

# DIVALI AND SIKHI

By Karminder Singh Dhillon Ph.D (Boston),

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

This article is inspired by the actions of some *parbhandaks* and *sangats* to celebrate Divali within the precincts of the local *Gurudwara Sahib*. Such celebrations range from encouraging Sikhs to bring sweets and delicacies to the *Gurudwara Sahib*, lighting the *Gurudwara* premises with oil lamps, to actually conducting full scale *kirtan*, *katha* and *ardas diwans* in relation and in conjunction with Divali.

Some *parbhandakis*, *parcharaks* and *ragees* have justified such practices by quoting / singing *Gurbanee*, citing historical incidents that connect Divali to our Guru Sahib's, and by pointing to the prevailing practices relating to Divali of the *Harmandar Sahib* and other *Takht Sahib's*.

This article thus aims to

- (i) Examine the *Gurbanee* quotes that are said to give the spiritual nod for Divali to be celebrated as a Sikh festival,
- (ii) Examine the Divali-related Sikh historical incidents cited, and
- (iii) Encourage evaluation of prevailing practices (pertaining to Divali) in the Harmandar Sahib (Amritsar Sahib) etc.
- (iv) The final part of the article will attempt to put Divali into its original and proper perspective by tracing the origins, purpose and philosophy of the festival.

**(I) DIVALI AND GURBANI.** The most commonly sung and quoted *Gurbani* verses relating to Divali are derived from Bhai Gurdas ji's *Var 19 Pauree* 6. Sikh *ragees* sing this *pauree* and explain it as evidence that Divali and the lighting of lamps is to be celebrated as an authentic Sikh practice. For a full understanding, the entire *pauree* is quoted below. An explanation of the *pauree* follows.

*Divali Dee Rat Deevay Baleean. Tarey Jaat Snaat Ambar Bhaleean.*

*Fullan Dee Bagaat, Chun Chun Chaleean. Teerath Jatee Jaat Nain Nihalean*

*Har Chandauree Jhaat Vasae Uchaleean. Gurmukh Sukh Fal Dat Shabad Smaleean.*

Keen readers of *Gurbanee* know that the main message of a *shabad* is encapsulated in the *Rahao* line. This is the generic rule of the five thousand plus *shabads* that are written by the Guru Sahibs and *Bhagat Sahibs* in the *Guru Granth Sahib* (GGS). The writings of Bhai Gurdas Ji do not follow such a practice. Bhai ji does *not* use *Rahao* in any of his 912 *paurees* (in 40 *vaars*), 672 *Kabits* and 3 *swayees*. In all his writings, his main message is always contained in the final verse of the *pauree*,

*kabit* or *swayea*. The first five lines of every *pauree* are illustrations / explanations for the real message which is provided in the final / concluding line.

A translation of the above *pauree* is as follows:

*The lamps of the night of Divali eventually burn out.*

*The stars of the night sky stop sparkling when dawn comes.*

*The beauty of the orchard disappears as the flowers are picked.*

*The gaiety of the place of pilgrimage dies when the crowds leave.*

*Life- even as bestowed by God- is temporary; settled and then destructed.*

*Yet, the Gurmukh is blessed with the fruit of permanent joy through his Immersion in the Shabad.*

The meaning of this *pauree* is therefore as follows:

A *Gurmukh* seeks bliss from the *Shabad*. The joy that comes from the *Shabad* is not as temporary as the lamps that burn on Divali night, the star-lit night skies, and the beautiful sights of the blooming orchard, the joyous atmosphere of the places of pilgrimages or of human life itself.

As stated above, Guru Arjan Sahib bestowed the title of *Gurbanee dee Kunjee* (the key to understanding *Gurbanee*) to Bhai Ji's writings. In other words, understanding Bhai Gurdas provides one the key to unlock the treasures of the GGS. Guru Arjan Sahib recognized him as an interpreter par excellence of *Gurbanee*. As is the case with all of Bhai Ji's writings, he is extolling the Sikh to link spiritually with the *Shabad* – by which he means the GGS and all the messages that are contained therein. This *pauree* is written to give inspiration to the Sikh to connect with the *Shabad* by virtue of the **permanence** of the joy that comes as a result.

