A STUDY OF THE SURFACE DECORATIONS WITHIN THE GOLDEN TEMPLE COMPLEX

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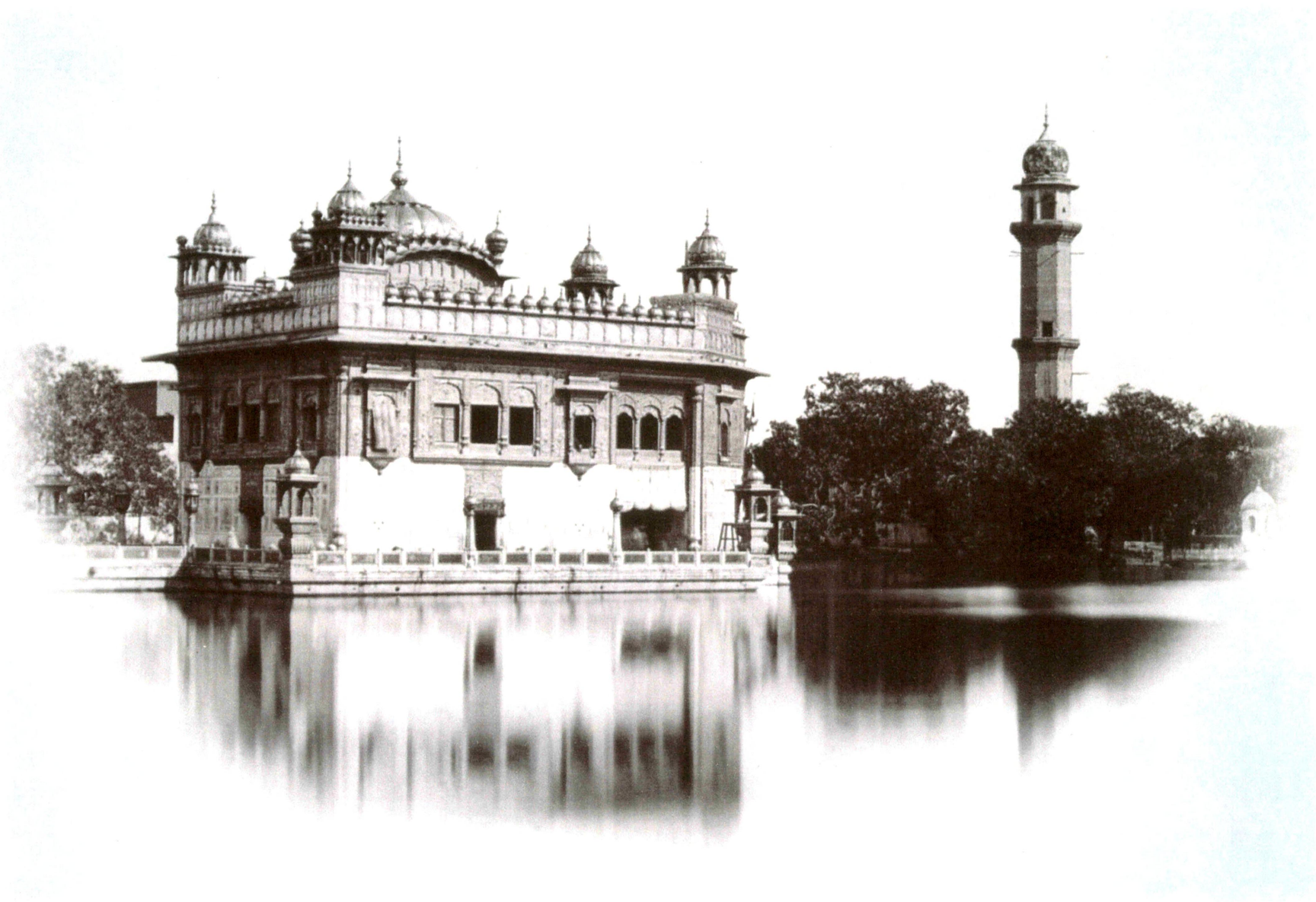
'Santan ke karaj aap khloya,
Har kam karavan aaya Ram'

'The Lord himself has come to fulfill the tasks of his devotees.
He himself is doing everything or seeing that it is done in his presence'
(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Panna 783)

(This is the first sermon that opened the discourse from the Holy Guru Granth Sahib upon its installation at the Golden Temple).



The Golden Temple, Amritsar : c.1863-64

Courtesy : V&A Museum

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Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of my revered Grandfather

Professor Gurbachan Singh Talib

one of the first Sikh scholars to translate the
Guru Granth Sahib into English.

Acknowledgements

When a student ties up with a teacher to go through the process of creating a body of work that would add to the wealth of knowledge of the world little does he or she realize the tremendous responsibility the teacher has taken on. In all actuality it is the teacher who will shine forth in the world everywhere the student and his work is talked about in the realm of academe'. It is with great humility and regard that I tender the immense debt of gratitude to my Guide and Mentor, Dr Alka Pande.

I acknowledge the great contribution of my family and friends who stood by me in all my efforts for making this research a fruitful and rewarding spiritual experience in itself. My gratitude goes in no little measure to my parents, Sardarni and Sardar Gajinder Singh and my brother, Dr Ravi Inder Singh and his wife, Harminder, who stood as pillars that held my faith and spirits aloft despite several disappointments, some despair and untold agony when some of my plans did not conform to expectations.

I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to Mr Harjinder Singh Nagi whose camera and artistic eye aesthetically captured the many rare and beautiful photographs of the Golden Temple, which form a large part of the repertoire of this study. My young assistants in this research work and most of the field data collection work were Manveena, Divleena, Harmanpreet and their parents Manjeet Kaur & Kamaljit Singh based in Amritsar, who inspired me to delve as deeply or as incisively as was possible by their presence and help.

My innermost feelings of thanksgiving stem from the deep sense of piety given to me in heritage by my Late Grandmother, Sardarni Gursharan Kaur, at whose knee virtually, I was introduced to Sikhism and what it has come to mean to me today.

I take this opportunity to thank the many interviewees and sewaks who generously contributed their views and helped me with rare insights and photographs as also all those who helped in the documentation of the thesis in its various drafts as well as helped shape it into its present form. Here I would also like to thank my friend, Dr. Rajni Lamba, without whose help this work would not have been possible.

I acknowledge most humbly the constant support and encouragement given to me by my Director, Mrs Vijay Sharma, for sparing me all the valuable time to devote to this research.

I am deeply thankful to my husband, Anandeep Singh Gill, for his absolute support in completing this work.

Simrita Singh 28.08.06

Simrita Singh

'Harmangal gao sakhi greh mandir banya'

'Rejoice my friends and sing auspicious songs, the Divine Temple,
the Harmandir, is ready'
(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Panna 921)

INTRODUCTION



A child bows down in deep obeisance on seeing the first glimpse of the Golden Temple at the entrance of the *parkarma*

CHAPTER 1

The Human Desire to Embellish

The earliest and most touching expressions of humankind's emotive response to the natural environment and the very essence of existence has been the desire to embellish. From the very beginning of Man's coming on earth, it would seem, ornamentation has been an integral part of virtually all cultures, gracing buildings, clothing, bodies, utensils, weapons, vehicles - almost every appurtenance of daily life. In fact the journey from birth to the final rites de passage have been marked by ornamentation and embellishment in some form or the other since time immemorial. Evidences are strewn across the continents of Man's quest for beautification. From the La Chappelle Enfants to the Caves of Bhimbetka, from the Afar triangle to the Inca remains the artifacts have underlined emphatically the singular focus of Man on embellishing his surroundings with the most exquisite mediums and techniques at his command.

Ancient civilizations bear witness to man's insatiable desire to decorate, embellish and ornament. The Great River Civilizations of the world that took roots on the banks of great rivers like the Nile and the Indus, give us ample scope to wonder at the munificence of Man's creativity in reaching the Sublime through his creations. This can be seen in the great works of architecture like the gigantic Pyramids and Sphinx in Egypt as well as the seals and other abundant traces of architectural magnificence found on the floor of the Indus Valley.

Ornamentation has beautified the most utilitarian and the most luxurious of objects which were decorated with colour, relief and tempering to give them a form and design not originally their own. Perhaps the ornament has sustained integrally as a consistent part of human history because it satisfied an inherent need for beauty that all people shared. With rare exceptions, whenever and wherever ornamentation could be used, it was,

and in most cases, in lavish proportion to wealth. It satiated a very basic and instinctive reaching out of man for the sublime in beauty and the most magnificent in the realm of an artist's imagination. If there has been one constant feature in the history of the arts, it has been the lack of debate about the use of ornamentation. This primeval yearning to give form and face to the Divine through human endeavour found expression in some of the ancient and modern Wonders of the World and a large number of places of worship like the Sistine Chapel in Florence. The Indian examples of this form of art date back to the Ajanta caves, the Kailash temple at Ellora, the group of temples at Khajuraho, and the exquisite Sun temple in Orissa. In later centuries the structures that came up bore a marked Islamic influence where image worship was against the tenets of the religion. Nevertheless, the embellishment of some of the distinctively Islamic edifices like the Qutub mosque, the Jama Masjid, Fatehpur Sikri, and the Taj Mahal attained heights earlier unknown.

This need to decorate and beautify is a distinctive feature of the entire South East Asian world. The Pagodas, the ornamental gardens, the fine rock cut images and even the sculptors' skill in draping the images in gossamer and silk is evidenced in many temples and places of worship. Thus, the ornament has been an integral part of life for millennia. It may have been celebrated and suppressed alternatively for varying degrees of time and place. It always found a way as even the modernists found avenues to slake the thirst for embellishment. Ornamentation has been and continues to be a very meaningful part of the lives of most people all over the world.

The fact is that both "ornament" and "beauty" have ruled the centuries bygone. But somehow the spirit to embellish has been gradually replaced by the waves of mass production and commercialization as an offshoot of globalization. From the middle of the nineteenth century, designers made it increasingly difficult to talk about the beauty of a design, or the attractiveness of its decoration, in purely aesthetic terms. Buildings were no longer beautiful, cozy, gracious, or comfortable. Instead, through the so-called principles of design, they appealed to our intellect and sense of morality: we were to

appreciate their honest expression of structure, function, material, and so on. Ideology tended to replace taste as the basis of discussion about the nature of beauty.

The "principles of design" appealed to designers because they put them on an entirely different and intellectual plane. The designers were concerned with morality and yet they gave wing to their creativity with a flexibility and freedom unparalleled in time. The sincere desire to believe in this kind of morality in art encouraged designers to ignore popular trends and shoulder the massive but still necessary burden of enchanting the public with their creations.

Without the lens of ideology distorting the common man's vision, it became easier to address critical design questions which were ignored for the past half-century. The most important of these was ensuring a humane, livable townscape with the addition of sensitively designed buildings that respected their surroundings yet celebrated them by the free use of ornamentation.

Perspective on Beauty down the Ages

Whenever there has been an attempt to understand the ways and mores of a culture and its vision of the arts there has been a marked distortion because one tends to see those cultures through the filter of ones own expectations and standards. Often this can be glimpsed in the use of language and words used to describe a work of art or a particularly magnificent rendition. Centuries ago the word 'awful' had no negativity attached to it. Rather it connoted 'awe' and wonder like in the form of address "Your Aweful Majesty". Yet it is used today to express abhorrence for something or an event like "It was awful". Words miss their meanings over time. Our differentiation between "artist" and "artisan" did not exist in antiquity, and as late as the beginning of the twentieth century the word "designer" did not have its present meaning. The most striking evidence for this gulf in understanding is that no ancient Greek of Roman equivalent exists for the word "art". The closest Greek approximation, tekne (or tekhne), has

the same meaning as a variety of modern terms, including art (as in artfulness), skill, craft, trade, the regular method of making a thing, or a work of art. Teknites (or tekhnites) can refer to an artificer, artist, craftsman, workman, or anyone who works by the rules of an art (or trade). There are similar ambiguities in the Greek word for architect: The word 'architekton' can mean chief artificer, director of works, architect (of buildings), engineer, or master smith, as in shipwright- all of which are, however, distinguished from the very lowest of manual or menial workers or labourers.[1] The appropriate Latin words have similarly broad meanings. Opifex, for example, can mean artisan, worker, mechanic, artist, producer, maker, or fabricator.[2]

Thus, just as the perceptions of beauty and its conceptualization at a particular time for a particular people have changed manifold so have the renditions and modifications thereon changed. What remains consistent, however, is the element of deep devotional piety that provoked many a manifestation of the arts, from the magnificent cathedrals of Europe, to the minutely embellished temples of the Orient, South-East Asia and the Indian sub-continent.

