual authority.

He wore both, at once, for the rest of his life.

### The building that is the doctrine

In 1606 he laid the foundation of the **Akal Takht** — the "Throne of the Timeless One" — directly facing the Harmandir Sahib across the pool at Amritsar.

The architecture *is* the argument, and I think it is one of the most elegant pieces of political theology anywhere:

#### TWO BUILDINGS, ONE DOCTRINE

| Harmandir Sahib                                         | Akal Takht                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sits <i>below</i> ground level, in the middle of water. | Sits on a raised platform, deliberately higher than the height a subject's seat was permitted to be under Mughal convention. |
| Four doors, open to all.                                | A throne. A place of judgment.                                                                                               |
| Where you go to pray.                                   | Where the community goes to decide.                                                                                          |
| <b>Piri</b> — the spiritual.                            | <b>Miri</b> — the temporal.                                                                                                  |

They face each other, thirty metres apart. You cannot look at one without seeing the other. That is the entire point.

## What Miri-Piri actually says

In the plainest words I can manage:

**Spiritual life and worldly power are not separate departments.** A religion that tells you to be good, pray, and accept whatever the powerful do to you is a religion that serves the powerful. It converts injustice into a spiritual test and asks the victim to pass it quietly.

Hargobind's answer was: pray *and* be armed. Be a saint *and* a soldier. This is the **sant-sipahi** ideal — the saint-soldier — and it is the template for everything Sikh that follows.

He built it out in practice. He constructed the fort of Lohgarh at Amritsar, raised cavalry, kept horses and hawks, and accepted weapons and horses as offerings. Jahangir imprisoned him at Gwalior for some years; Sikh tradition holds that he refused release unless the fifty-two imprisoned princes held there were freed with him, which is commemorated as *Bandi Chhor Divas*. He fought four battles against Mughal forces — the first Sikh-Mughal military engagements in history.

## Now the question the doctrine leaves open

I have to state this carefully, because it is the most important analytical point in Part 4 and it is one that devotional accounts skip.

Miri-Piri establishes that the sword is legitimate. It does not, by itself, establish **who decides when the sword comes out**.

In Hargobind's lifetime the answer was obvious: the Guru decided. There was a living Guru, his authority was undisputed, and the question did not arise.

But after 1708 there is no living Guru — by the tenth Guru's own deliberate design, as Chapter 7 will show. Authority passes to the scripture and to the community acting collectively. Which is a magnificent defence against a state that wants to decapitate a movement by killing one man.

It also means that **there is no living office that can authoritatively say "no."**

---

*Miri-Piri says the sword is legitimate. It does not say who gets to draw it. For three hundred years that gap was filled by consensus. In 1980 it was filled by a man with a microphone.*

---

## THE MOST IMPORTANT BOX IN PART 4

Every significant actor in Parts 9 through 12 claims Miri-Piri. Bhindranwale claimed it explicitly and repeatedly. The Akal Takht's authority is invoked by militants, by moderates, by political parties, and by the Indian state's Sikh allies — often against each other, often in the same week.

The doctrine is genuine, ancient and central. It is not a militant invention and it cannot be dismissed as one. That is exactly what makes it usable: because it is real, an appeal to it is powerful; and because it names no arbiter, the appeal is available to anyone who can gather a following.

When I get to Part 9 I will not be asking "was Bhindranwale allowed to invoke Miri-Piri?" Anyone can. I will be asking the question the doctrine itself poses and that Chapter 8 will give me the tools for: **had all other means genuinely failed?** That is the test the tenth Guru set, in writing, and it is the only one that can be applied from outside.



## CHAPTER FIVE

## 1675

*In November 1675 the ninth Guru was beheaded in Delhi. He was not killed for defending Sikhs. He was killed for defending Hindus — specifically, Kashmiri Brahmins, whose religion he did not share and whose caste system his own faith rejected.*

### The two Gurus in between

**Guru Har Rai** (1644–1661) maintained the cavalry force but avoided using it, and concentrated on consolidation and on a dispensary of medicines. One episode from his time is worth keeping.

Aurangzeb summoned him to Delhi. He sent his elder son, Ram Rai, instead. At court, asked about a line in the scripture that appeared to reflect poorly on Muslims, Ram Rai altered the wording to please the emperor.

Har Rai disinherited him permanently and never saw him again.

The principle established there is severe and it is worth naming: **the text is not negotiable, not even a single word, not even to save your life or please an emperor.** Sikhism's attitude to its own scripture — including the extreme sensitivity around any perceived disrespect to the Guru Granth Sahib, which will become directly relevant in Part 13 — begins with decisions like this one.

**Guru Har Krishan** (1661–1664) became Guru at five. During a smallpox epidemic in Delhi he tended the sick, contracted the disease, and died at eight. Gurdwara Bangla Sahib marks the place.

### Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Kashmiri Pandits

**Guru Tegh Bahadur** (Guru from 1665) founded the town of **Anandpur** in the Shivalik foothills, and travelled extensively through Bihar, Bengal and Assam. His son Gobind was born at Patna in 1666.