Now, to use the first line of this *pauree* – *Divalee Dee Raat Divey Baleean* – as *Gurbanee* justification for Sikhs to light lamps (or otherwise celebrate) the Divali night is ignorance – feigned or genuine. If that is the case then gazing the stars (the second illustration of temporariness in line two) can also be argued to be a call by Bhai Gurdas Ji for Sikhs to worship the planets. On the same account, then planting orchards and going for *teerath yatra* or pilgrimages (as mentioned in lines 3 and 4) is also recommended Sikh spiritual practice. Each of the four events in each of the four lines are examples / illustrations used by Bhai Ji to make a concluding point regarding a particular characteristic (permanence of the joy) of the *Shabad*. This characteristic of the *Shabad* is *contrasted* with characteristics of the four events. Surely then, it would be highly disingenuous to suggest that the events being contrasted are acceptable as Sikh practice.

A cursory examination of the language used by Bhai Ji in the *pauree* gives indication of his emotions. Lamps are lighted. The word for lighted is *Jagaeyan*. However, Bhai Ji uses the word

*Baleean* – meaning burned. He is saying “lamps burn away.” His emotive context is easily discerned from here. The emotion behind “lighting” a lamp is generally positive. Lighting lamps gives one a sense of creating light and brightness. But Bhai Ji’s emotions are concerned with the temporariness of the act – that the lamps (no matter how many positive feelings they create) *eventually* burn out, or burn to cinder, burn to darkness. Bhai Ji’s message is concerned with the *final* outcome – that lamps burn out. His concern with the *initial* act (the lighting / *Jagayean*) is no more than to indicate its temporariness. He is using this act (and others) to explain the concept of temporariness as opposed to permanence (of the joy of the *Shabad*) – which is his *main* concern. Hence to interpret this line as a call by Bhai Ji to Sikhs to “burn” lamps on Divali night is to miss the point all together.

It must also be pointed out that apart from singing the above *pauree* and interpreting it (albeit wrongly), no *ragee* or *parcharak* has been able to find a single *shabad* from the 5,867 that make up the GGS that discusses Divali. In fact the word Divali or any of its equivalents does not appear in the GGS even once. This alone should make any Sikh wonder. Why would a Sikh related festival (if indeed Divali was such) not be mentioned even once in the GGS? Even in this *pauree* of Bhai Gurdas Ji, the issue is the burning away of lamps during the Divali night – not the *celebration* of Divali per se. It therefore goes without saying that attempts by some of our *ragees* and *parcharaks* to stretch to breaking point the meaning of this line requires nothing less than distortion.

**(II) DIVALI AND SIKH HISTORICAL INCIDENTS.** Two significant historical incidents are cited by those who attempt to link Divali to Sikh history and spirituality. The first relates to what is termed *Bandee Chor Divas*, (literally: prisoners release day) and is related to Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib. And the second is Bhai Mani Singh Ji’s martyrdom. Both need examination to separate fact from apologetic thinking.

- (i) *Bandee Chor Divas*. Sikhs have been told that Guru Hargobind Sahib was ordered released from the Gwalior prison by Emperor Jahangir. Guru Sahib accepted the release on condition that 52 other Hindu kings / princes imprisoned in the same jail be released together with him. The Guru Sahib, upon securing the release of the kings, himself arrived at Amritsar, and the Sikhs celebrated by doing a *deep-maala* (literally: rosary of lighted lamps) display at Harmandar Sahib. This release happened on Diwali day. So on Diwali day, Sikhs actually celebrate the release from prison of Guru Hargobind Sahib – by lighting lamps.