The relationship of physical to spiritual beauty was similar to that of the manual to the liberal arts. Plato never doubted that knowledge gathered through the senses was inferior to that gleaned by the mind. "Absolute" beauty referred to the constant and invariable truths of wisdom - of philosophy – which were impossible to apprehend "except by thinking; they are invisible to sight. "If someone tells me that the reason why a given object is beautiful is that it has a gorgeous colour or shape or any other such attribute," said Socrates,[3] in Plato's Phaedo, "I disregard all these other explanations - I find them all confusing - and I cling simply and straightforwardly and no doubt, foolishly, to the explanation that the one thing that makes the object beautiful is the presence in it or association with it of absolute beauty." While sight was the foremost sense, it was only first among the lesser faculties which, singly

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[1]Etymological derivations from the Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, 1964.Allied Publishers Pvt Ltd. 1972 edition.

[2]Ibid



Celebration of Gurpurab [Festival in honour of the Gurus] at the Golden Temple.
The strings of light add to the splendour of the edifice



The Golden glory of the Temple and its glittering reflection gilds the entire atmosphere
during the Festival of Lights - Diwali at the Harmandir Sahib

or in combination, were unable to attain the entire Truth. With the passage of time the one constant was that the role of art remained securely anchored in the service of religion and the state. "The great test of Architectural beauty is the fitness of the design to the purpose for which it is intended, and that the style of a building should so correspond with its use that the spectator may at once perceive the purpose for which it was erected."[4]

From earliest times there has been distinctive documentation of the rules and principles that govern the form, content and rendition of art in any medium. The Vishnudharmaottara Puran[5] laid down the principles of fine art expression in the visual, plastic and performing arts. Even before fine art came into being all manual or mechanical arts were decorative; even painting and sculpture were seen as an embellishment. Ornamentation was not an entity easily isolated. Along with weapons, seals, shields, homesteads, stairs, lids, windows, handles, walls, spouts, and so on, ornament or decoration, was an inseparable divisible part of buildings and objects.

Embellishment as the Worship of the Divine

The religious connection was reinforced by an assumption that natural forms were inherently utilitarian, a view sanctioned by the writings of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Scholars have attempted to apply a hierarchy of beauty to nature, stating categorically that decorative lines were beautiful only if they were adaptations of the most common, natural lines.

In India Art[6] found its home in the temple which was not only the physical core but the soul of the community. The temple was not seen as a monastery of the ascetic nor the fortress of the priest claiming semi-divine powers but the embodiment of Dharma – in effect its very home. The shapes and forms of the sculptures and the generous yet poignant use of colour on

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[3]Brent C. Brolin, 1985. Architectural Ornament – Banishment and Return. W.W Norton & Co. Ltd. London.

[4] Ibid.

[5]The Vishnudharmottara Purana is a compilation that lays down the codes of conduct for the artisan and the work of art that is being rendered. This is a text on sculpture and painting which speaks of themes and images that were frankly drawn from imagination and through an indirect way of articulation.

the temple walls only recorded the heartbeats and the spiritual aspirations of a vigourous life. According to Percy Brown[7] the "outstanding quality of the architecture of India is its spiritual content . It is evident that the fundamental purpose of the building art was to represent in concrete form the prevailing religious consciousness of the people. It is mind materialized in terms of rock, brick or stone". He continues that this characteristic is "emphasized by the treatment of its wall surfaces. The scheme of sculpture often covers the whole of the exterior of the building notable not only for the richness of its decorative effect, but for the deep significance of its subject matter. Here is not only the relation of architecture to life but transcendent life itself plastically represented. Carved in high or low relief are depicted all the glorious Gods of the age-old mythology of the country engaged in their well-known ceremonials, an unending array of imagery steeped in symbolism thus producing an 'ocean of story'[8] of absorbing interest".

This meaning and significance of the temple has persisted from age to age though its materials have changed from bamboo to wood, from wood to the living rock. From the living rock to the stone, brick and marble which were lavished upon to be built into an imposing edifice. When the worshiper sees the spire of the temple at a distance, his spirit is lifted, he heaves a sigh of relief that the journey's end has come. His heart is gladdened as he passes under the canopy of ancient trees or contemplates the crystal clear waters of the river flowing by. He may meditate on the meaning of life and truth at the edge of the tranquil lake in front or besides the edifice. The beauty of nature uplifts his soul and the sordid world is left behind, if not forgotten, as he comes nearer he is overwhelmed by the massive imposing front of the temple and then mesmerized furthermore by its lofty '*shikhara*' or spire. The shapes and figures of Gods, men, animals and foliage that adorn the temple walls are a feast for his eyes. His senses are bombarded by the absolute that merges into the vivid form and the varied richness of the creation that is spread around him. Then as he observes one figure after another and follows with

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[6] K.M Munshi, 1959. Indian Temple Sculpture. Rupa and Company Delhi.
[7] Percy Brown, 1956. Indian Architecture – Buddhist and Hindu. D.B Taraporewala Sons & Co. Pvt. Ltd. Bombay.

interest the successive meaning of the episodes depicted on the walls, his subconscious mind embraces both the history and aspirations of his race – its depths of piety and heights of exultation. He recognises his favourite Gods, turns to them in thankfulness or expectation, in effect he almost becomes one with them.

As the devotee enters the temple he is overcome by the grandeur of the inner dome. His pilgrimage culminates in the '*garba griha*' or the inner shrine which is the sancta sanctorum. Its cool, soothing interiors are so different from the race and chase of the outer worldly experience that he, for several moments, is compelled to express his excitable emotions and even to some extent calm the vital movements of his body in a veritable trance. Out of the surrounding darkness there rises before him the almost imperceptible outline of the deity as the flickering lights throw shifting shadows on it. He is overwhelmed by his own insignificance in the larger schema of things. He sees himself in the presence of the magnificent deity as one who seeks eternal fulfillment of the aspirations which have so far remained inarticulate. He feels that he is in a higher World surcharged with Divine Power when he bows before the representation manifested by the creativity and sublime art of the artist. It is almost as if the abstract of the Ultimate Power has taken on absolute dimensions in a surrealistic depiction. He feels himself in the presence of God. Then he sits or stands in front of the image. He closes his eyes repeating the incantations for invoking the deity. He sees in his heart the image of the Omnipresent in its form which the artist's rendition and imagination have shaped for him. He says his prayers, invokes the benign blessings and then goes on. This is a process of devotion for every generation and man, as far as he understands, passes them on to the next. This passage is also a task accomplished by the artist. When he opens his eyes to the image in his heart he is able to give body and form to the flaming colours and shapes he has envisioned. This is the purpose of the sculptured image. It stimulates the worshippers' pursuit of the Divine, fires his imagination with an unfathomable zeal, gives his aspirations a shape. By this single-minded

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[8] '*Kathasagar*' in the Indian terminology.

devotion is the artist blessed with a divine touch so much so that the deity in a living inspiring presence is brought virtually to life. According to the Mana-sara Shilpashastra[9] the features of the image are determined by the relation between the worshipper and the object of his worship, they are embellished with the devotional zeal of the worshipper and given true life and form lovingly by the devotees.

The institution of pilgrimage to holy places, '*tirth yatra*' is an ancient and continuing religious tradition. Religion assumes an important role in generating a circulation mechanism in which all the social strata participate. Religion provides the basis of pilgrimage by offering the reward of purification of the soul and the attainment of objectives related to the problems of mundane existence. Every religion has its sacred foci to which men of faith periodically converge. From the most ancient civilizations to the present times sacred centers have exerted a powerful pull on the believers. The Sumerians of antiquity who reverently ascended the steps of the ziggurat to reach the gate of heaven have their modern counterpart in the devout Jews and Christians who visit the Holy Land and in the multitudes of Muslims from diverse parts of the world who undertake the Haj to Mecca. Millions of pilgrims since time immemorial have similarly been attracted to their numerous holy cities in India.

Pilgrimage is thus a pan-human phenomena albeit its importance is reduced in the industrial commercial nations of the western world. The concept of pilgrimage exists in all major religions, although not unexpectedly its meaning varies widely within the canonical structure of each religion as it may have an absolute significance or merely a procedural value. This can be seen more clearly in the fact that anybody who goes to the shrine of *'Mata Sheran Wali'* [in Jammu] must also visit the temple of *Bhairon* [located above the Bhavan or temple] but it is not necessary to go through the '*Garabh Joon*' which falls half way to the *Bhavan* at the site called *Adhkawari.*

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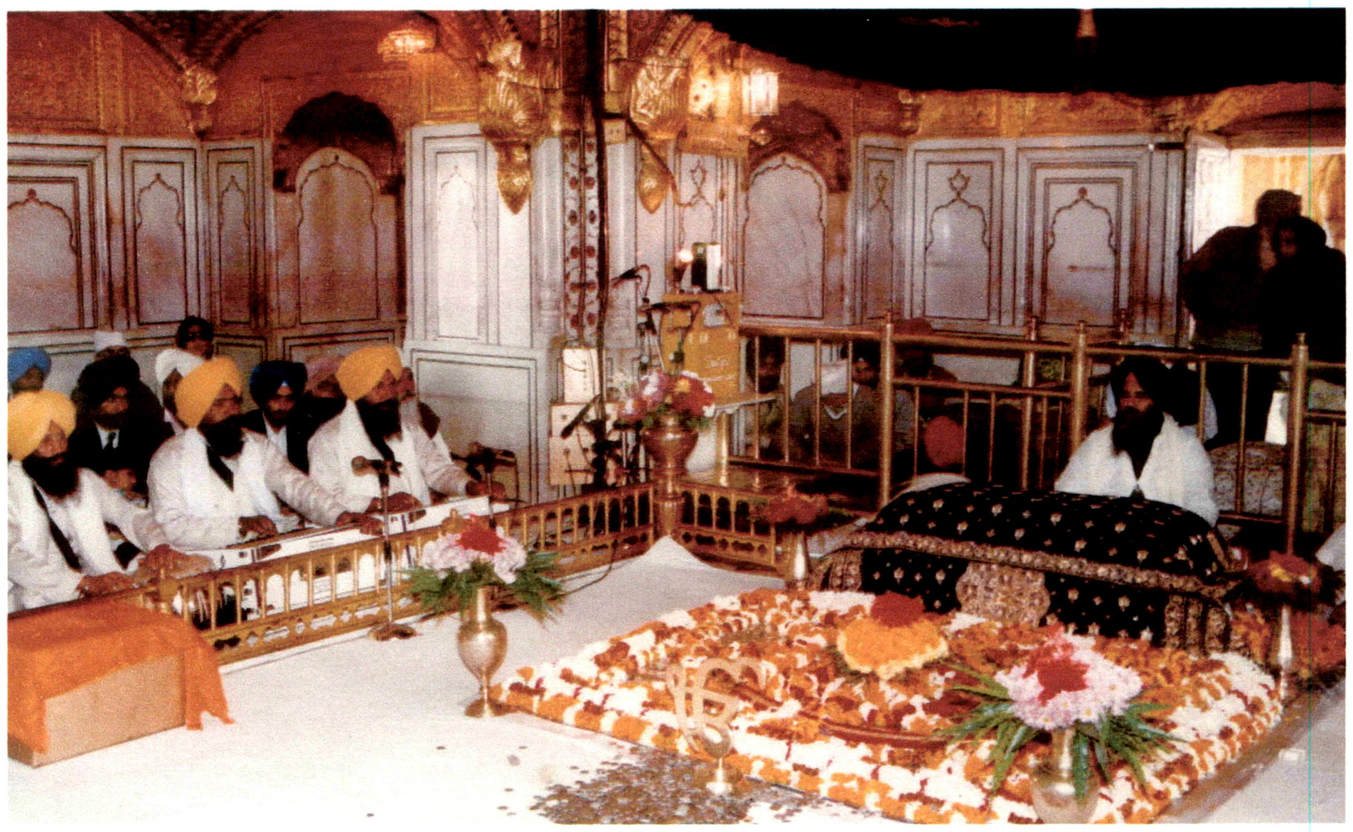
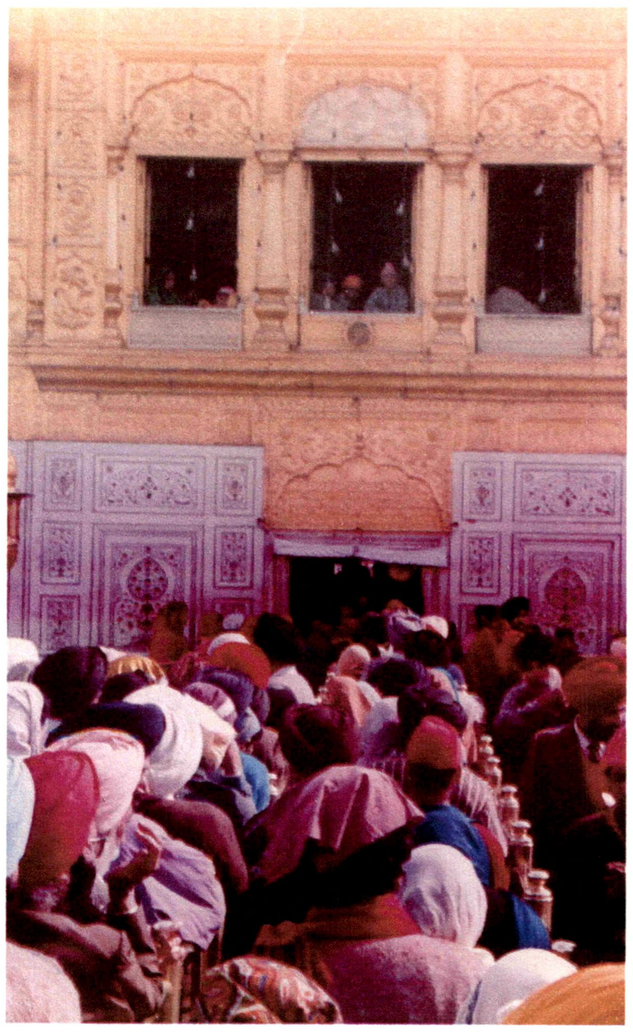
[9] Surinder Mohan Bhardawaj, 1973. Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India. Thomson Press Ltd. Delhi.



