

# Memories of Tarn Taran

by Manohar Singh Gill

JUNE 1, 2006 is a happy day for me and all who have some connection with Tarn Taran. In the last 20 years, six new districts have been created by different governments, almost all south of the Satluj. Tarn Taran, which had the strongest claim, unfortunately was not. I congratulate the Chief Minister and thank him for taking the decision because this step will promote development in this most backward border area.

I was born in Aldinpur, a kilometer away from Tarn Taran. I studied a year in the Guru Arjun Dev School there. Tarn Taran is forever linked with Guru Arjun Dev. On the Martyrdom celebration day, we went up and down the bazaars, drinking glass after glass of free *shabeel sharbat*. Five of us use to walk to school, in the hot summer, dawdling on the way playing cards! Coming back in the midday heat, we would hold on to a *tonga*, jogging along, carrying peasants back from the courts.

In school, we ate *parathas* and *aachar*, packed by our mothers. Head Master Mahtab Singh, would have done credit to a Cambridge College. Assembly was held, prayers were said, the few who came late, or let their attention wander, were given swishes of his cane. I recently visited the school, now called a government college, and wanted to cry. I have spent Rs 15 lakh from my MPLAD fund, giving them new class rooms, and facilities. I will do more as I can.

In my own way, I have already celebrated Guru Arjun's Martyrdom, and my memories of the past. Apart from the college, I have built with MPLAD funds, a wall around the government girls' school to protect its extensive grounds and girls. A hostel for 75 is

We must load our  
*gajar, gobi* and fruits  
at 5 a.m. and put  
them in the Gulf  
markets by 11 a.m.

almost ready for girls from this border belt villages to do a college degree. I keep urging the authorities to start it before June 16. I hope to dine with the girls when they are living there.

Why do I fight for the full expansion of Amritsar International Airport? I started this effort in 1978, when I was the Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister. I wanted a comfortable, easy access to Punjab and our sacred city for all Punjabis abroad.

But more than this, I dreamt of dozens of air cargo flights going from Amritsar to the Gulf and elsewhere. We should be able to load our fresh *gajar, gobi*, fruits and vegetables, fish, meat and eggs, at 5 a.m. and put them fresh in the Gulf markets at 11 a.m. This is the only way for the two-acre farmers to earn a tolerable living. This dream remains to be fulfilled.

I am concerned to read in the Delhi papers that the first loads of vegetables have been exported from Jaipur to Dubai. Indian Airlines has given a concession of charging half rates. If sandy Rajasthan can do it, why does Punjab sleep? Why does the Civil Aviation Ministry allow unlimited national and international flights from everywhere but not from Amritsar?

Punjab folklore has a saying: *Dubb Key Wahah, Tey Rajj Key Khah*. It is a foolish slogan. I propose another: *Soch Key Wahah, Tey Pher Kush Khah!* ■

*The writer is a Member of*

*Parliament*