The context for what follows: from 1669, Aurangzeb abandoned the relative tolerance of his predecessors and pursued an active policy of religious persecution against non-Muslims, including the destruction of temples and schools. Jizya, the tax on non-Muslims, was reimposed in 1679. In Kashmir, under the governor Iftikhar Khan, pressure on the Brahmin community was severe.

A delegation of **Kashmiri Pandits**, led by **Kirpa Ram Datt**, travelled to Anandpur and asked the Guru for help.

According to Sikh tradition — including the account given by his own son in the *Bachitar Natak* — the response was to send word to the Emperor that if the Guru could be converted, the Pandits would all convert with him.

### What happened

He was arrested in July 1675 with three companions, imprisoned at Sirhind, and taken to Delhi. He was ordered to convert to Islam or to perform a miracle to prove his standing. He refused both.

His three companions were killed in front of him first, to break him. **Bhai Mati Das** was sawn in half. **Bhai Dyala** was boiled alive. **Bhai Sati Das** was wrapped in cotton and burned.

He was then beheaded publicly at Chandni Chowk. The date is given as **11 November 1675** in the Nanakshahi calendar and as 24 November in some other reckonings; the discrepancy is a calendar-conversion issue, not a factual dispute.

Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib marks the site of the execution. Gurdwara Rakab Ganj marks where his body was cremated.

### Why this is the most important fact in Sikh-Hindu relations

I want to slow down here, because this fact does more analytical work in this book than almost any other.

Guru Tegh Bahadur did not die defending Sikhs. Sikhs were not the ones being forcibly converted in Kashmir. He died defending **Kashmiri Brahmins** — members of the very caste hierarchy that his own tradition explicitly rejects, performing rituals that Nanak had criticised by name.

He had no theological agreement with them whatsoever. He defended their right to be, in his own tradition's terms, wrong.

---

*That is the definition of religious freedom as a principle rather than a preference. A preference protects the people you agree with. A principle protects the people you do not.*

---

Guru Gobind Singh's own verse names his father "*Hind di Chadar*" — the shield of India.

**KEEP THIS IN YOUR HAND FOR PARTS 9, 10 AND 11**

In Part 10 I will have to write about Sikh militants pulling Hindu passengers off buses and shooting them because they were Hindus. In Part 11 I will have to examine an ideology that treats Hindus as the enemy of Sikhs by definition.

The ninth Guru was beheaded in Delhi, and had three of his companions tortured to death in front of him, for the specific and sole purpose of defending Hindus' right to remain Hindu.

There is no way around that fact. It is not a liberal gloss or a modern reinterpretation — it is the reason the execution happened, recorded in the tradition's own foundational sources. Any account of Sikhism that places Hindus as the natural enemy has to explain away the death of its own ninth Guru. It cannot, and I will say so every time it comes up.

## CHAPTER SIX

## 1699: the Khalsa

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*A nine-year-old boy was brought his father's severed head. Twenty-four years later he created the most unusual institution in Indian religious history — and then knelt down and asked it to initiate him.*

### Gobind Rai

Born at Patna in 1666. He became Guru at **nine years old**, in the circumstances described in the last chapter.

He was not only a soldier. He kept fifty-two poets at his court at Anandpur, commissioned translations of classical works into Braj, and wrote extensively himself in Braj, Persian and Punjabi. The intellectual output of Anandpur in this period was substantial and is usually forgotten in favour of the battles.

### Vaisakhi 1699

He called the Sikhs to Anandpur for Vaisakhi in 1699. The date is given as **30 March 1699** in the reckoning most commonly used, and as 13 April in others — again a calendar-conversion difference rather than a dispute about the event.

Before a very large gathering, he drew his sword and asked for a head.

One man stood up. The Guru took him into a tent. There was a sound, and the Guru came out alone with a bloodied sword, and asked for another. This happened five times.

Then he brought all five out alive.

### The Panj Piare, and why the details matter

The five became the **Panj Piare** — the Five Beloved. Look carefully at who they were, because the selection was clearly deliberate:

THE FIVE BELOVED — WHERE FROM, AND WHAT CASTE

| Name                                | Home                   | Caste background                     |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Daya Ram → <b>Daya Singh</b>        | Lahore, Punjab         | Khatri — a high commercial caste     |
| Dharam Das → <b>Dharam Singh</b>    | Hastinapur, near Delhi | Jat — a cultivating caste            |
| Himmat Rai → <b>Himmat Singh</b>    | Jagannath Puri, Odisha | Kumhar — potter / water-carrier      |
| Mohkam Chand → <b>Mo-hkam Singh</b> | Dwarka, Gujarat        | Chhimba — washerman / calico-printer |
| Sahib Chand → <b>Sahib Singh</b>    | Bidar, Karnataka       | Nai — barber                         |

Two patterns, and neither is an accident.

**Geography:** Punjab, Delhi, Odisha, Gujarat, Karnataka. Five men from five corners of the subcontinent, at a gathering in a Himalayan foothill town. This was not a Punjabi event that happened to include outsiders.