Shabad kirtan and *path* reverberates inside and outside the precincts of the Golden Temple Complex bringing alive the meditative interiors and reflective exteriors alive with the words of the *Gurus* or the *Gurbani*



Pilgrims reflect upon the beauty of the exquisite surface decoration of the external walls of the *Harmandir Sahib* as they wait their turn to enter and pay homage

The significance of the Hindu pilgrimage is encapsulated in the expression '*tirth yatra*' which literally means undertaking a Holy journey. The Skanda Puran,[10] a religious text, says that truth, forgiveness, control of senses, kindness to all living beings and simplicity are '*tirth(s)*'. Thus, the *tirth yatra* not only means the physical act of undertaking a journey to the holy places but implies the imposition of mental and moral discipline. In fact without the latter, any pilgrimage would have little significance.

Right from ancient times the concept of pilgrimage has been to undertake journeys [often perilous and involving much penance on the part of the devotee] to sacred places for purification and redemption from sin. This does not imply that the pilgrimage of today has the same ritualistic content as that of the Vedic period but a conceptual similarity still remains.

The Sikh Gurus recognized this need for having a place of pilgrimage. The choosing of the site, the devotion with which the 'Doorway to God' or the *Gurdwara* was constructed, its gilding through the generous donations and piety of steadfast Sikhs like Maharaja Ranjit Singh, its surface decorations and several revivals all went into the making of the Golden Temple into the holiest place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs all over the world.

The compilation of the Guru Granth and its installation within the Harmandir altered the nature and function of the Sikh shrine. Since the time of Nanak, communities of Sikhs had built themselves halls of congregation, where they could meet to recite the *bani*, sing hymns, and listen to discourses. The *sangat* or the congregation is a crucial aspect of Sikhism, and there is a well-articulated belief that the congregation itself is as a Guru: the *Guru Panth*. The congregational halls were likely to have been modest buildings and were called *dharamsala*, "place of *dharma* or righteousness", a common word used to designate a place of shelter, usually associated with a religious institution. Guru Arjan Dev called his special shrine, the Harmandir,

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[10]The Purans were ancient Hindu scriptures that have been considered the delineations ofthe principles of living. There are 18 Purans of which the most quoted are the Skanda Puran, the Agni Puran, the Bhavishya Puran, the Matsya Puran, the Garuda Puran, the Brahmand Puran, the Kurma Puran, and the Brahmavaivari Puran. The Skanda Puran is the largest of the Purans, it has seven parts and contains 88,000 stanzas. It derives its name from Karttikeya, the son of Lord Shiva.

'the temple of Hari the Lord'. And it was his son, Guru Hargobind, who coined the special term which this shrine and other Sikh sites of worship and congregation came to be given- 'Gurudwara' -the doorway to the Guru. This was one more step in the construction of a distinctive identity, demarcating Sikhs from the populace around them.

Evolution of the Temple

The earliest known place of worship was a mound of earth around which the '*pradakshina*' or circumambulation was done. It is said that this mound covered the ashes or the mortal remains of some bygone seer, saint or wise one. This was the beginning of the temple from which evolved the simplest form called the '*stupa*' or funeral mound.[11] The earliest versions of these structures were made of unburnt bricks having the shape of a domical mound or '*annda*' [egg]. A small space enclosed the receptacle containing a relic of the Buddha. Its summit was surmounted by a wooden or polished stone parasol or '*chchatra yashti'* as a mark of respect and devotion.

The 300 years rule of the Sungas and the Andhras saw considerable change in the construction and shaping of the temple form. There were four distinctive phases: [1] stone carving;[2] symbolism; [3] stone construction and [4] the halls or the '*Chaitya*' and the monastery or the '*Vihara*'.

During the earlier times the shrines connected with the Brahmanical faith were the epitomes of simplicity and natural surroundings. According to Percy Brown, "... an ancient commentary, the Satapatha Brahmana, incidentally describing one of these before the Christian era, states that it comprised two sheds 'formed of posts and beams covered with reeds and mats' thus seeming to imply that a very primitive shelter was all that custom ordained in the ceremonial usage of this belief. That such was the practice is shown by the bas-reliefs of Bharut and Sanchi, of the 2nd and 1st century B.C., the fire altars and the 'naga' tabernacles of non-Buddhists being either entirely uncovered or merely protected by temporary erections, from which it may be

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[11] Stupa was originally a funeral mound or tumulus, erected by the Buddhists either to enshrine a relic or to commemorate some sacred site. Later it came to be recognised as a symbol of Buddha.

inferred that the service and ritual were ordinarily performed in the open air. What may be the oldest known actual remains of a Brahmanical stone structure are the foundations of the Vishnu shrine at Besnagar [Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh] ..."[12]

Percy explores this phenomenon and gives the explanation that, "The reason for the almost complete absence of any stable religious edifice, is due to the particular character of the belief up to this period. Consisting mainly of propitiation by means of offerings on an altar of certain abstract powers representing natural forces and phenomena whose presence was everywhere, under such conditions any kind of earthly abode would have been meaningless. In the course of time, however, there grew up a desire for something more positive than spiritual essences, a need for some material interpretation of the religious ideal. And so by degrees there developed a demand for an embodiment of these impersonal powers, which, early in the Christian era crystallized and before the fourth century A.D the object of worship began to assume a visible form, usually a graven image."

He thus encapsulates the evolution of the temple as it is today - "The anthropomorphic conception of the deity naturally called for some habitation, and so a structural shrine came into being. The various stages through which the embryo Hindu temple passed are common to the growth of edifices, first a leafy bower, then a reed hut, and afterwards a cella of wood and brick. Eventually in the Gupta period it appears as a sanctum of stone, called the *Garba Griha* literally 'womb house', a small chamber, square in plan, its interior walls perfectly plain and without any other opening except the doorway, the darkness inside providing the requisite atmosphere of solemn mystery. Within was placed the effigy of the God. Contrasting with the bare walls of the interior, the outer side of the doorway was often richly carved and in front of this was usually a shallow porch". [13]

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[12] Percy Brown, 1956. Indian Architecture – Buddhist and Hindu. D.B Taraporewala Sons & Co. Pvt Ltd. Bombay.
[13] Ibid.

The concept of *Pradakshina* or *Parkarma* as it is known in the context of the Golden Temple developed over the years where this temple complex came to serve the purpose of worship, prayer, circumambulation, shelter, congregational preaching and assemblage etc. all under one common roof.

According to the deliberations of Niharranjan Ray on the 'Social Base and Social Character' of the human endeavour in the use of art for edification of religion, "... a temple or a temple complex, functionally speaking, was the main, indeed the most important centre of local social life. It served as the main marketing centre as well as the public meeting place of the community which on special occasions included men and women from far and near. It served as a bank and treasure vault for whatever valuables a community happened to possess and when there were civil strifes, political upheavals and military inroads, it was the securest fort where the community used to seek its shelter. Secondly, it was the standing public exhibition ground of actuality and imagination in terms of the visual languages of sculpture and painting. It was also the main centre for all the contemporary performing arts like those of music and dancing, drama and dialogue in verse. It was the centre for giving readings and holding discussions and disputations. A temple or temple complex was indeed the habitat of all the contemporary muses and hence the audio-visual communication and education centre of the community."[14]

Evolution of the Surface Decorations

In the genesis of Indian art[15] it can be seen that the significance of the six limbs is paramount: [1] *Roop Bheda* or the differentiation in form ; [2] *Pramanani* or the canons of measurement (balance, proportion, harmony, cadence, rhythm etc.); [3] *Bhava* or the quality of life as articulated through feelings; [4] *Lavanya* or grace; [5] *Sadarashiyam* or verisimilitude; [6] *Varnika Bhangam* or the tonality of colour. Of these at least four limbs [1,2,5,6] have

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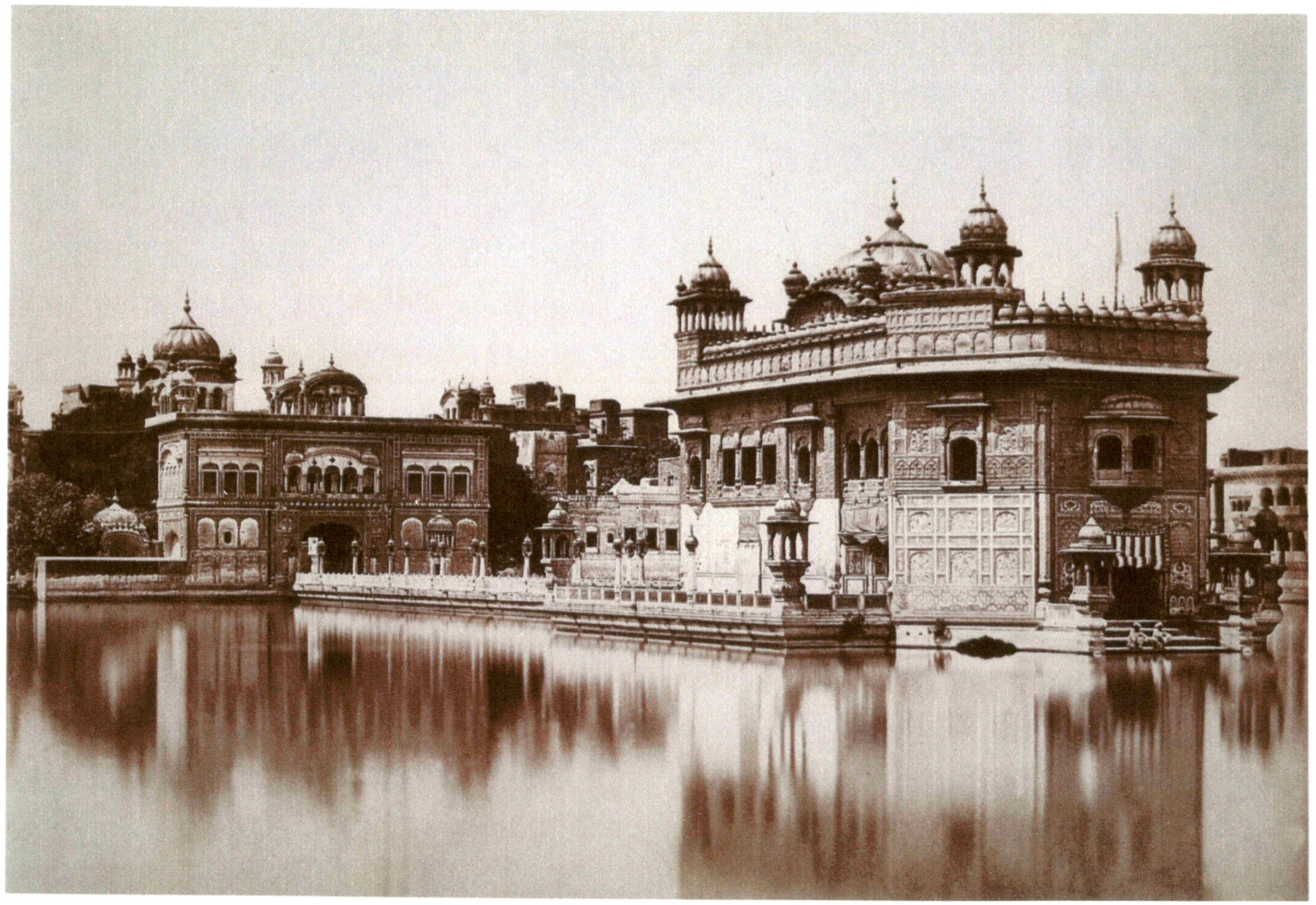
[14] Niharranjan Ray, 1974. An Approach to Indian Art. Punjab University Publication Bureau, Chandigarh.