Is this an accurate depiction of Sikh history and an accurate interpretation of Sikh sentiment? Or are some Sikhs so eager to celebrate Divali, and so fervent to want to link Divali to Sikh practice and tradition that they simply *had* to find or create an incident that is suggested to have happened on or close to Diwali day, and use that as a pretext to celebrate? The following arguments will help answer this question.

First, the euphoria of *Bandee Chor* – a Guru being released from prison – needs to be looked at within the context of Sikh history. In 1521 Babur attacked Saidpur at Ahmenabad and reduced the

city to rubble. Guru Nanak Sahib, witnessing the episode of destruction went up to Babur and critiqued him in spiritual yet stinging terms, as recorded in his *Tilang Raag Shabad* on page 722

*Paap Kee Janj Ley Kablon Dhaeya, Joree Mangey Daan Ve Lalo*

*Saram Dharam Doe Chap Khaloe, Koor Firey Pardhan Vey Lalo.*

Translation: Bringing the marriage party of sin, Babur has invaded from Kabul, demanding our land as his wedding gift, O Lalo. Modesty and righteousness both have vanished, and falsehood struts around like a leader, O Lalo.

The result of the critique was a harsh jail sentence for Guru Nanak Sahib and Bhai Mardana Ji who were thrown into prison with thousands of others – mostly women and children meant to be sold as slaves in Kabul. Guru Nanak Sahib gave solace to the prisoners, consoled them, and stood up to Babur as their representative. After a discourse with Guru Nanak Sahib, and having made to realize his folly, Babur ordered Guru Nanak Sahib released. The Guru Sahib's condition was that he would only accept release if each and every prisoner was released. Now the question: Why aren't Sikhs extolled to celebrate Guru Nanak Sahib's *Bandee Chor Divas*? Why is there no *Deep Maala* to commemorate this day? Because it does not coincide with Divali? Or it did not happen close enough to Divali day? Or there was no Harmandar Sahib to be lit up with lamps then? Or simply because this *Bandee Chor* provides no pretext for celebrating Divali?

The story of Guru Hargobind Sahib's release on Diwali day deserves further examination. Given that the 52 Kings were Hindu, their release on Diwali day is of significance to them and their subjects. It is thus entirely possible that Jahangir – upon the persuasion of his Hindu wife - decided to release them on a day that was auspicious to the Hindu Kings. Sikhs are told that the *deep mala* was done at Harmandar Sahib upon the Guru Sahib's arrival at Amritsar. Gwalior is in Agra – 112 miles out of Delhi. An express train journey from Delhi to Amritsar these days takes eight hours. The mode of travel by Guru Hargobind Sahib would have been horse back, or a horse carriage. Even if the Guru Sahib had rushed back to Amritsar – without stopping to meet with any of the *sangats* that would have gathered to greet him at the many villages and districts between Agra, Delhi and Amritsar – he would have arrived four or five days if not weeks *after* Divali. Not meeting with the multiple *sangats* en-route and rushing back to Amritsar is highly uncharacteristic of any Guru Sahib. No Guru Sahib would leave behind *sangats* to rush off to Amritsar or anywhere else. What was he rushing there for? To sit on a throne as the 53<sup>rd</sup> Hindu King? In any case, even if Guru Sahib did rush, Guru Hargobind Sahib's arrival would *not* have coincided with Divali – it would have been off by four or five days at least.

Second, the performing of a *Deep Maala* itself needs examination from a Gurmat point of view. There is no Sikh spiritual activity that resolves around the *Diva* (lamp). Beyond an article of practical use (providing light), *Gurbanee* discounts any and all Diva related rituals. In fact *Gurbanee* discards physical diva-related ritual and instead gives inner spiritual context to the lamp. On Ang

(page) 878 of GGS, in *Ramkali Raag* for instance we have an entire *shabad* devoted to the *Diva* by Guru Nanak Sahib.