**Caste:** one from a high caste, four from artisan and service castes traditionally treated as low. In 1699, in a caste society, this was not symbolism. It was demolition.

### The initiation, and the reversal

He initiated them with **Khande di Pahul** — water stirred with a double-edged sword, the *khande*, while the scriptures were recited. Mata Sahib Kaur added *patashe*, sugar crystals, to the water.

Steel and sweetness in the same bowl. That is the sant-sipahi in a sentence.

And then he did the thing that I think has no parallel in the history of religion.

### He knelt and asked the Five to initiate him.

The Guru received initiation at the hands of his own disciples, and became Gobind Singh. He is recorded as saying that the Khalsa is the Guru and the Guru is the Khalsa.

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*Every founder of every faith has stood above the community he created. This one knelt down in front of five men — a shopkeeper, a farmer, a potter, a washerman and a barber — and asked them to make him one of them.*

---

## Names, and what they abolish

All initiated men took the name **Singh** — lion. All women took **Kaur** — which carries the sense of princess, or sovereign in her own right.

Understand the mechanism. In India, the surname *is* the caste marker. It is how strangers place you in the hierarchy within three seconds of meeting. Replacing every surname with two universal names does not merely discourage caste — it deletes the instrument by which caste is operated in daily life.

And note that women received a name of their own, not their husband's. In 1699.

## The Five Ks

### THE PANJ KAKAAR

| Article        | What it is                     | What it means                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Kesh</b>    | Uncut hair                     | Acceptance of the form in which you were made; rejection of the idea that you must alter yourself to be acceptable.                               |
| <b>Kangha</b>  | A small wooden comb            | Cleanliness and discipline. Not a renunciate's matted hair — a working person's kept hair.                                                        |
| <b>Kara</b>    | An iron or steel bracelet      | A circle with no beginning or end. Worn on the working hand, so that whatever that hand reaches for, the wearer is reminded.                      |
| <b>Kachera</b> | A specific cotton undergarment | Self-restraint and modesty; also, practically, clothing you can fight in.                                                                         |
| <b>Kirpan</b>  | A blade                        | The duty to defend the defenceless. Note the doctrine attached: it is for protection, including the protection of others, and not for aggression. |

## The function nobody explains

There is a practical logic to the Five Ks that I rarely see stated, and it is the sharpest thing about them.

### They make you impossible to hide.

A Khalsa Sikh is visually identifiable from across a street. In a period when the Mughal state was executing Sikhs, and would shortly place a price on Sikh heads, this is the deliberate removal of the option of anonymity.

You cannot quietly deny what you are. You cannot blend in when it gets dangerous. Having accepted the uniform, you have only two remaining options: defend yourself, or be killed.

It is a commitment device, engineered so that going back is not available. I find it one of the most audacious pieces of institutional design in any religion.

### What the Khalsa actually is

Analytically, strip away the reverence and look at the components:

- **Nanak's ideas** — one creator, no caste, honest work, service, equality of women.
- **Amar Das's institutions** — separate ceremonies, an administrative structure, a distinct society.
- **Arjan's assets** — a scripture, a capital, a revenue system.
- **Hargobind's Miri-Piri** — the legitimacy of temporal power and arms.
- **The frontier society of Part 3** — armed villages, clan organisation, self-defence, deep scepticism of the state.
- **And now: a uniform, an initiation, a code of conduct, and collective sovereign authority.**

The result is a religion, an army and a republic occupying the same body at the same time. I do not know of another one.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## The price

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*Between 1704 and 1708 the tenth Guru lost his fortress, his mother and all four of his sons. What he did in response — twice — tells you more about the Khalsa than any doctrine.*

### Anandpur, December 1704

Anandpur was besieged repeatedly by the surrounding hill rajas allied with Mughal forces. In December 1704, after a long siege, the Sikhs were offered safe passage out under a sworn oath — the Mughal commanders swearing on the Qur'an, the hill rajas on the cow.

The Guru's own view, as recorded later, was that the oath would be broken. He evacuated anyway, under pressure from those inside.

The oath was broken. The column was attacked while crossing the flooded **Sarsa** river. In the chaos the family was scattered. Much of the manuscript library was lost in the water.

### Chamkaur, 22 December 1704

The Guru, his two elder sons and around forty Sikhs took shelter in a mud-walled house at Chamkaur. Outside was a Mughal army.

They went out to fight in small groups. **Ajit Singh**, aged seventeen, went out and was killed. **Jujhar Singh**, aged fourteen, asked to follow his brother, and was killed.

Then the surviving Sikhs took a decision. Constituting themselves as the Khalsa — five of them, in the form of the Panj Piare — they issued the Guru an *order* to leave and survive.

### He obeyed.

I want to stop on that. The Guru of the Sikhs, having just watched two of his sons die, was given an instruction by five ordinary Sikhs and he followed it. That is not a story about humility. It is the constitutional mechanism established at Vaisakhi 1699 operating under maximum stress: the Khalsa is the Guru, and its collective decision binds even him.