[15] Ibid. Yashodhara of Gujarat wrote a 'Jayamangala Tika' enumerating the six limbs or parts in the form of a shaloka evidently for the benefit of his contemporaries who may have forgotten a fairly old tradition.



The Golden Temple, Amritsar : c.1858-60

Courtesy : V&A Museum

serious implications for the surface rendering of any work of art. The remaining two limbs pertain to the qualities or properties which are added presumably by the artist and are hence subjective. According to Niharranjan Ray[16] the "essence of the product of art is not so much in its external measurable qualities as in its feeling and grace which are imparted to it by the artist's creative imagination". In the context of the surface decorations of the Golden Temple it is seen that the stirrings of the soul of the artisan are rendered onto his work of art, be it the delicate, lacy creepers in *gach* and *kach* or the intricate designs of posies and creatures of the wild in the pietra dura or frescoes or the resplendant gold work of the *chattris* and the dome as embodied in the Golden Temple. The innermost feelings or *bhava* of the artist are captured onto the surface decorations.

Delving into the finer aspects of creativity vis-à-vis the renditions of the artist, Niharranjan Ray[17] opines, "Iconographic prescriptions, esoteric symbology and mystical ideas have all their place, no doubt, but only up to a point, upto a limit of their being helpful in the realization in form of a vision or experience. Early and medieval traditional art including Rajasthani painting, is, generally speaking, religious, which does not mean anything more than that the art was pressed into the service of religion and religious cults, and it is perfectly understandable that cult prescriptions, since the patronage came mostly from the cults themselves, would condition art forms to an extent. But, it may be remembered at the same time that the form itself, in each case, is realised by the hand of the artist who is usually an ordinary member of the society of his times, belonging usually to a lower socio-economic order, and not a priest or a *sadhaka* himself with any mystical or esoteric experience. For all that we know he happens to be one who works within the limits of a flowing art tradition depending on his inheritance of the tradition, his unceasing perception, observation and integration of the life of ideas and action and of objects around him. This he does in the light of his personal experience, his knowledge and experience of the tools and materials he employs for his work,

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[16] Ibid

[17] ibid.

and last, but not the least, the skill of his eye and hand and of the manner and method in which he uses his tools.

The method and process of the concretization in visual form, of an idea of experience, howsoever mystical, subtle or esoteric, presupposes a perceptual understanding of the vision and experience which, in the technical language of hieratic texts, is called *dhyana* or contemplation or meditation. It is not necessary to assume that this contemplation or meditation has any mystic or esoteric significance or is in any way in conflict with actual observation, for minute, unceasing and engrossed observation with the aid of the senses and the mind, is contemplation itself, a deep taking in of and sinking into the object of contemplation".

Thus devotion that emerges as a work of art is the manifestation which is apparent in the art, architecture, surface decorations and overall appeal of the aesthetic appearance of the Golden Temple to the expert in the arts and the untrained eye alike.

History of Sikh Architecture

The study of art and architecture of the Golden Temple has remained a subject of little concern for art historians and critics and even scholars of Indian temple architecture have by-passed it and references, whenever made, were mere courtesies. According to the official list of the buildings of interest published by the Punjab government in 1875, the design of the temple as reconstructed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh was borrowed from the shrine of Saint Miya Mir near Lahore. Louis Rousselet, writing in 1882, regarded it as a "handsome style of architecture'. Major Cole described it as an adaptation of Mohammedan styles flavored with a good deal of Hindu tradition. Percy Brown considered it to be a product of the synthesis of Hindu and Muslim influences combined with the elaboration that imparted it an appearance of its own[18]. In the opinion of Hermann Goetz,"Kangra transformation of Oudh architecture was taken over by the Sikhs and evolved into that wonderful

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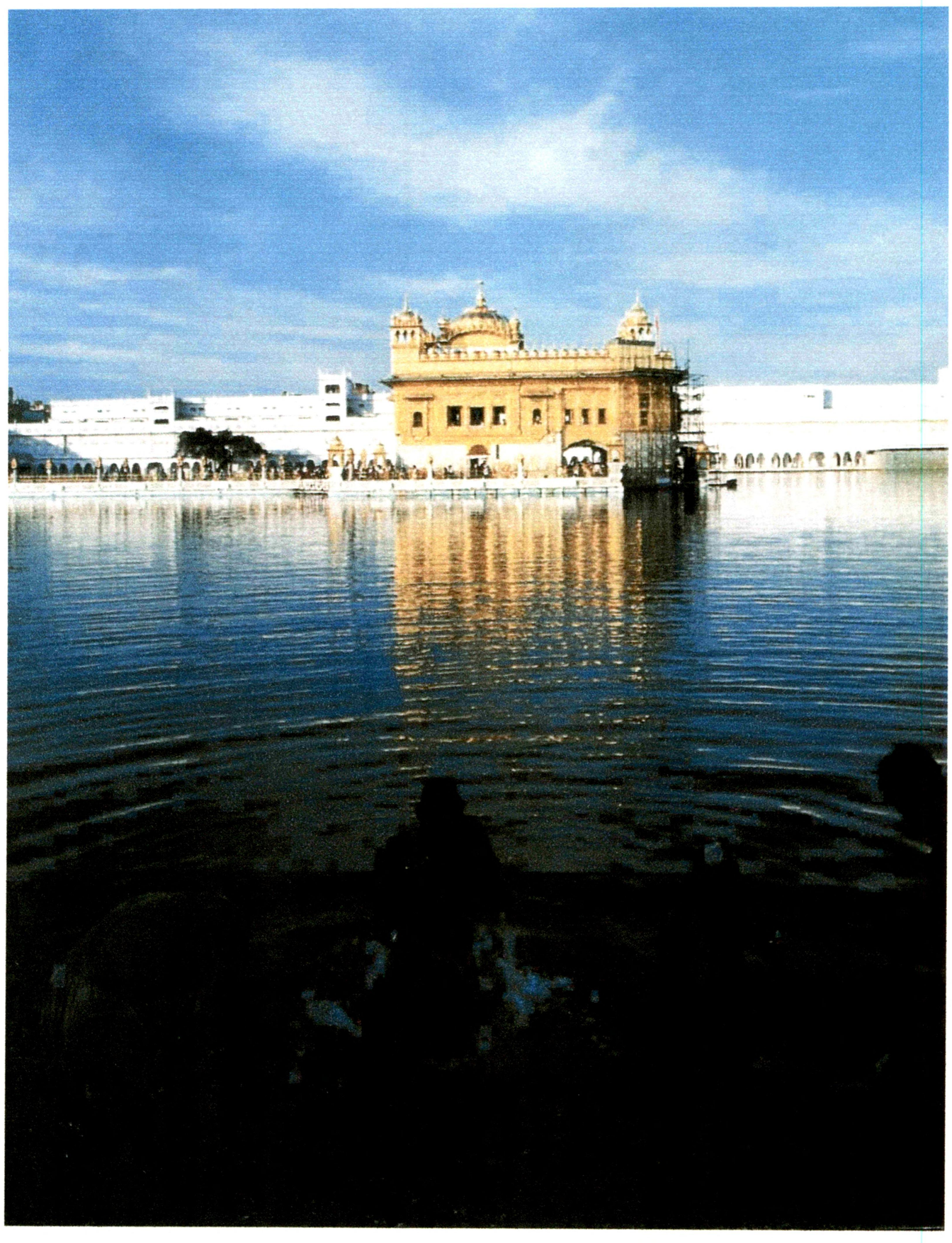
[18] Percy Brown, 1956. Indian Architecture, Buddhist and Hindu. D.B. Taraporewala Sons and Company. Pvt.Ltd.Bombay.



The clear blue of the sky seems reflected in the holy waters of
the Pool of Nectar or the Amrit Sarovar as a devotee takes a dip in the sacred waters

though occasionally gaudy Indian rococo art often seen in the Gurdwaras of Punjab."[19]

Gurmeet Rai and Kavita Singh explored the problem of documentation of the Sikh architecture from various approaches which they reported was largely brickwork "...Made from local earth and low-fired in wood-burning kilns, the bricks of pre-19th century Panjab had to be small and thin to be fully baked. The mortar most often used to bind them was mud; lime mortar, which had to be imported from Rajasthan, was a luxury item which was used sometimes to point mud-mortared joints. Given a higher budget, mud-mortar structures were plastered with lime and decorated with paintings, but lime was used throughout as a mortar only in the most deluxe projects. For the most part the building projects of the Gurus were modest ones, made through the collective efforts and donations of their followers."[20]

For a historical study of an institution of great significance like the Harmandir, a researcher has to face a number of problems, but the foremost of them is the paucity of first rate evidence on which to base his or her conclusions. There are few writers who have left behind them an eye-witness account of the events relating to the Golden Temple although there is a plethora of historicity recorded in obscure and hard to trace oral and even scarcer written traditions.

'The few Persian sources extant on the contemporary and the near-contemporary history of the Punjab, contain casual references only, and even these are biased, so that they fall short of all expectations. Therefore, the Sikh chronicles, emerge as our main source of information for reconstructing the history of the Temple. The '*Janam Sakhi*'[21] and '*Mahima*'[22] traditions were the earliest to develop. Most of these chronicles appeared during the period of Sikh rule. These earlier traditions were followed by the introduction of the '*Gur Bilas*' tradition with additional details. This literary tradition developed during

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[19]Kanwarjit Kang, 1977. 'Art and Architecture of the Golden Temple'. Marg Vol XXX, Number 3.
[20] Gurmeet Rai and Kavita Singh, 2003. 'Brick by Sacred Brick: Architectural Projects of Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind' Marg, Volume 54, Number 4 June 2003, Marg Publications. Mumbai
[21] Accounts of the lives of the Gurus.
[22] Eulogies in praise of the sacrifices, miracles and preachings of the Gurus.

the late eighteenth century. All these early chronicles were incorporated into the *Panth Prakash* tradition, with a semi-historical approach to Sikh literature, which developed during the period of the advent of British rule in Punjab.'[23]

The Harmandir

When Guru Arjan accomplished the excavation of the water tanks he was completing his father's unfinished tasks, but building a shrine at the centre of the tank was an inspired idea of his own. Contemporary records tell us that the temple was designed by Guru Arjan himself. It was constructed during 1588-1604; the scale and expense of the project required contributions from the whole Sikh community, and the temple project became a rallying point for all Sikhs.

The structure designed by Guru Arjan was replete with symbolic meanings. It consisted of a square building, placed in the centre of the tank, and approached by a causeway. There were four doors to the shrine, one on each face of the building, to welcome pilgrims from all directions, all castes and all creeds. Rather than being raised on a high plinth the shrine took advantage of the natural depression of the water body and was deliberately built on a lower level than even the ambulatory path at the edge of the tank. The low plinth was chosen to symbolize the humility of true Sikhs. We cannot be certain of the details of the earlier structure, but it could possibly have been double-storeyed, and was likely to have been topped with a dome. Very few pictorial representations remain to inform us of the construction and architectural details of the earlier buildings.

Traditional accounts of the building of the Harmandir speak of the arrangements made for brick kilns, and the appointment of a worthy mason. We may assume that the original shrine was of brick, the design and construction of which had been enhanced no doubt by decorative brickwork.

The glittering marble and gold edifice visible today is a 19th – century structure built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and may have very little in common

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[23]Gurmeet Rai and Kavita Singh, 2003. Brick by Sacred Brick: Architectural Projects of Guru Arjan

with the original structure that was built by Guru Arjan Dev. The Harmandir was attacked repeatedly by Afghan invaders in the 18th century. In 1762, Ahmed Shah Abdali in his vehemence blew it up with gunpowder and had the pool filled up with rubble. Subsequently, the twelve Sikh *misls* rebuilt the temple in 1765, and Maharaja Ranjit Singh completely renovated and redecorated the structure between 1802 and 1839. After such extensive damage and reconstruction, it is difficult to imagine and surmise with any great accuracy the nature, construction and design of the original construction by the Guru. Sources, however, do tell us how the building was resurrected after every attack giving an appropriate idea of the solidarity of the Sikhs and the power and glory of the Sikh kingdom in those days.

The Harmandir was completed in the same year that the Adi Granth was compiled. This happy coincidence was further heightened when the Granth was formally installed in the centre of the hall of the Harmandir and enshrined there for posterity. It was placed on a *manji* (cot) on a high pedestal, under the *channani,* a canopy, and was attended by *chowr sahib* or the *fly* whisk bearers. These are all symbols of royalty. Great deference is shown to the Holy book as it is the embodiment of the teachings of the Gurus. According to Guru Arjan Dev "the book is where the Lord dwells". Guru Arjan bowed to the Granth and took his own seat at a level lower than that of the Holy book. It is thus clear that even before the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, declared the Granth as the perpetual Guru of the Sikhs, the Holy book was treated with the same deference, rituals, and *maryada* (ritualized honour) that is offered to a Guru. The physical body of the book was enshrined in the Harmandir; therefore whether the living Guru was present or not, the teachings of the lineage of Gurus were available through the book, and read out to the *sangat* or congregation gathered there. The daily round of ceremonial practices that is followed today in the Harmandir and in countless Sikh Gurudwaras was in large measure established by Guru Arjan Dev at the Harmandir as soon as the original manuscript of the Adi Granth was ready.