*Shape your lamp on the wheel of good actions.*

*In this world and in the next, this lamp shall be with you.*

*Within the heart, this lamp is permanently lit.*

*It is not extinguished by water or wind.*

*Such a lamp will carry you across the water.*

*Wind does not shake it, or put it out. Its light reveals the Divine Throne.*

*The Khatrees, Brahmins, Soodras and Vaishyas cannot find its value, even by thousands of calculations.*

*If any of them lights such a lamp, O Nanak, he is emancipated.*

*Gurbanee* accords similar treatment to another practice involving the *Diva* namely the *aartee*. Physical *aartee* as a ritual is discouraged and *Gurbanee* provides inner spiritual context to *aartee* in the shabad *Gagan Mei Thaal Rav Chand Deepak Baney* (Dhinasree First Guru).

*Upon that cosmic plate of the sky, the sun and the moon are the lamps.*

*The stars and their orbs are the studded pearls.*

*The fragrance of sandalwood in the air is the temple incense, and the wind is the fan.*

*All the plants of the world are the altar flowers in offering to You, O Luminous Lord.*

*What a beautiful Aartee, lamp-lit worship service this is! O Destroyer of Fear, this is Your Ceremony of Light.*

Given that these *gurbanee* injunctions already existed, it is thus unlikely that Sikhs would have indulged in a mass lamp lighting ritual or *deep mala* to welcome their Guru Sahib. It is even more unlikely that the Guru Sahib would have allowed his Sikhs to indulge in a ritual that was not only of no significance in Sikhi, but against *Gurmat*. It is more likely that huge numbers of Sikhs thronged to visit him on the way from Agra to Amritsar and he had divans of *kirten*, *katha*, *langgar sewa*, and *parchar* for weeks culminating in a grand gathering at Harmandar Sahib.

Third, if one assumes that Guru Hargobind Sahib started the practice of *deep maala*, in defiance of the teachings of the first 5 Gurus Sahib, then one must look at other historical events of stature and importance. It is worth noting that there is no record of the Sikhs having performed *deep maala*

when Harmandar Sahib was inaugurated, when the first *parkash* of the GGS was conducted, when Akaal Takhat was installed, when Guru Hargobind Sahib initiated his *Peeri Meeri* army, and or when he returned victorious in each of the four wars he fought with local Mughals. These are all events that happened within a 50 year span (before and after) of the sixth Guru's release from Gwalior. If indeed *Deep Maala* was an accepted practice then, it would have been done on all these other occasions. Yet, it was not. Surely no Sikh would have trouble accepting that *all* of the historic events above would be of a higher importance *to* the Guru Sahib when compared to his release from prison. Why then is a lesser event being celebrated with a grand *Deep Mala*?

An examination of the collective mental psyche of the Sikhs at the time of their Guru Sahib's release will shed light on the probability of the Sikhs undertaking an exercise of lighting thousands of lamps to celebrate Diwali. Jahangir had, on 30th May 1606, after having kept him in prison, put to death in the most inhumane and cruel way, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs,. That this was the first martyrdom of the Sikhs, that their peace loving and beloved Guru Sahib was the victim, and the terrible tortures he endured had a lasting impact on the Sikh collective psyche. The Sikh psyche was tormented and beleaguered beyond imagination. One Guru Sahib was cruelly executed; the successor was imprisoned for one year. It is impossible to imagine that the Sikhs would have decided to have *any* grand celebration (Divali or otherwise) with the cruel and inhumane death of their Guru Sahib still fresh on their mind. It is equally impossible to imagine that Guru Hargobind Sahib would have allowed or condoned a grand celebration to commemorate his own release from prison. For someone who was prepared to die in battle four times with the Mugal tyrants, and for someone to call upon his Sikhs to be ever prepared to lay down their lives for justice, being jailed would have been as **trivial** as being released.