### Sirhind, December 1704

The Guru's mother, **Mata Gujri**, and his two younger sons had been separated at the Sarsa. They were betrayed by a former servant and handed to the authorities.

**Zorawar Singh** was nine. **Fateh Singh** was seven.

They were brought before **Wazir Khan**, the Mughal governor of Sirhind, and ordered to convert to Islam. They refused. They were executed — Sikh tradition and most accounts record that they were bricked up alive in a wall.



Mata Gujri died the same day.

#### BEING CAREFUL WITH THIS ONE

Some historians debate the precise mechanism — whether the children were bricked up and then executed by sword, or died in the wall. Persian sources of the period record the executions; the details vary between accounts.

The core facts are not in dispute in any source I have found: two children, aged nine and seven, were executed by the state for refusing to convert. I do not need the most dramatic version of this to be true. The undisputed version is sufficient.

## The Zafarnama

From Dina, in Punjab, the Guru wrote a letter in Persian verse to Aurangzeb. It is called the **Zafarnama** — the Epistle of Victory. It is included in the Dasam Granth.

One line from it is quoted constantly, usually by people who have read nothing else in it:

*"When all other means have failed, it is righteous to draw the sword."*

Read the whole letter and the emphasis changes completely. The Zafarnama is overwhelmingly an **accusation of oath-breaking**. Again and again it charges the Emperor with perjury: you swore on your holy book, and you broke the oath. What kind of ruler are you? What is your faith worth?

The moral claim is not "my religion is right and yours is wrong." It is **"you gave your word and you broke it."** The Guru is holding a Muslim emperor to the standard of his own scripture — which is a very different argument from a religious war, and a much harder one to answer.

#### THE TEST, IN THE GURU'S OWN WORDS

Note what the famous line actually contains: a **condition**. The sword is righteous *when all other means have failed*. Not when other means are inconvenient, not when they are slow, and not when they have not been tried.

That is a test with a threshold, set in writing by the tenth Guru. It is the single most useful instrument I will carry into Part 9, because it is the tradition's own standard rather than one I have imported from outside — which means it cannot be dismissed as an alien framework imposed on Sikh history.

## Muktsar, and the end

At **Muktsar** in 1705, a group of Sikhs who had earlier deserted at Anandpur — signing a written disclaimer renouncing the Guru — returned and died fighting a Mughal force. The

Guru tore up their disclaimer over the body of their leader, Mai Bhago's companion Mahan Singh. They are remembered as the *Chali Mukte*, the forty liberated ones.

Aurangzeb died in 1707. Guru Gobind Singh supported Bahadur Shah in the succession struggle and travelled south with his camp.

At **Nanded**, in present-day Maharashtra, he was stabbed by an assassin — generally reported as sent by Wazir Khan of Sirhind. He died on **7 October 1708**.

### The last decision, and the one that shapes everything after

Before his death he did not appoint an eleventh Guru. He ended the line of human Gurus permanently and conferred the guruship on the **Guru Granth Sahib**. *Guru Maneyo Granth* — accept the Granth as Guru.

Authority in Sikhism from that day is held jointly by two things: the **Guru Granth Sahib**, the scripture, and the **Guru Khalsa Panth**, the community acting collectively.

**Why this was brilliant.** No more succession disputes — and Sikh history to that point had been full of them, with rival claimants backed by the Mughal state. No individual who can be arrested, tortured or bought to decapitate the movement. No pope, no clergy with the power to reinterpret at will. The Mughal state had killed two Gurus. After 1708 there was nobody left to kill.

### And now the cost, which I have to state honestly.

A community with no living central authority is a community that can be spoken for by anyone who gathers a following. There is no office empowered to say, with binding force, *this man does not speak for us*. The Akal Takht issues edicts, and they carry real weight — but its jurisdiction, its appointments and its independence have been contested throughout the modern period, and it has at various times been influenced by whoever held political power in Punjab.

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*In 1708 the absence of a single living authority was a shield against an empire that killed leaders. In 1980 it was an opening for anyone who could claim to speak for the Panth. The same design feature, in different circumstances, produced opposite results.*

---

I am not criticising the decision. Given what Guru Gobind Singh had just lived through — two Gurus executed, his own four sons dead, rival claimants installed by the state — it was the correct decision and probably the only one that would have preserved the tradition at all.

But structures have consequences beyond the circumstances they were built for, and this one is the most important structural fact in this whole book for understanding what happens in Part 9. I will return to it there.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## Where *shaheedi* comes from

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*This is the chapter the whole part exists for. It is also the one I rewrote most times, because getting it wrong in either direction would poison everything after it.*

### The theology, in four steps

Every culture honours people who die for a cause. What is distinctive here is the *centrality* of it, and the specific reasoning behind it. Set out plainly, the argument runs:

1. **Death is certain, and the body is temporary.** This is not unique; most religions say it.
2. **Therefore fear of death is irrational** — you are afraid of something that is going to happen regardless.
3. **And fear of death is the machinery by which tyranny works.** Every oppressive power, in the end, rests on the threat of killing you. Take away the fear and you have taken away the lever.
4. **So a person who does not fear death cannot be ruled by force.** Overcoming that fear is therefore not only a spiritual attainment. It is a *political* capability.

