

# Custodians of History

KAMLESHWAR SINGH

*Sikh Heritage: Ethos and Relics*, a new book, presents an unseen treasure of well-preserved relics belonging to the Gurus

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IT'S a journey that has a past, present and future, one that takes you into the Sikh ethos, history, theology, lore, and heritage. *Sikh Heritage: Ethos and Relics* (Rupa, Rs 1,500), is a book and anthology that took authors Bhayee Sikandar Singh and Roopinder Singh more than five years to bring to the readers. The Sikhs, reflect the city-based authors, are fortunate to have many well-preserved relics that belonged to the Gurus, the significance of which is timeless. Yet, many remain unaware of this vast treasure. The book weaves the tenets of Sikhism, together with the history and lore of the people of Punjab. Through photographs and descriptions of many hitherto unseen relics of Sikh heritage, the authors place the artefacts in its historical context, giving a broad perspective of Sikh heritage. Every relic and article is a living symbol of the Sikh ethos and included here are priceless artefacts in the custody of the descendants of Bhai Rup Chand.

The Maharajas of Patiala and Nabha still have significant collections which find a special place in this beautifully illustrated volume. The 204-page treasure trove of relics includes the *hukamnamas* of the Gurus and objects of personal use of the gurus, including the comb and ar-



mour of Guru Gobind Singh, his armour, the *rabab* of Guru Hargobind, contemporary portraits, paintings, texts and many other relics. While presenting the ethos of the Sikhs, the book focuses on some families in the Malwa region of Punjab who have had the privilege of receiving the Gurus' blessings, which they have cherished and preserved. "Some of the relics of the Gurus that my family is blessed with, went for an exhibition to London, and it was there that the idea of writing a book on these treasures was born," recalls Sikandar Singh, a scion of the Bagrian family, whose ancestor Bhai Rup Chand was blessed by Guru Har-



Authors Roopinder Singh (left) and Bhayee Sikandar Singh; (left) pictures in the book, *Sikh Heritage: Ethos and Relics*

gobind, the sixth Guru. "One thing led to another and took a meaningful context," adds Roopinder Singh, a journalist, photographer and author of *Marshal of the Indian Air Force Arjan Singh DFC* (2002) and *Guru Nanak: His Life and Teachings* (2004).

Besides other sources, the authors relied heavily on Bhai Kah Singh Nabha's *Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahankosh*, an encyclopaedia of Sikh religion. "The effort was that each element in the book should be authentic. We depended on oral tradition, various records and were in touch with the families who possessed these relics, to do this book, with four years of re-

search," the authors add that they tied the text together using visual metaphors. Footnotes at the end of each page, informative and detailed captions and a narrative that gives the visuals a new meaning, make the book appealing to a wider audience. The authors worked closely with their designer Peali Dutta Gupta and publishers Rupa for creating a book that's a visual treat. "Ensuring that all elements fit in was an enriching experience and we are happy that we have, through this book, preserved an integral part of our heritage and will be able to reach out to brand new audiences," sum up the two.