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and Guru Hargobind. Marg, Volume 54, Number 4 June 2003, Marg Publications.

The object of Guru Arjan Dev in planning the structure of the Harmandir in the middle of *Amrit Sarovar* was to combine both, the spiritual and the temporal constructs of the Sikh philosophy of life which he chose to call the *Nirgun* and the *Sargun*. All leaders of the Sikh community and devotees of the Guru welcomed the new plan.

Facing the Harmandir shrine, Guru Hargobind erected a structure which would serve as the centre of the temporal authority of the Sikhs. This was the Akal Takht or the Eternal Throne. It was built in the year of his accession, and is said to have been a simple platform, 3.5 metres high. The Guru sat and held court, receiving petitions and administering justice, surrounded by insignia of royalty like the parasol and the flywhisk. Today's Akal Takht does not convey the design of Guru Hargobind's simple Takht or plinth. Recent restoration and renovation work has uncovered a layer of lime plaster, with painted decoration, that may have been part of the original.

Every religion has gained a collection of signs and symbols, ideology, aspirations, ritualistic practices, myths and legends and a pantheon of deities be they realistically represented or projected in the abstract. There are a number of attendant congregations and priestly, monastic and serving orders. Any religious edifice has to encapsulate within its shape, form, organisation of space and its minutest decorative details and in its general layout the significance of its ceremonial rituals, and the demand upon it by its followers as the religion evolves and comes into its own. On a similar plane the surface decorations in the Harmandir are the repository of the ideals and ideology of the Sikh faith.

Throughout its past history, the Harmandir has been a subject of absorbing interest for most writers. Their extreme devotion to the Sikh faith urged them to create a halo around this nerve centre of the community, their writings dwell much on the spiritual blessings that accrue from a dip into the holy Tank and from paying obeisance at the Temple.

These authors had to rely on oral traditions. The most trustworthy sources are, of course, the Sikh Gurus' own *bani* preserved in the Guru

Granth Sahib and their *hukumnamas* which were generally epistles or letters issued by the Sikh Gurus to *sangats* in different parts of the country. Another source are the *Varaan* or stories of valour composed by Bhai Gurdas. Then there are also the word of mouth records of families and the exploits of great legends kept by bards or mistrels colloquially called *bhands* or *bhatt vahis*. Veritable genealogists these *bhands* provide useful details to fill in the gaps not obtained historically. These records are also useful sources for reconstructing the history of the Golden Temple.

In 1973 the Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, planned to bring out a treatise on the Golden Temple to commemorate the quarter centenary of the founding of '*Sri Amritsar*' which was to take place in the year 1977. The project took four years to fructify. To accomplish this some significant evidence was cited from contemporary Persian sources and much useful information was collected from Urdu sources to accumulate details on the development and management of the Temple. This work of Madanjit Kaur[24] rediscovered many facts related to the foundation, development and history of the Golden Temple, which had not been known earlier. The study throws a new light on many of the aspects, ceremonial practices, art and architecture, ancillary shrines and bungas and the contribution of the Golden Temple to the promotion of literature and learning which made up an important part of the history of the Golden Temple. An interesting feature was the many appendices dealing with land records, inscriptions, documents, and lists of important service personnel of the Temple. Its glossary of words and terms from Persian, Sanskrit and Punjabi languages proved useful source material for the present study. Needless to say all this information pertained only to the period upto 1977. A number of other published records were used to look at the post 1977 features of historicity of the Golden Temple.

"With the construction of the Harmandir, Amritsar attained the status of *Ath Sath Tirth*".[25] With the installation of the Adi Granth, which was the

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[24] Madanjit Kaur, 1983. Golden Temple: Past & Present Guru Nanak Dev University , Amritsar.
[25] Madanjit Kaur, 1977. 'Sri Hari Mandir Sahib: Evolution of the Shrine' in Marg. Vol XXX,

compilation of the genuine *bani* of the first four Sikh Gurus, to which Guru Arjan Dev added his own compositions, as well as selections from the writings of Hindu *bhaktas*, and Muslim saints, the Golden Temple attained the status of a sanctified place of worship and pilgrimage. "The *Granth* was completed and was formally installed in the Hari Mandir on *Bhadon sudi Ikam Samvat* 1661 *BK* (August, 1604). Baba Buddha was appointed the first *granthi* of the temple. From that very day regular worship, *kirtan* and other religious services started at the shrine. Soon after its foundation, Amritsar became the centre of Guru Ram Das's missionary activities and the headquarters of the Sikh faith."[26]

The temple has a spirit, a soul and a body like man and like the universe. The architect of the temple of God identifies himself with the building and what it represents; thus each phase of the architectural task is equally a phase of an individual and as a collective, an entire community's spiritual realization. The artist tends to confer upon the work at hand some of his own vital force. In the case of the Golden Temple the fourth and fifth Gurus, Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan Dev had performed *'Kaar Seva'* or the Divine Service and further sanctified the holy place with their piety and deep love of mankind. Many of the workers who gave their labour and love to the construction of this holy edifice participated in the transformation of their devotion and sacrifice into the sacramental virtuosity that would transcend centuries to epitomize Sikhism.

Sewa or selfless service and *Simran* or meditation, occupy a prominent place as these are the pillars of the Sikh faith. *Seva* is an essential complement to *'nam'* [chanting the Holy Name] and *'simran'*. All these three virtues have had pride of place in enshrining the devotion of devotees to the Holiest of holies of the Sikhs in the past four centuries. The devotion and dedication the Guru's Sikh has towards this holy place is visible in the fine renderings of the surface decorations all over the inner sancto sanctorum and the attention to detail paid to the delicate marble inlay work around it. It

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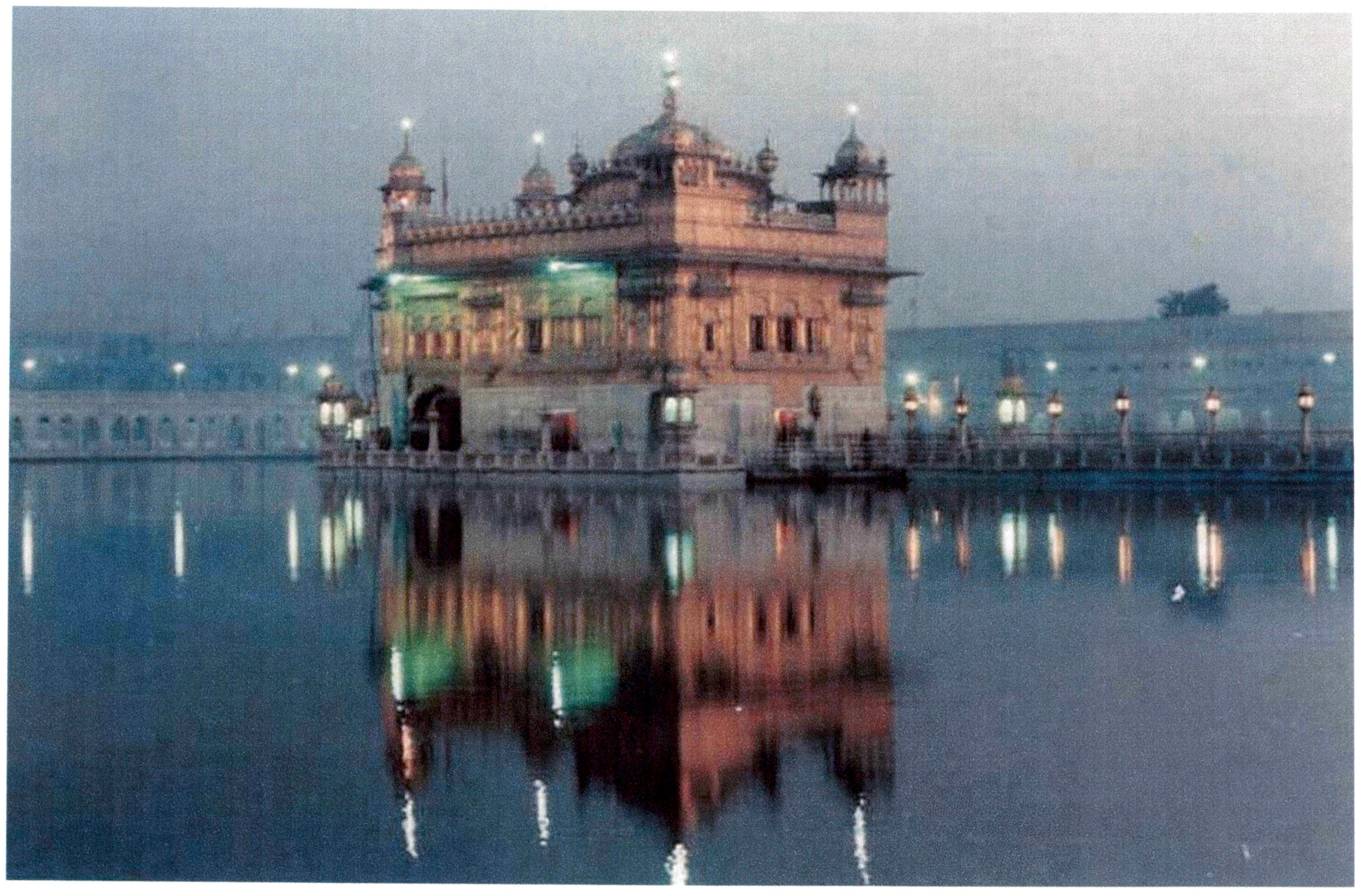
Number 3, June 1977, Marg Publication. Bombay.

[26] Ibid.



The Golden Temple presents a new face with the changing hours of the day, the changing seasons and are somehow linked with the agelessness of humanity, human endeavour and human devotion

seems that this magnificent portrayal of the individual's piety and love for the Lord has been possible only as a result of the '*sewadars*' inner devotion. It is not mere art but the exultation of prayer and the soul's constant reach for the Divine through his labour and his inner strength. This is also the reason why the flawless and pristine beauty of the Golden Temple's decorative work is unmatched probably in the entire world. This fact is all the more wonderful because the *sewadars*, who gave freely and lovingly of their labour, were from all walks of life.

The present study has attempted to look into the historical and theological roots of the works of art rendered on the surfaces of the Golden Temple Complex. The study makes an attempt to gradually piece together the reality of creation of the Golden Temple Complex, the architecture, those who worked on it and the sublime manifestation of their creativity and devotion as embodied in the resplendent surface embellishments. The chapterisation is a logical assemblage of the facts and figures that went into the creation of the edifice as it stands today. There are eight chapters that follow the introduction and review of literature attempted above. The second chapter looks into the origin of The Golden Temple……its founders, the geographical boundaries that bound the limits of the Sikh kingdoms and their sovereignty as well as the royal patronage enjoyed by the Temple Complex from the earliest times. The third chapter exclusively and separately deals with the identification and listing of the various forms and types of the surface decorations. The fourth chapter documents the evolution and development of the surface decorations, the patrons and supervisors who gave so much of themselves to make the surface decorations what they are as well as reflects upon the atelier of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The fifth chapter enlists the various mediums and techniques of the surface decorations. The chapter that follows deals with the methods and materials utilised in the creation and manifestation of these surface decorations. The seventh chapter contains a study of the artists, artisans, craftsmen, embellishers and decorators keeping in view the link with the past. It dwells upon the development and innovation of technique, material and

equipment and concludes with a comparative analysis of the various forms and influences over space and time. The eighth chapter enumerates the other manifestations of artistic inspiration in textiles, carpets, weapons, jewelry, miniature painting traditions, calligraphy and manuscripts which were imbibed in the many variants of the surface decorations which came to be termed as Sikh Art. The last chapter treats the Golden temple as an established role model for other Sikh shrines especially with regard to the architectural art and surface decorations and the subsequent decoration of Sikh shrines or gurdwaras in India and abroad.