Guru Gobind Singh's famous line — "*sava lakh se ek ladaun*," I will make one fight a hundred and twenty-five thousand — is not a boast about physical strength. It is a claim about arithmetic. One person who genuinely cannot be frightened is worth an enormous number of people who can be.

### Why it is not abstract in Punjab

Theology alone does not produce a culture. What made this real was that the record backed it up, relentlessly, for over a century:

THE RECORD BEHIND THE DOCTRINE

| When          | What happened                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1606          | Guru Arjan executed at Lahore.                                                                                                                   |
| 1675          | Guru Tegh Bahadur beheaded at Delhi; three companions tortured to death in front of him.                                                         |
| 1704          | Ajit Singh (17) and Jujhar Singh (14) killed at Chamkaur. Zorawar Singh (9) and Fateh Singh (7) executed at Sirhind. Mata Gujri dies in custody. |
| 1716          | Banda Singh Bahadur tortured to death at Delhi with hundreds of his followers — Part 5.                                                          |
| 1730s–40s     | Bhai Mani Singh dismembered joint by joint. Bhai Taru Singh's scalp removed rather than cut his hair. A price placed on Sikh heads.              |
| 1746 and 1762 | The <i>Chhota</i> and <i>Vadda Ghallughara</i> — the Lesser and Greater Massacres. Part 5.                                                       |

Two of ten Gurus executed by the state. All four sons of the tenth killed, two of them small children. This is not a tradition of remembered grievance built on one incident. It is an unbroken run of documented state killing across five generations.

### And then it was made into a daily practice

Here is the mechanism that turns history into culture, and it is the part I find most remarkable.

The **Ardas** — the formal Sikh prayer, recited at the end of every service, in every gurdwara, every day, everywhere in the world — contains an explicit remembrance of the martyrs. It names, in sequence, those who were cut apart limb by limb, who were scalped, who were broken on the wheel, who were sawn asunder, who gave their heads but not their faith.

And then it asks for the same courage.

---

*This is not history being remembered once a year. It is history being rehearsed, out loud, daily, by millions of people, as a request.*

---

That is how a datable series of seventeenth and eighteenth century events becomes a permanent feature of how a people understand themselves in 2026.

### What it gives, and what it costs

Now the honest part, and I have tried to write both halves with the same force.

**What it gives.** An extraordinary resistance to intimidation. It is not a coincidence that a community which is roughly 1.7% of India's population produced a wildly disproportionate share of the freedom movement's executed and imprisoned, and of the Indian Army's gallantry decorations. Threatening a population raised on the Ardas with death is a strategy

with a known and poor track record. Part 6 will show the British discovering this, and Part 10 will show the Indian state discovering it again.

**What it costs.** A culture that ranks dying for a cause as the highest human achievement is a culture in which **the person who gets to define the cause holds enormous power.**

The theology says: do not fear death. It does not, by itself, say: *verify that the man telling you this cause is worth dying for is telling you the truth about the cause.*

That gap is not a defect in what the Gurus built. They were addressing a specific tyranny with specific, documented, undeniable crimes — an emperor who had beheaded a Guru for defending other people's religion and executed two children for refusing conversion. In that situation the question "is this cause real?" answers itself.

The gap opens later, when the inheritance passes to people who face no such tyranny — or who are told they do, by someone with something to gain.

### **What the tradition itself says about limits**

This is the part that is almost always left out when *shaheedi* is invoked, and it is the reason I do not accept that the tradition is simply open to any use.

**The Zafarnama sets a test.** The sword is righteous *when all other means have failed*. That is a condition, and it can be examined from outside by asking a factual question: had they?

**The Rahit forbids attacking non-combatants.** The code of conduct is explicit that the kirpan is for defence and for the defence of others, not for aggression.

**And there is Bhai Kanhaiya.** During the fighting at Anandpur, a Sikh named Kanhaiya was seen carrying water to wounded men on the battlefield — including wounded Mughal soldiers. He was reported to the Guru as a traitor.

Asked to explain himself, he said he did not see Mughals and Sikhs; he saw the Guru's face in all of them.

Guru Gobind Singh's response was to approve, and to hand him ointment as well, and tell him to treat their wounds too. That is the founding story of Sikh humanitarian service, and it is not a marginal anecdote — it is in the tradition's core narrative of its most desperate battle.

**THE STANDARD I WILL APPLY IN PART 9**

Anyone can invoke *shaheedi*. Anyone can invoke Miri-Piri. They are real, central and available.

But a person invoking them while ignoring the Zafarnama's last-resort condition, and ignoring the prohibition on attacking non-combatants, and ignoring Bhai Kanhaiya carrying water to enemy wounded, is quoting **half a tradition** — and specifically the half that authorises violence while discarding the half that restrains it.