In light of the above, it is clear that the *Deep Maala* story is concocted as an after thought by people eagerly seeking to provide a historical justification to link Diwali to the Guru Sahib. The similarity between the story of Guru Hargobind Sahib returning to Amritsar and that of Ram Chander returning to Ayothya to celebrate Diwali (elaborated below) is striking enough for Guru Sahib's *Bandee Chor* celebration to come across as un-imaginative, whole scale plagiarism and dull fabrication. As is the case with most afterthoughts – they do not withstand careful scrutiny, are shaky at best, and dubious at worst. Given that lighting lamps was the standard way of providing light and given the huge crowds present when Guru Hargobind Sahib arrived from Gwalior, a great many lamps may have indeed been used for their practical value. But if using many lamps constituted *Deep Maala*, virtually every day before the advent of electricity would have been a *Deep Maala* day at Harmandar.

**(ii) Bhai Mani Singh's Shaheedee.** Sikhs are told that Bhai Sahib Ji sought to have a gathering of Sikhs during the Diwali of 1737. The local ruler agreed to not persecute the Sikhs who attended provided Bhai ji agreed to pay a fixed amount of money. Subsequently, upon discovering that the ruler had devised a plan to attack the *sangat*, Bhai ji sent notices for the Sikhs to not attend this function. There was thus no function and Bhai ji refused to pay the agreed amount to the ruler. He refused to allow the existing *golak* of the *Guru Ghar* to settle the amount due. As a result, Bhai ji was cut up limb by limb.

This incident is used to portray the fact that Sikhs did celebrate Divali as a religious function because that is what this great *Shaheed* intended to do. But was that the intention – to celebrate Divali as a Sikh religious function? Or was Bhai ji merely using the occasion to gather Sikhs to conduct a spiritual diwan that had everything to do with Sikhi (Kirten, Gurbani recitation, langgar sewa etc) and nothing to do with Divali per se? In any case, the function was never held. More importantly, the outcome of the Divali of 1737 was the cruel limb by limb mutilation of a brave, noble, bright and principled jewel of the Sikh community. Only one thing can be worse than this cruel annihilation of a man of God. That would be to use his name, his sacrifice, and his loss of life to sanction us Sikhs to do *deep malas*, distribute sweets and to *celebrate* this day. And those who are most guilty of such gross deviation are the present day guardians of the Harmandar Sahib. What is most disturbing to the Sikh psyche is the fact that the roots of this great martyrdom of a great *Bhram Gyani panth rattan* soul lay in his desire to maintain the sanctity and dignity of Harmandar Sahib. But now the guardians of the same Harmandar Sahib are bent on soiling Bhai Ji's sanctity.

**(III) DIVALI AND HARMANDAR SAHIB.** In what can be described as a senseless waste of funds, money and energy sincerely contributed by Sikhs who look to the Harmandar Sahib as their spiritual guidance, *parbhandaks* of this seat of holiness conduct, at virtually every Divali night an ostentatious display of fireworks, *deep mala*, and distribution of sweets. To see Harmandar Sahib (and other leading *Gurdwara Sahib's* and *Takhats* – notably Patna Sahib and Damdama Sahib) take part in a ritual so decidedly critiqued by the GGS, on an occasion so unrelated to Sikhi – is a clear indication of the spiritual and moral corruption that has seeped into today's Sikh spiritual leadership.

No authority at Harmandar Sahib, Patna Sahib or Damdama Sahib has been able to justify their Divali night extravaganza save to quote *Pauree 6 Vaar 19* of Bhai Gurdas Ji, mention *Bandee Chor Divas* and link to Bhai Mani Singh's *Shahidee* – as discussed above. No one can authoritatively give a time frame when this practice started. It certainly was *not* practiced during the Guru Sahib's times because there is no mention in the GSS. Such practice certainly did not happen during the 100 years or so after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib in 1708 and defeat of Baba Banda Singh *Bahadur* – as the Sikhs – hunted as they were by the rulers of the day - were hiding out in the jungles as guerillas. The Harmandar Sahib itself was destroyed many times over during this period to prevent the Sikhs from even secretly visiting it to get spiritual strength. This period is replete with tales of Sikhs challenging each other to go for a dip in the *Sarowar* (pool) of Harmandar Sahib. The challenge was substantial as it involved the risk of getting caught and losing one's life. The price of the head of a Sikh was up to 80 rupees. It is thus difficult to believe that Sikhs would have conducted a *deep mala* or any celebration every year on Divali under such circumstances during these 100 years.