'Dithae sabhe thav nahin tudh jaeha'

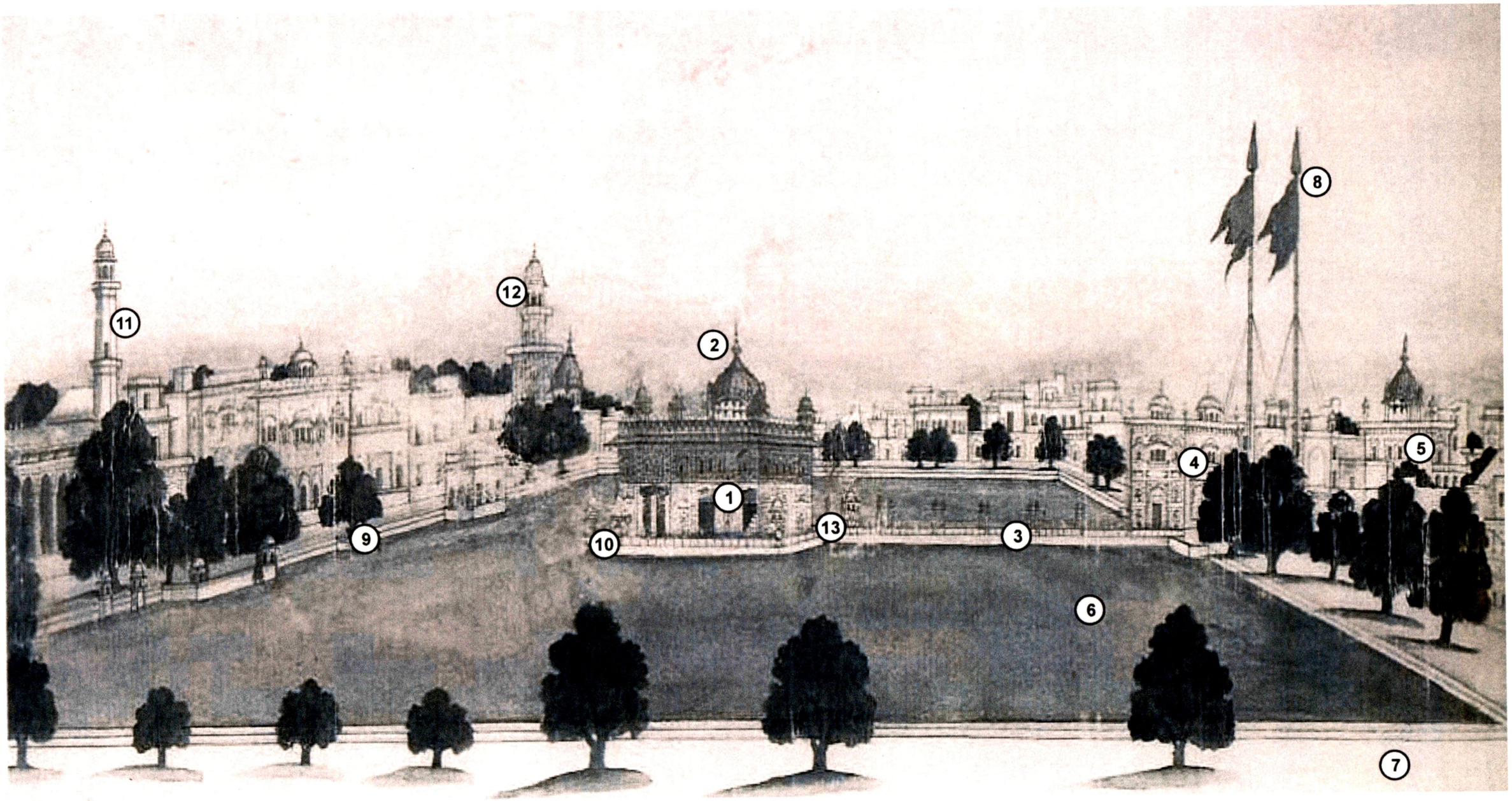
'Of all the places that I have seen there is none like you'
(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Panna 1362)

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GOLDEN TEMPLE

The Founders

The Geographical Boundaries

Royal Patronage



A Site Map of The Golden Temple

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

1. Inner Sanctum
2. Lotus Dome
3. Bridge
4. Darshani Deorhi
5. Akal Takht
6. Amrit Sarovar
7. Parkarma
8. Nishan Sahib
9. Dukh Bhanjani Beri
10. Har Ki Pauri
11. Bunga
12. Baba Atal
13. Inner Parkarma

CHAPTER 2

This chapter traces the genesis of the concept and earliest construction of the Golden Temple Complex, as we know it today. From the very framing of the idea to its overseeing during construction, some of the Gurus, the revered fountain head of Sikh teaching, made a sizeable contribution.

'The *Harmandir*', or the abode of God, was established between the years 1581 and 1606 A.D. By uttering the expression on the title page of this chapter he meant that the Harmandir is peerless as no other place can be matched with its splendid grandeur. It was by him only that the original and the basic concept of a sanctum surrounded by a pool was visualized and finally executed. The four doorways of 'The *Harmandir*', facing four different directions, symbolize the secular thinking of Guru Arjun Dev. They are suggestive of the religious tolerance of the Guru and reflective of the equal treatment of all castes and creeds at par. This secular tradition is reflected in the various influences and inspirations drawn from different sects and cultures and embodied in the surface embellishments of the Golden Temple. Even the artisans were drawn from different sects, strata, cultures and walks of life.

The history of the Golden Temple is, in a way, the encapsulated history of the Sikhs. Throughout the 500 odd years of Sikh history, no place not even the birthplace of the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, can claim as intimate, effective and continuing a role in Sikh history as the Golden Temple Complex. At any particular point of its history, the Tank-temple complex assumed the position of a symbol representing the life and soul of the entire Sikh community.

The enemies of the Sikhs as a people considered that the demolishing and defiling of the holy complex was an absolute indicator of the intent to bring about the complete liquidation of the Sikhs. But phoenix-like, the holy edifice

reappeared, reaffirming all the more, the tenacity of the Sikh faith and devoutness of its followers. Besides, serving as a symbol of their identity, the holy complex has served, on different occasions, as an arbiter of community disputes, as a rallying point, as a source of inspiration, as a refuge and as a healer for the entire world of Sikhism and to a greater extent the entire population of Punjab. The holy complex moves through Sikh history as a living and palpable presence.

Harmandir, the Golden Temple, is regarded by the Sikhs all over the world as their holiest shrine and foremost pilgrimage spot. It rests on a platform in the middle of a sacred reflecting pool; with its four doors welcoming people of all four castes, this first Sikh shrine is the paradigm for Sikh shrines, or *Gurdwaras* [the word means literally a door, *dwara* to ultimate enlightenment, i.e. the *Guru*]. The domes and minarets of the buildings lead the eye towards the infinite skies. Most traditional Gurdwaras are white and have a large courtyard which provides an immediate feeling of expansiveness. A path surrounds the pool and the devotees are often seen bathing in the water, sitting on the edge, saying prayers and circumambulating in contemplative mood. "Abstraction, symmetry, rhythm and repetition are essential characteristics of Sikh architecture. Abstract patterns make possible a passage into another world beyond the senses. Symmetrical designs emerging from the multiplicity of intricate details add to the feeling of tranquility. The black and white marble slabs upon which the devotees walk are repeated rhythmically as are the stylized flowers, birds, arabesques and lattice work on the surfaces"[1].

The foundation stone of 'The *Harmandir*' was laid in 1588 A.D. To begin with, the building was a mere structure of baked brick and lime and having very little or almost no surface ornamentation of any form. Encircling the '*sarovar*' was the '*Parkarma*' or circumambulatory path from which steps descended into

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[1] Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, 1999. in 'The Sikh Religion' in Susan Stronge (ed) "The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms". V&A Museum, London.

the '*sarovar*' for the benefit of the pilgrims who wanted to step into the serene waters for a holy dip. In fact the city of 'Amritsar' gets its name from this '*Amrit Sarovar*' or literally the 'pool of nectar' that surrounds the holy shrine.

'Amrit' or the 'Nectar of Immortality' is metaphorized for the waters of this holy tank because it is a deep seated belief that with the ritualized custom of constant singing of God's name or the *Gurbani* in its vicinity, the waters have been ordained with Divine powers of satiation and miracle healing. Episodes of its healing prowess are recounted in all walks of life even today. The mystique of the '*Dukh Bhanjani Beri*' and the almost magical *'kago hans banaee'* stories abound in the weft and weave of Sikh culture and forms all over the world. The spiritually pristine glory of the location of the *'sarovar'* seems to have been made an exception in the case of this Temple. The Sikh Scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib*[2] looks askance at the entire prospect of image worship and edifying places as pilgrimages. "He pervades the entire universe" says the Sikh Scripture; "the whole universe is, therefore, the Temple of God"[3]. The omnipresence of the divine spirit and the significance of the *Harmandir* as a site of spiritual realisation for the Sikhs can be estimated from the following words from the *Guru Granth Sahib:*

'*Harmandir mahi har(i) vasa sarb nirantar soi*'

He who is Omnipresent resides in the *Harmandir*[4]

Continuing in the same vein, the *Harmandir* is also called the *Sachkhand* or the abode of God. Its glory has been epitomised in the words of Hardas, a poet of spiritual reckoning, as *"Amritsar baikunth ko, tolilo Har*(i) *Hardas, gaura sau dharti rihai, haula chario aakash*"[5] [God created two heavens as envisioned by the poet Hardas. The heavier of the two descended upon Earth at Amritsar while the lighter one ascended upon and became the abode of the gods].

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[2] The embodiment of the Guru.
[3] Guru Granth Sahib.
[4] SGGS Panna 1346.
[5] Sarup Singh Alagh, 2001. Excellence of Sikhism, pp270.

That the Golden Temple is the premier shrine and headquarters of the Sikh faith and also many who do not formally subscribe to its tenets can be measured from the large number of people who flock to it from all corners of the world for reasons ranging from curiosity to salvation. The message of the four-door Temple to mankind is unmistakable: it is the embodiment of the primary tenet of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, wherein he expostulates, "Awwal Allah Noor O Paya, Kudrat dae sab bande, Ek Noor tae sab jag upjaeye kaun bhallaye kaun mandaye".[6]

The Holy Scripture was compiled under the title of *Adi Granth*. As there was no binder at that time at Amritsar, the holy scripture was sent to Lahore through Bhai Bano. The *Adi Granth* was completed and was formally installed in the *Harmandir* on *Bhadon Sudi Ikam Samvat* 1661 BK (August, 1604). "The *Guru Granth* is set at the very centre of each *Gurdwara*. There are no images or sculptures incarnating deity in any way. Metaphysical poetry with its sensuous imagery is the sole visual and aural icon for Sikhs; the recitation of the intangible verses enables the worshipers to recognize the Infinite One".[7] Baba Buddha was appointed the first *granthi* (head priest) of the temple. From that very day onwards regular worship, *kirtan* and other religious services were initiated in the shrine.

The *Harmandir*, now called the Golden Temple, is a living symbol of the spiritual and historical traditions of the Sikhs. The tank and the temple have been a source of inspiration to the Sikh community ever since its foundations were laid. It is evident from the Sikh chronicles that the Gurus exhorted their followers to accept all Sikh centres as places of pilgrimage. As the *Harmandir Sahib* was the first important holy shrine, it became the centre of inspiration and action and

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[6] From the sermons of the Guru. It means that all men are made equal and are parts of the same Supreme Universal Light.

[7] Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, 1999. 'The Sikh Religion' in Susan Strong [ed], The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms. V & A Museum, London.

the most significant achievement of the Gurus. Over the centuries it gradually developed into the most important place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs as well as many who were not Sikhs but had reverence for the miraculous powers of the holy site.

Whatever the version about the acquisition of the land, it appears that, originally, the site on which the Golden Temple stands was under the ownership of the *zamindars* of Tung village and later it was acquired by the Sikhs Gurus either on payment or free of cost. It is certain, however, that the land of the *Harmandir* was revenue-free land. The paper of the land settlement of Amritsar during the British period dated A.D. 1856 records the land for the *Darbar Sahib* as a revenue-free grant to Guru Ram Das.

The projections and programme of the new project was chalked out by Guru Amar Das and told to Guru Ram Das. The latter was instructed to acquire funds for expenditure from Baba Buddha. Some experienced, devout, elderly Sikhs were instructed to join Ram Das in carrying out the new project which was to become world renowned as the Golden Temple in the coming centuries.

Religious service and significance apart, the architectural design and beauty of the *Harmandir* has its own attraction. Standing in the middle of the pool of Nectar on a plinth of hard stone reached from the bank over a bridge, it provides a rare atmosphere of coolness, calmness and serenity. Its square shape and appropriate dimensions give it perfect geometrical symmetry and compactness. Four doors, opening one in each cardinal direction, signified the openness of mind and the attainment of free access from all sides to all children of God irrespective of caste or creed.

Of particular interest to common visitors as well as to connoisseurs of art alike is the beauty of the interiors of the *Harmandir*. The beauty encapsulates the intricate floral designs embossed on metal or inset in stone and painting or

filigree work on walls and the ceiling which are simply enchanting. However, the *Harmandir* has had its share of persecution suffered by the community as an entity. After Guru Hargobind had to leave the town subsequent to the first battle of Amritsar in 1629, no Guru graced the *Harmandir* with his presence for more than three decades. Only Guru Tegh Bahadur came on a visit in 1664, but he too was not allowed to enter the sanctum sanctorum. Massa Ranghar, the appointed *kotwal* of Amritsar, after the execution of Bhai Mani Singh in 1737, befouled the *sarovar* and desecrated the *Harmandir*. In 1762, Ahmad Shah Abdali had the *Harmandir* blown up with gunpowder. It was reconstructed by the *Dal Khalsa* through Bhai Des Raj of Sursingh village. The reconstruction was completed by 1776.