That is the test I will use in Part 9, and I want it on the record here, established from seventeenth-century sources, before I have met the man I will be applying it to. I would rather set the standard before I know who it convicts.

## CHAPTER NINE

## Scorecard: what Part 4 proves

"Sikhism was founded as a militant religion."

FALSE — AND THE CHRONOLOGY IS THE ARGUMENT

For the first 137 years, from 1469 to 1606, Sikhism has no military dimension at all. Nanak personally witnessed Babur's invasion and responded with poetry, criticism of the local rulers, and a question addressed to God. Not a militia.

Arms enter in 1606, in the year the state tortured and killed the fifth Guru, and they enter as an explicit response to it. The state made that decision, not the Gurus.

"Sikhism is just a sect of Hinduism."

CONTESTED — AND ALMOST ALWAYS ASKED FOR POLITICAL REASONS

**The strongest case that it is:** it emerged from the Indian religious world and shares its vocabulary and cosmology; the scripture contains Hindu bhagats; Punjabi Hindu and Sikh families intermarried extensively and many Hindu families raised their eldest son as a Sikh; and Indian law itself, in Explanation II to Article 25 of the Constitution, groups Sikhs with Hindus for certain purposes.

**The strongest case that it is not:** a separate scripture, treated as a living Guru; a separate initiation; separate ceremonies for birth, marriage and death, established deliberately by Guru Amar Das in the 1500s; explicit rejection of caste, idol worship, and the authority of the Vedas; a separate script; and the Gurus' own repeated statements of distinctness.

**My assessment:** Sikhism emerged from the Indian religious world in roughly the way Buddhism did, and is theologically and institutionally distinct from Hinduism while being historically inseparable from its context. Both of those are true and neither cancels the other.

What I will add is this: in Indian public life this question is very rarely asked for theological reasons. It is asked to determine who is entitled to what. And Explanation II to Article 25 — a clause of the Indian Constitution that defines Sikhs, for the purpose of that article, as included within "Hindus" — is a long-standing and genuinely felt Sikh grievance that goes directly into Part 8. Whatever one thinks of the theology, a community objecting to being legally defined as part of another religion is not making an unreasonable complaint.



**"Sikhs and Hindus are natural enemies."****FALSE — DECISIVELY, AND ON THE TRADITION'S OWN EVIDENCE**

The ninth Guru was beheaded in Delhi, after watching three companions tortured to death, for defending the right of Kashmiri Brahmins to remain Hindu. He shared none of their theology. The Sikh scripture contains Hindu saints, including a Dalit. Punjabi Hindu and Sikh families were, for centuries, one social world.

Any ideology that positions Hindus as the definitional enemy of Sikhs must explain away the death of Sikhism's own ninth Guru. It cannot.

**"Sikhs and Muslims are natural enemies."****ALSO FALSE**

The Sikh scripture contains the poetry of a Muslim Sufi. **Pir Budhu Shah**, a Muslim holy man, fought for Guru Gobind Singh and lost two sons doing it. **Nabi Khan and Ghani Khan**, two Muslim brothers, hid the Guru and carried him to safety at Machhiwara after Chamkaur at enormous personal risk. Mughal officials and Sufi figures interceded for the Gurus more than once.

The conflict was with the **Mughal state**, and the Sikh sources are notably careful about that distinction — which is remarkable, given that they were written by people whose Gurus and children were being killed at the time. Guru Gobind Singh's argument in the Zafarnama is not that Islam is false; it is that Aurangzeb betrayed his own oath on his own scripture.

**"The Khalsa abolished caste."****TRUE IN PRINCIPLE. UNFINISHED IN PRACTICE — AND I AM NOT GOING TO PRETEND OTHERWISE**

Theologically it is unambiguous, and the institutional design was serious: langar, the Panj Piare drawn deliberately from four service castes and one high caste, the abolition of surnames in favour of Singh and Kaur, a scripture containing a Dalit saint's compositions.

In practice, caste persists in Punjab today. Some villages have separate gurdwaras for Dalit Sikhs. Marriage advertisements specify Jat Sikh. Mazhabi and Ramdasia Sikhs face real discrimination in land, marriage and social access. Punjab has one of the highest Scheduled Caste population shares of any Indian state, at roughly 32%, and one of the lowest rates of Dalit land ownership.

Both halves are true. The Gurus attempted the most direct assault on caste that any Indian tradition has attempted, and it is not finished. Saying so is not an attack on Sikhism; it is taking its own stated project seriously. I return to it with the data in Part 13.

**"Where does *shaheedi* come from?"****ANSWERED**

Not from Punjabi character, blood or soil. From a specific theology — that fear of death is the mechanism of tyranny, so a person without that fear cannot be ruled — developed between 1606 and 1708; validated by an unbroken record of actual state executions across five generations, including two Gurus and four children; and then institutionalised into a daily prayer recited by millions.