Yet it is highly likely that the divali related *deep mala* crept into Sikh Gurudwara Sahib's sometime during these 100 years of a tumultuous period. Since the Sikhs were fighting for survival in the jungles of Punjab, the hills of Jammu and the deserts of Rajasthan, the Sikh *Gurudwara Sahibs*, including the major historical sites were in the hands of *Mahants*, pseudo-sikhs, government backed deviant Sikhs etc. By and large they were anti-Sikh and had their philosophies rooted in deviant

practices or Bhramanical beliefs. This is a period when Bhramanical rituals such as *Lohree*, *Maghee*, *Rakhree*, *Shraad*, *Sangrands*, *Maasiyas*, *Puranmashi*, *Karva Chauth*, *Dushera*, *Divali* etc were brought into and institutionalized as “Sikh” practices. One century was more than enough for these rituals – even though tossed out by the GGS – to be rooted firmly in Sikh *maryada* (Gurudwara practice).

When Sikh Raj was established in 1801 – the Sikhs were no longer hunted, but their Gurudwara Sahib’s continued to remain in the hands of the deviant Sikhs. Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s ministerial portfolio for Sikh Religion was in the hands of the Dogra brothers who were Hindu converts from Jammu and Kashmir. We now know that these brothers were on the pay roll of the British for the purpose of destabilizing the Sikh Raj. These Dogra brothers sat as *parbhandaks* of Akaal Takhat, sanctioning deviant practices and doling out huge sums of money and land to the deviant *Mahants*. It is thus most likely that Divali related *Deep Mala* at Harmandar Sahib and other leading Sikh Gurudwara Sahib’s was regularized during this period. When the British annexed the Sikh Raj, these *Mahants* and controllers of Sikh Gurudwaras were supported by the new rulers for politically expedient goals and actively allowed to carry on their activities. It was during the British rule (Guru Nanak’s Nirangakari GURPURAB of 1942 ) that the first Akhand Paath of the *Bachittar Natak Granth* (dubiously called *Dasam Granth*) was conducted at none other than the Akaal Takhat itself ! It wasn’t until the Singh Sabha Movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century that the historical Gurudwaras were liberated and put under the control of SGPC. These Gurudwaras were physically liberated, but Sikhs are still trying to liberate themselves from the deviant practices and rituals that were rooted by their previous occupiers. At the same time, non-historical and local Gurudwaras continued to remain in the hands of individuals and a host of *deras* have sprung up. The *deras* are run by a sanitized version of the *Mahants* known as *Sants*. A good number of local Gurudwaras, including diaspora gurudwaras are staffed by *granthis* who are the products of *dera* philosophies and *sant* influences. It is in this context that the introduction and continuation of Divali *deep mala* (and other Bhramanical rituals) at Harmandar Sahib (and other Gurudwara sahib’s) is perhaps best understood.

**(IV) UNDERSTANDING DIVALI.** It now remains to explain Divali within the context of Indian spirituality. *Bramanism* dictated the classification of Indian Hindu society into four main groups – *Brahmin*, *Khatris*, *Veshyas* and *Shudars*. Dress, occupations, language and celebrations were allotted accordingly to allow for distinctions to be made at the outset. The Brahmin thus celebrated *Vesakhi* while the *Khatris* considered *Dushera* to be their main celebration, The *Veshayas* – because they were the *Bania* or business class – were allotted Divali which is a celebration of *Laxmi Puja* (goddess of wealth). The *Shudars* – because they were lowest in the pecking order of castes – were deemed satisfied to consider *Holee* as their main celebration whence forth they gathered to chuck colored dust at each other in the name of guttural fun.

