

# Where's the maharani?

## Preneet Kaur absent at Amarinder Singh's book release

By **Neha Tara Mehta**

**W**HY would a royal from Patiala, famous for being "sworn enemies" of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, write a book on him 168 years after his death?

The answer, says former Punjab chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh, is the sheer genius of the late maharaja, whom he describes as one of the ablest rulers and military commanders in the history of Punjab, and indeed, of India.

It was Singh's love for military history that drew him to Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Shukarchakia dynasty. "Sikhs respond to strong leaders, not namby-pambies. Everything collapsed after Maharaja Ranjit Singh died in 1839," says Singh, whose third book, *The Last Sunset: The Rise and Fall of the Lahore Durbar* (Roli Books; Rs 695), was released in the capital on Thursday.

Such was the draw of the late maharaja and the charisma of the Captain, who had served as the ADC of the legendary General Harbaksh Singh, that Janpath was clogged with beacon-bearing cars ferrying VIPs who thronged the book launch at The Imperial. Notable among the absentees, though, was the Captain's wife and minister of state for external affairs, Preet Kaur, but his good friend from Pakistan, Aroosa Alam, was around to give him company.

"Ranjit Singh had never studied military tactics. Yet, he reorganised his army and armed it in the western style by hiring Napoleon's officers after Waterloo. He brought in 43 of them and created a modern army," said the Captain. These officers introduced the concept of the infantry in the army — which the Sikhs had looked down upon initially.

Describing the book as a "formidable volume," Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh said: "Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a genuinely secular man. He employed people of many countries



**Amarinder Singh's friend from Pakistan, Aroosa Alam (right), sports a Salra Bano bouffant**



### Tweet minister Shashi Tharoor seems to be more interested in the action on the dais

Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh holds up a copy of *The Last Sunset*. Amarinder Singh, the author, is to his left. Gurcharan Das, one of the panelists, is to his right.

and religions and had complete faith in them."

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Moderating a discussion on the book, Manvika Singh, publisher of monthly journal *Seminar* described the author as "a military historian first, and a politician later." Amarinder Singh, a Dosco, is a graduate of the National Defence Academy and the Indian Military Academy.

Author and management guru Gurcharan Das drew attention to the constant refrain in the book — the comparison between Napoleon and Ranjit Singh. "Napoleon was small and he

had to prove his significance. Emily Eden (the sister of Lord Auckland), described Ranjit Singh as an old mouse with one eye who'd wear two pairs of socks."

An 'old mouse' who could teach the British, Russian and Americans a few tricks. The Maharaja never sent his troops to fight the Afghans in the mountains. He knew he couldn't fight them in their own territory," pointed out the Captain. The British, however, didn't follow his example. "Out of the 10,000 men who fought in the first Afghan war, only one doctor and his dog returned," said the Captain.

Little wonder that the well-heeled still want to read about the Maharaja who wore two pairs of socks

# Raza gifts himself a solo show

PARVEEN NEG

By **Kritika Banerjee**

HAD it been for anybody else, you would have probably taken it as one of the many clichéd statements often made by the rich and the mighty. But when Syed Haider Raza, whose canvases have always attracted top billing at auctions worldwide, says, "My paintings are independent of the trappings of money and fame. Instead, they are a medium to find the larger truth," one is bound to take note of it.

The master painter was speaking at the opening of an exhibition of his canvases at the Vadehra Art Gallery on Wednesday evening, where everybody who has anything to do with art had turned up to congratulate the veteran Paris-based artist.

The exhibition is special as it showcases three new canvases by the 88-year-old master that he had completed this year, upon his arrival in India.

The new paintings got everyone talking at the opening. Pointing at *Nirvan*, a new acrylic on can-



*The grand old masters of Indian art — (from left) Krishen Khanna, Ram Kumar and S.H. Raza — at the launch of Raza's show at Vadehra Art gallery*

vas, Sunaina Anand of Art Alive gallery said, "It's almost as if you are sitting in the middle of an ocean."


The painting, without the signature geometrical patterns, was quite a shift from Raza's characteristic style. "It reminds me of the early works of Raza Sahab from 1970s," added Anand.

But the rich colour patterns were hard to miss even in his new works. "The sense of colour co-ordination is what I love the most about Raza's paintings,"

said his old friend Krishen Khanna; the two go back together to 1940s when both were setting out as artists in Mumbai.

Also on display were some of Raza's old canvases, portraying the colours of Rajasthan. "I have special place for it in my heart as my first drawing teacher was from the state," said Raza, who has chalked out a two-day trip to Jaipur.


— The exhibition is on at D-40, Defence Colony, till March 25



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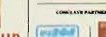
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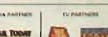
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