It is datable, traceable and deliberate. Which means it can be understood — and, crucially, it means the tradition's own internal limits (the *Zafarnama*'s last-resort test, the ban on attacking non-combatants, Bhai Kanhaiya's water) are as much a part of it as the courage is. Anyone who takes one half and discards the other is not carrying the tradition. They are using it.

**Timeline of Part 4**

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1469</b>        | Guru Nanak born at Talwandi (Nankana Sahib), near Lahore.                                                                                                                        |
| <b>1520–21</b>     | Babur invades Punjab. Nanak witnesses it and composes the <i>Babarvani</i> .                                                                                                     |
| <b>1539</b>        | Nanak dies at Kartarpur, having appointed Bhai Lehna — Guru Angad — over his own sons.                                                                                           |
| <b>1539–1552</b>   | Guru Angad standardises the Gurmukhi script.                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>1552–1574</b>   | Guru Amar Das: langar made compulsory before audience, the Goindwal baoli, 22 manjis, opposition to sati and purdah, and separate Sikh ceremonies for birth, marriage and death. |
| <b>1574–1581</b>   | Guru Ram Das founds Ramdaspur, which becomes Amritsar. Composes the Lavan.                                                                                                       |
| <b>1581–1606</b>   | Guru Arjan. Harmandir Sahib completed; Adi Granth compiled 1604; new towns and a revenue system.                                                                                 |
| <b>30 May 1606</b> | <b>Guru Arjan executed at Lahore</b> on Jahangir's orders.                                                                                                                       |
| <b>1606</b>        | Guru Hargobind takes the two swords of <b>Miri-Piri</b> and founds the Akal Takht.                                                                                               |
| <b>1620s–1630s</b> | Gwalior imprisonment and release; four battles against Mughal forces — the first Sikh-Mughal wars.                                                                               |
| <b>1644–1661</b>   | Guru Har Rai. Disinherits Ram Rai for altering a line of scripture.                                                                                                              |
| <b>1661–1664</b>   | Guru Har Krishan, Guru at five, dies of smallpox at eight while tending the sick in Delhi.                                                                                       |
| <b>1665</b>        | Guru Tegh Bahadur founds Anandpur.                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>1666</b>        | Gobind Rai born at Patna.                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>1669</b>        | Aurangzeb begins active persecution of non-Muslims.                                                                                                                              |
| <b>1675</b>        | Kashmiri Pandits led by Kirpa Ram come to Anandpur. Guru Tegh Bahadur arrested in July.                                                                                          |
| <b>11 Nov 1675</b> | <b>Guru Tegh Bahadur beheaded at Chandni Chowk, Delhi</b> , defending the religious freedom of Hindus. (24 November in some reckonings.)                                         |

|                      |                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>30 March 1699</b> | <b>The Khalsa founded at Anandpur.</b> The Panj Piare. Khande di Pahul. The Guru asks the Five to initiate him.                                              |
| <b>Dec 1704</b>      | Anandpur evacuated under a broken oath. The Sarsa crossing.                                                                                                  |
| <b>22 Dec 1704</b>   | <b>Chamkaur.</b> Ajit Singh (17) and Jujhar Singh (14) killed. The Khalsa orders the Guru to leave; he obeys.                                                |
| <b>Dec 1704</b>      | <b>Sirhind.</b> Zorawar Singh (9) and Fateh Singh (7) executed for refusing conversion. Mata Gujri dies.                                                     |
| <b>1705</b>          | The <i>Zafarnama</i> written to Aurangzeb. Battle of Muktsar; the Forty Liberated.                                                                           |
| <b>1707</b>          | Aurangzeb dies.                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>7 Oct 1708</b>    | <b>Guru Gobind Singh dies at Nanded</b> , assassinated. Ends the line of human Gurus and installs the <b>Guru Granth Sahib</b> . <i>Guru Maneyo Granth</i> . |

## What happens in Part 5

Part 5, *The Sikh Empire*, covers 1708 to 1849 — and it is the only period in five thousand years when Punjab was an independent sovereign state governed by Punjabis. It lasts fifty years.

It opens at the worst possible moment. Within two years of the tenth Guru's death, **Banda Singh Bahadur** raises a peasant army, takes Sirhind, executes Wazir Khan, and does something genuinely revolutionary: he abolishes the zamindari system and gives land to the tillers. He is captured in 1716 and tortured to death in Delhi with hundreds of his followers.

Then comes the worst period in Sikh history. A price on Sikh heads. The *Chhota Ghallughara* of 1746 and the *Vadda Ghallughara* of 1762, when Ahmad Shah Abdali's forces killed a very large share of the entire Sikh population in a single day. Bhai Mani Singh dismembered. Bhai Taru Singh scalped.

And out of that, the **misls** — twelve armed confederacies, reverting to exactly the frontier structure Part 3 described — and then **Ranjit Singh**, who takes Lahore in 1799 at nineteen and builds an empire running from the Khyber Pass to Tibet, with a Muslim majority population, Hindu and Muslim and European ministers, and no state religion.