**(i) The Philosophy.** Divali is a shortened version of *Deepavlee*; meaning a festival of lamps. It is fixed on the moonless (*masia*) night of the month of *Kathak* – a month associated with labour (as opposed to *Veskahi* which is associated with reaping the benefits). By definition *Kathak Masia* falls at the end of the “working month.” The day after Divali is known as *Vishkarma Divas* (literally: day of no-labour – also name of a *devta*) and then next *Dhan Chaundas* (literally: day of wealth – also name



of a *devta*). Wealth will only arrive if the deity of wealth – Laxmi arrives on Divali night, and the devotee is home waiting for her. So prior to Divali, devotees clean their homes, give it a new coat of paint etc. On Divali night, they light up their homes, perform fireworks, and distribute sweets – in anticipation of Laxmi's arrival. The main door of the house is never closed on Divali night. Laxmi's photo is adorned with silver and gold decorations and *Kesar* and *Ganesh* are drawn in full color on the walls / floors of the house. Many devotees gamble during Divali night hoping for wealth. Shivji and his consort Parvati are commonly depicted as gambling during Divali night. The Ramayan narrates a session of gamble between Ram and Sita on Divali night.

(ii) The History. Given that the civilization of India is 5,000 years old, a number of significant events would have coincided with Divali. Of these the most significant is the return to Ayothya by prince Ram Chander after having defeated rival king Ravan. This battle is depicted as the triumph of good over evil. Divali night has therefore since witnessed fireworks and *deep malas* (to celebrate victory) and the burning of effigies of the defeated Ravan.

(iii) CONCLUSION. It is fairly clear therefore that Divali is a celebration that holds deep philosophical and historical significance to followers of the Hindu / Bramanical faith. And it is equally clear that Divali has no significance whatsoever from the view point of Sikh philosophy, *Gurbanee*, *Gurmat* and Sikh practice.

Sikhs, having lived in cosmopolitan Punjab from the days of Guru Nanak Sahib would have undoubtedly shared the joy of Divali (and even the Muslim celebrations such as Eid) with their neighbors and countrymen – without sharing the philosophical underpinnings of the event. The same can be said of Sikhs outside of Punjab and India who live in mixed societies. It is thus likely that Divali has been accepted from the social and cultural perspective by the Sikhs – in the name of good inter-communal relations and ties. A good number of Sikhs living in western countries are known to “celebrate” Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year, - without ascribing to the religious and spiritual connotations of these events - presumably within the spirit of good citizenship. As a minority almost everywhere, Sikhs have perhaps better understood this principle than others. There is nothing in *Gurmat* that prohibits a Sikh from sharing in the joys of his neighbours and countrymen.

But attempts to provide Sikh philosophical and historical basis to Divali (and any other non-Sikh celebrations) and endeavors to bring these functions to Gurdwaras are grossly misguided. Such endeavors necessitate the distortion and manipulative interpretation of *Gurbanee* to provide basis where none exists. They make a mockery of the rich Sikh tradition by implying a bankruptcy of indigenous Sikh celebrations. Such attempts falsify Sikh history and rob our younger generations of the chance to appreciate their own distinct identity. The spiritual esteem of the Harmandar Sahib (and other sites) is undoubtedly affected amongst *Gurmat* and *Gurbanee* appreciating Sikhs over the misguided and wasteful actions of these *Gurdhaams* to burn lamps and conduct fireworks on Divali night. Above all, such actions lower the esteem of the Sikhs in the eye of our Guru Sahib's as indicated by Guru Gobind Singh Sahib : *Jab Yeh Gahe Bipran Kee Reet, Mein Na Karoon En Kee Parteet*. The trust and faith (*parteet*) that the Guru Sahib placed in Sikhs may simply be lost in so doing.