The present appearance of the *Harmandir* dates from the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1801-39), although the work of the decoration of the interiors continued long after his death. But the Sikh rulers left the religious management with Udasi and Nirmala priests who had been looking after Sikh shrines during the troubled period when baptised Sikhs suffered prosecution of the cruelest kind and were not permitted to serve their places of worship. Although Maharaja Ranjit Singh appointed Giani Sant Singh and, after his death in 1832, his son Bhai Gurmukh Singh as managers yet their responsibility extended only to the beatification of the *Darbar Sahib*. After the annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849, the practice continued. While the government appointed a *sarbarah*, the religious administration remained with the *mahants* and *pujaris*. Several malpractices became the vogue and rampant mismanagement crept in, which even the Singh Sabha Movement failed to rectify. It was only at the beginning of the *Gurdwara* Reform (or *Akali*) Movement (on 15th October 1920) that the *Harmandir* was liberated from the malignant control of the priestly order and brought under *panthic* management. At present the Harmandir along with *Sri Akal Takht Sahib* and other holy shrines in Amritsar are managed directly by the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee [SGPC]* under Section 85 of the *Sikh Gurdwara* Act, 1925.



An early photograph of the Golden Temple

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

Akal Takht (literally "the Revered Throne of the Timeless One") housed in *Akal Bunga,* opposite the *Darshani Deorhi* (gateway to the *Harmandir*) across the marble-paved *parkarma* (circumambulatory terrace around the *sarovar*), is the secular counterpart of the purely spiritual or religious *Harmandir*. It must be kept in mind, though, that in Sikhism, the secular is not divorced from or in opposition to the religious and the spiritual. Sri Akal Takht Sahib, or Akal Takht for short, is the highest seat of religious authority, for the Sikhs. Four other *Takhts*, situated respectively at Anandpur Sahib, Sabo ki Talwandi, Patna Sahib and Hazur Sahib Abchalnagar, Nanded, also have that honour and authority, but the *Akal Takht* is the premier seat of authority as the *hukamnamas* (religious fiats) issued by it hold precedence over similar fiats issued by other *Takhts*. It has been the convention that only *Akal Takht* has the authority to excommunicate a Sikh for religious offence(s). It is senior most in age as no other *Takht* came into existence till the birth of Guru Gobind Singh sixty years later.

The *Akal Takht* was founded and physically constructed by Guru Hargobind on 15th June 1606. According to *Gurithas Chhevin Patshahi*[8], the Guru laid the foundation, and Bhai Budha and Bhai Gurdas completed the construction, with no other person permitted to take part in the process. It was, of course, then only a platform of mud and masonry on which the installation ceremony of Guru Hargobind was performed on 24th June 1606. Guru Hargobind had decided to adopt a princely style. Even his father had approved of and arranged his training in martial sports. And the Gurus, at least from the time of Guru Ram Das, had been given the epithet *Sachcha Patshah* (The True

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A building over the *Akal Takht* must have been raised during the time of Guru Hargobind himself. During the period of persecution following the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur, the Sikhs looked up to *Sri Akal Takht Sahib*, *Sri Harmandir Sahib* and the Amritsar or 'pool of nectar' for fresh inspiration and thus revived their courage. Occasionally, usually on *Baisakhi* and *Divali*, different *jathas* (later *misls*) assembled at the *Akal Takht* and held *Sarbat Khalsa* (assembly representing the entire *khalsa* or 'Pure' nation) and passed *gurmatas* (resolution in presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib*) related to general strategy, particular operations or other organizational or administrative matters. After the *Misls* had set up their different independent states, the significance of *Sarbat Khalsa* assemblies declined, but the supremacy of the *Akal Takht* as the final arbiter in matters of religious and moral discipline continued to be acknowledged.

Like the *Harmandir Sahib,* the *Akal Takht Sahib* also suffered destruction at the hands of Ahmad Shah Abdali during his invasion in 1764 because a small garrison of 30 *Nihangs* stationed here had the audacity to stand up to the invading hordes. But what was destroyed was the *Akal Bunga*, the building, and not *Akal Takht,* the institution. The *Dal Khalsa* continued to meet at the *Akal Takht* on the ruins of *Akal Bunga* of which too, the ground floor was reconstructed by 1774. Another four storeys were raised above it during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This was the building, which was destroyed when the Indian army attacked the *Darbar Sahib* complex in June 1984. Alarmed at the strong reaction and indignation of the Sikhs, the government hastily reconstructed it, but simultaneously committed another faux paus - the holding of a fake *Sarbat Khalsa* at the site. This infuriated the Sikhs more than the destruction perpetuated earlier because this latter act meant an insulting

assault on the *Akal Takht* as an institution. The Sikhs, therefore, held a real *Sarbat Khalsa* in which they, through a *gurmatt*, decided to pull down that building raised by the government and to reconstruct the *Akal Bunga* through *kaar seva* (voluntary free service).

The Founders

The Ten Sikh Gurus

First	Guru Nanak	1469-1539
Second	Guru Angad	1504-52(Guru 1539-52)
Third	Guru Amar Das	1479-1574(Guru 1552-74)
Fourth	Guru Ram Das	1534-81(Guru 1574-81)
Fifth	Guru Arjan Dev	1563-1606 (Guru1581-1606)
Sixth	Guru Hargobind	1595-1644 (Guru 1606-44)
Seventh	Guru Har Rai	1630-61 (Guru 1644-61)
Eighth	Guru Har Krishan	1656-64 (Guru 1661-4)
Ninth	Guru Tegh Bahadur	1631-75 (Guru 1664-75)
Tenth	Guru Gobind Singh	1666-1708 (Guru 1675-1708)

Sikhism evolved from the original gentle emphasis given to it by Guru Nanak (the founder of Sikhism) and his descendants. Religious persecution meant that the Sikhs had to fight back in order to survive, and the formation of the *'Khalsa'* helped create a cohesive identity.

The plan was executed by Guru Ram Das under the counsel of Baba Buddha Ji. The inauguration was in traditional Indian style, with distribution of sweets after prayers. Kilns were laid and a number of hutments were build. Members of over 50 caste-groups from Patti, Kasur and Kalanaur were called to settle here and assure a regular supply of essential commodities.

The construction work of the tank and the town proceeded smoothly. But, while the work was in progress, Guru Ram Das had to rush back to *Goindwal* at the call of the dying Guru Amar Das. The work was stopped and resumed only on his return, after his pontification in A.D. 1577, and the construction of both the tank and the town was completed in the same year.

Then the Guru called the *Khatris* (business community) and told them to take charge of the holy place. But they pleaded their inability to perform religious duties and requested the Gurus to engage some *brahmins* and *fakirs* to perform the ceremonies. But the *khatris* sought the blessings of the Guru for *kirt* [earnings] and *barkat* [prosperity] to pursue their professions.

The Guru and his disciples were overjoyed on the completion of the new pilgrimage centre. Guru Ram Das composed beautiful verses in the glory of the *sarovar*, making an injunction upon his followers to take bath in this *holy tank* and meditate here on *Hari Nam* (the name of God).

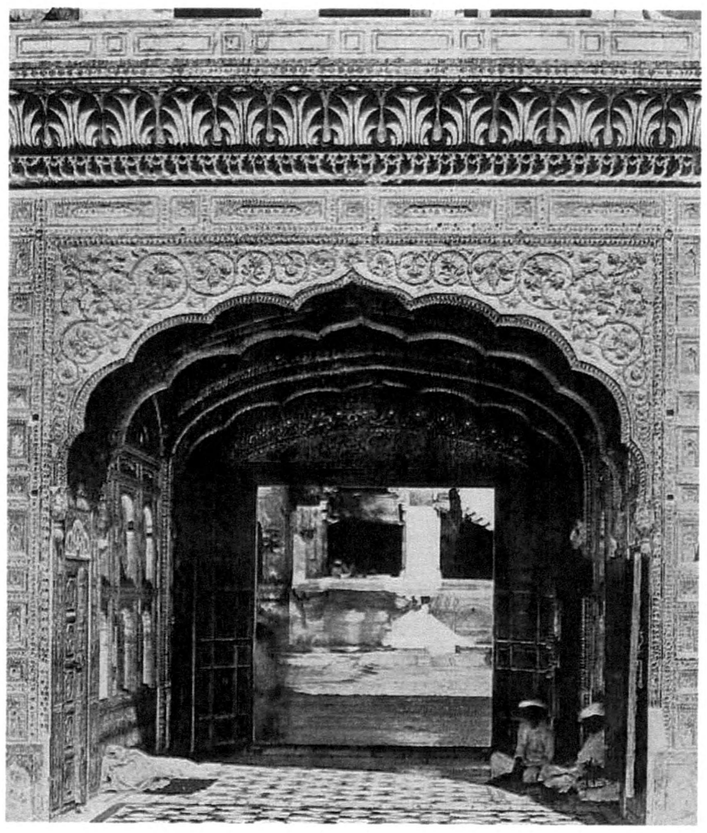
The plan was executed under the direct control and supervision of Guru Arjan Dev assisted by Baba Buddha, Bhai Gurudas and other devoted Sikhs. The Guru appointed his trustworthy followers, such as Bhai Salo, Bhai Bhagtu, Bhai Piara, Bhai Bahlo and Bhai Kalyana, to supervise the construction work and arrange for building material. The assignment of brick making was entrusted to Bhai Bahlo, an expert on this subject.

According to early Sikh tradition, the foundation stone of the *Harmandir* was laid by Guru Arjan Dev himself. (A related story tells us that a mason accidentally displaced a brick, on which the Guru expressed his fear that the foundation would have to be laid in the future. This incident is mentioned in the Sikh sources written after the reconstruction of the *Harmandir*, in A.D. 1764, and is carried up to the late nineteenth century.) The recorded account is that Guru Arjan Dev laid the foundation of *Harmandir* on 1st Magh *Samvat* 1645(A.D. 1588).



An early photo representation of the Akal Takht. The geometric patterns of the *Parkarma* are distinctively visible in the foreground

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.



An early photo representation of the Darshani Deorhi entrance to the Golden Temple as seen from the sanctum

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

However, the later Sikh tradition holds that the foundation was laid at the request of Guru Arjan Dev, by a Muslim divine, Pir Mian Mir of Lahore, in *Samvat* 1645 BK (A.D. 1588). This version is based on oral tradition and is not supported either by the early Sikh sources or any of the Persian accounts, including the biographies of Mian Mir.

The construction work of the new temple was undertaken with great enthusiasm. A large number of Sikhs participated in the work. Some of the Sikh devotees became legends and adorn the pages of the annals of Sikh literature. The solid foundation was laid on a level higher than the bottom of the tank with lime and bricks. Broad walls were built. A bridge connecting the temple with *Darshani Deorhi* (entrance gate) was constructed over the support of *Surang Dwaries* (aqueducts) *mehrabs* and *dats* (arches).

Simultaneously with the construction of the Temple, plans were made to expand and develop the town. New markets were opened and trade was encouraged. In due course, people from different walks of life, as also from different caste groups, settled there. They were encouraged to make it their permanent home. This saw the city grow in population in no time. The inhabitants and traders of Lahore, however, could not reconcile with the rapid growth of the town. They ridiculed the planning of a city around a big tank in a low-lying area, and feared loss of property and their wares during the rainy season. Their foreboding alarmed the business community at Amritsar, they approached the Guru and expressed their fears and discussed the matter with him. The Guru assured them that there was no danger to their life or property. On the contrary he prophesied a bright future for them and the town. There is in the Holy Scripture a hymn by Guru Arjan Dev, embodying his vision of the town:

Eternal is the city of my Guru my God.
Contemplating (herein) the name, I have attained bliss
And have attained all the fruits that my mind desired;
Yes, the Creator himself has established it.