Part 5 also asks the two questions that matter most for Part 12. Why did the empire collapse within ten years of Ranjit Singh's death? And what does the only working example of a Punjabi state actually tell us about whether another one could work?

## REFERENCE

## Sources and further reading — Part 4

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### Primary sources

- **Guru Granth Sahib** — including the compositions of Guru Nanak (the *Babarvani*, Rag Asa and Rag Tilang), and the works of the bhagats Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas and Sheikh Farid.
- **Jahangir**, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* — the emperor's own account of ordering Guru Arjan's death. Rogers and Beveridge translation. This is the key primary document for Chapter 3 and should be read in full rather than in fragments.
- **Guru Gobind Singh**, *Bachitar Natak* and *Zafarnama*, in the Dasam Granth. The Zafarnama is essential and is much more than its one famous couplet.
- Contemporary Jesuit correspondence from Lahore — a third-party European record of Guru Arjan's death, valuable precisely because it is neither Mughal nor Sikh.
- **Sainapati**, *Sri Gur Sobha* (early 18th century) — the earliest substantial Sikh account of Guru Gobind Singh's period.
- Later Sikh chronicles: *Gurbilas* literature, Bhai Santokh Singh's *Suraj Prakash*, Rattan Singh Bhangu's *Prachin Panth Prakash*. These are devotional and later; I have used them for tradition, and flagged them as such rather than as contemporary evidence.

### Modern scholarship

- **J. S. Grewal**, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (New Cambridge History of India) — the standard scholarly single-volume history.
- **W. H. McLeod**, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, The Evolution of the Sikh Community and Sikhism*. McLeod's source-critical approach is contested and in places resented within the Sikh community; he is nonetheless unavoidable, and reading him alongside his critics is the honest approach.
- **Harjot Oberoi**, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* — on how Sikh identity hardened in the modern period. Also controversial, also useful.
- **Louis E. Fenech**, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition* and *The Sikh Zafar-namah of Guru Gobind Singh* — the key modern study of *shaheedi* and the best English treatment of the Zafarnama.
- **Pashaura Singh**, *Life and Work of Guru Arjan* — the fullest treatment of 1606 and the competing readings of Jahangir's account.
- **Pashaura Singh and Louis Fenech (eds.)**, *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* — the best single reference for competing scholarly positions on almost everything in this part.
- **Khushwant Singh**, *A History of the Sikhs*, vols. 1–2 — readable, narrative, occasionally loose on detail but a good entry point.
- **Purnima Dhavan**, *When Sparrows Became Hawks* — on the making of Khalsa martial tradition, and excellent on the eighteenth-century transition into Part 5.

### Reference sources used for dates and details

- SikhiWiki entries on the martyrdoms of Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Panj Piare, Miri-Piri and Nanded 1708; *The Sikh Encyclopedia* on Miri-Piri; Britannica on Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Khalsa; Wikipedia on Guru Tegh Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh, the Khalsa, Saka Sirhind, the Five Ks and the individual Sahibzade.
- Sikh Research Institute (sikhri.org) on Guru Arjan; the University of California Santa Barbara *Journal of Punjab Studies* paper on understanding the martyrdom of Guru Arjan.

**A NOTE ON DATES IN THIS PART**

Several dates here appear differently in different sources — Vaisakhi 1699 as 30 March or 13 April, Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom as 11 or 24 November 1675. These are almost always **calendar-conversion differences** between the Bikrami, Nanakshahi and Gregorian systems, not disagreements about what happened. I have given both where they occur, so that you are not confused when you see the other figure elsewhere.

## THE LIVING ARCHIVE

## About the author

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*Lovepreet Singh is a researcher and writer working toward doctoral research. He writes long-form work on Indian history, society, religion, public policy and technology — from the record, in plain language, with competing views left standing.*

### Background

He is the founder of **Lovelace**, an independent design and engineering studio building websites, brand systems, 3D and WebGL experiences and digital products, and is **Founder and Managing Director of Five Rivers Inc.**

He has studied at **Panjab University** and **Chandigarh University**, and is in the second year of an **MBA in Business Strategy and Analysis**. He is a **Certified Ethical Hacker** and a self-taught developer working in the MERN stack.

His interests run across history, epistemology, belief and public life — and the common thread, in the security work as much as the research, is a preference for testing a claim to destruction rather than defending it.

### The Living Archive

*Punjab: The Whole Truth* is the first major work of The Living Archive, a long-form research project examining subjects that are argued about constantly and read about rarely. The method is fixed across everything published there: plain language, named sources, disputed figures shown as ranges, and every opposing argument stated at full strength before it is answered.

### What comes next

He is working toward doctoral research, with Punjab — its history, its politics and the contested decades between 1966 and 1995 — as the intended field. These thirteen parts are the groundwork for it.

**Corrections and correspondence are welcome, and taken seriously.**

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*If you find an error of fact in this work, please write. Sources are listed at the end of every part so that any claim here can be checked against the record. A corrected edition is better than a confident one.*

— End of Part 4 —

Part 5: *The Sikh Empire*