I'm blest with gladness and all my kindred and followers
Are happy. And they all sing the praises of the perfect Lord.
And all their affairs are adjusted.
Our Lord, God himself, is our refuge;
Himself is he our Father and Mother.
Seethe Nana : '"I'm sacrifice unto the
True Guru who hast blest this city.[9]

The early history of the *Harmandir* related to its progress under Guru Arjan Dev who looked after its construction, management and working since its inception to the Day he was martyred in 1606. During his lifetime, as also long after him, it remained the nerve centre of the Sikh community. The events which followed, revolve around the tank and the temple and constitute an important chapter in the history of the Sikhs. Simultaneously, with the completion of the *Harmandir* more and more *pucca* houses were built around the Temple. The market i.e. *Guru ka Bazar* grew at a rapid pace and the city expanded commensurate to the expectations held by its founders. The Guru ordained his devotees to take their abode in the newly built tenements. Bhai Bhalo assisted the Guru in executing the scheme. Consequently, the area around the temple became more polluted. The Guru ordered the *Darshani Darwaza* to be built to ward off any danger to the temple from an intruder. A garden was planted near the *Harmandir* which was later on called *Guru ka Bagh*. Some wells and *baulis* were constructed for supplying water to the pilgrimage site. Thousands of Sikhs benefited from the development of Ramdaspur. It became a supreme place of pilgrimage. The Guru himself took bath in the holy tank early in the morning, paid homage to the temple, walked around it, held the *Darbar* and received visitors. He made regular arrangements for the recitation of the Holy *Granth*, performing of *kirtan* and distribution of *langar*, as laid down in the rules for the guidance of his devotees in matters pertaining to religion and ceremonial practices.

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[9] Madanjit Kaur, 1977. 'Sri Harmandir Sahib: Evolution of the Shrine' in Marg, Vol XXX, No.3, June. Marg Publications, Mumbai.

The task of supervising the *Harmandir* occupied Guru Arjan Dev for a considerable time. He appointed his trust-worthy lieutenant's i.e. Baba Buddha, Bhai Salo, Bhai Bhagtu, Bhai Pheru and Bhai Kalyan, to look after the various assignments made to them. The funds for construction and provision for the *langar* were collected from the Sikh devotees. The *masands* collected offerings for the Guru and faithfully delivered them to him. The funds, the *jagir* and the property of the Temple were all under the direct control of the Guru who spent it as best as he could for the maintenance of the Temple comprising offerings in cash and kind, as also arrangements for the community kitchen (*Guru ka langar*) were under the charge of Prithvi Chand, the elder brother of Guru Arjan Dev, the provisions and fuel for the *langar* were arranged through voluntary service. As the Guru himself was present at Amritsar, matters regarding the mode of worship and rituals etc. were decided by him. Divans were held in *Harmandir* both in the morning and the evening, where the recitation of *Gurbani* or *kirtan* was a regular feature. As long as Baba Buddha lived, he worked as the head *Granthi* at the *Harmandir.* Because of his high status in the community, the distinct privilege of applying *tilak* to the Sikh Gurus on their succession to the *Guru Gaddi* rested with him.

The actual construction had modest beginnings. A mud-house was constructed by Guru Amar Das, who is said to have found on the edge of the pool, a magical herb which cured a skin ailment of his master, Guru Angad. The *Amrit Sarovar* remained a village tank until the fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das began to carry on in the place of his mentor for a more permanent structure in brick. *Chak / Chak Guru / Guru-ka-chak / Chak Guru Ram Das / Ram Das Pura* were the names of Amritsar in those times. The temple on the banks of the pool of nectar was surrounded by the houses of the craftsmen from the towns of Patti, Kasur and Kalanaur, who came to build the holy place. The only market was then called *Guru-ka-bazar*, and is still known by that name, though more populous now.

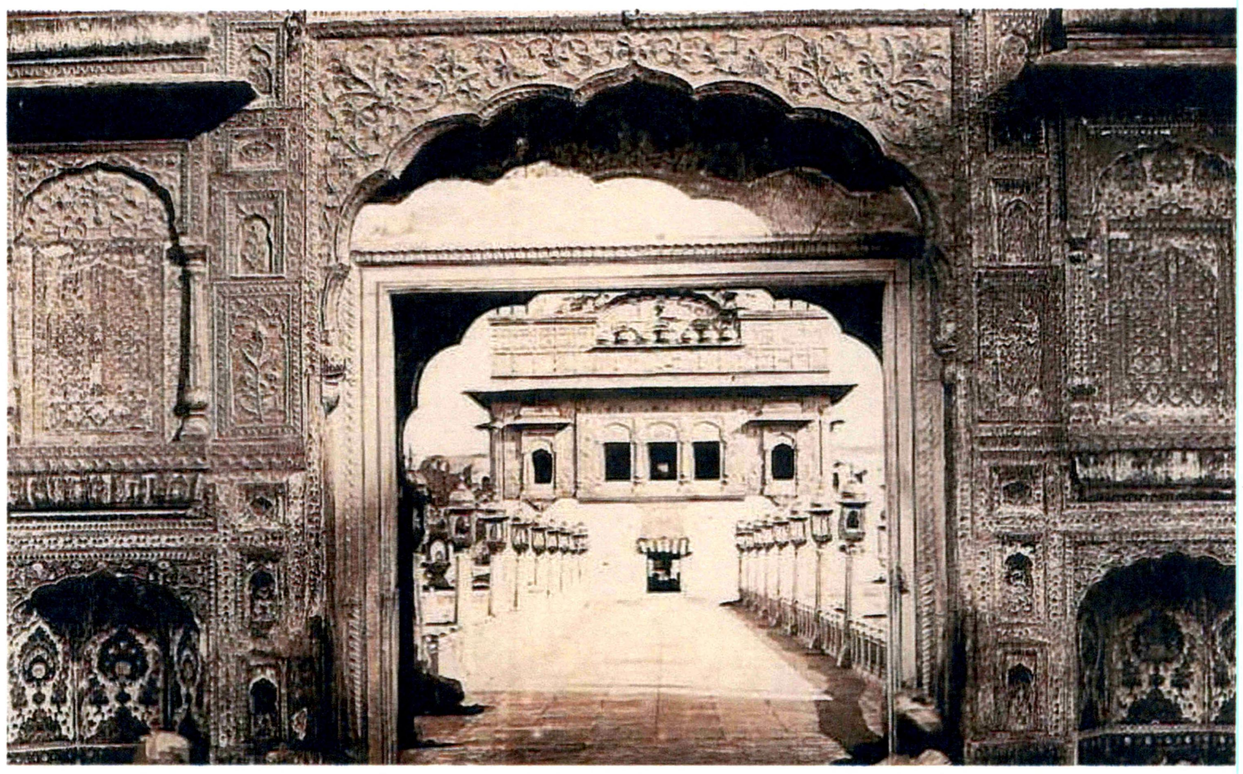
Guru Ram Das composed a poem in praise of *Amrit Sarovar*. Guru Arjan Dev, the Fifth Guru, who came to the spiritual throne in 1581, assessed from the growing popularity of the shrine as a pilgrimage centre, that there was the need to have the tank paved on four sides and the steps of the *Harmandir* bricked. The devotees joined hands to construct the temple where the infinite mystery would be revealed only to those who seek and work to know it.

Already, however, the demand to create a paradise on earth became urgent, from the vision of Guru Arjan Dev, of many simple hearts coming, with dimmed eyes, folded hands and overjoyed hearts to pray and touch the holy water and bend their foreheads at the holy portals.

The present causeway leading to the *Harmandir* was then designed, with the rectangular shape of the circumambulatory walk ending at the gateway, from which the path to Reality began. This combines, symbolically, the noblest truth of Islam about One God with the faith in the Hindu God *Hari* and his many incarnations. The Muslim divine soul, Mian Mir of Lahore, is said to have been invited by Guru Arjan Dev to lay the foundation stone of the temple in A.D. 1588. The structure of the shrine also mixed the rectangular form of the Hindu temple with the dome and minarets of the Muslim edifices.

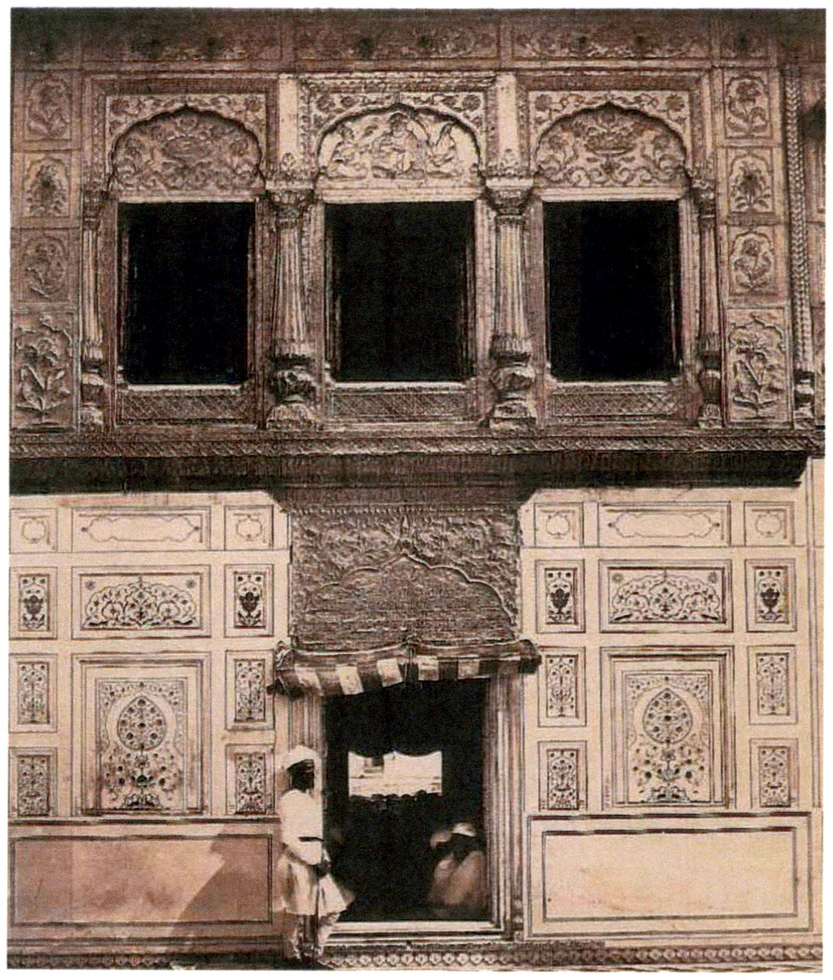
Amritsar, beginning from its pool of nectar, has remained the humming centre of millions of devotees, the caravanserai of travelers, the greatest trade centre of northern India, and an inspiration in the struggle for freedom for four centuries. And it will remain, what it has been since its foundation, the source of the ideology for the unity of faiths, which the Sikh Gurus preached for generations.

In the late 16th century, the site that is now Amritsar was a woodland dotted with ponds. Local legend had long held that the site was holy and the



An early photo representation of the entrance to the Golden Temple as seen from the Darshani Deorhi

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.



An early photograph of the entrance to the inner sanctum of the Golden Temple. The marbled peitra dura work is visible on both walls as is the golden calligraphy immediately above

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

water had healing properties. In about 1577, Guru Arjan Dev's father, Guru Ram Das commenced the excavation of a large tank in the area. Before the work could make greater progress, he passed away, and the completion of this project was one of the first tasks undertaken by Guru Arjan Dev on assumption of the Guruship. The two tanks which were being dug - Santokhsar (the Pool of Contentment) and Amritsar (the Pool of Nectar of Immortality) - were completed, and at Guru Arjan Dev's initiative funds were raised to make them *pucca,* with brick linings for the steps and the walkway. The surrounding area was marked out for a new settlement, called Ramdaspur. This city would later come to be named Amritsar after this most famous water body.

Soon after its foundation, Amritsar became the center of Guru Ram Das's missionary activities and the headquarters of the Sikh faith. *Amrit Sarovar* remained enclosed in *"kachcha"* construction till Guru Arjan Dev ascended the *gaddi* in 1581 A.D. Except for the bottom, the tank was made *pucca* and bricked. The construction of the tank was soon completed with the help of devotees who showed great enthusiasm for *sewa*. Guru Arjan Dev expressed his thanksgiving in the words:

"God himself hath come to fulfil the Task of the saints
Yea, He Himself hath come to do the Work.
And, now, Blessed is the earth, the Tank and
The Nectar with which it is filled ……."[10]

The Geographical Boundaries

It was in 1803 that this town was incorporated in the dominion of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The cultural, economic and political development of Amritsar was largely the work of this monarch who took great pains to make it the spiritual capital as well as the main commercial and cultural centre of his kingdom, while

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[10] Shri Guru Granth Sahib.

Lahore remained the political capital. He encouraged a great many nobles of the Lahore court and renowned merchants to settle in Amritsar.

Instead of building the *Harmandir* on a higher level, as was the custom in traditional *Hindu* temple architecture, the Guru built the shrine on a level lower than the surrounding ground. The visitors have to go down the steps in order to pay homage to the holy shrine. The other distinguishing feature of the structure of the *Harmandir* is that, unlike the Hindu temples which usually have only one gate, the *Harmandir* was made open on all the four sides; representing open entry to all, a privilege not available in the Hindu temples. The construction of the temple was accomplished in a continuous process. Even while the work was proceeding, news about the ambitious project spread far and wide and pilgrims began to visit Amritsar in large numbers. All the devotees contributed a share from their earnings to the construction fund. Rich people offered huge donations. The *masands* (Guru's agents) collected funds for the project, from far and near. The tank and the temple rose in all the majesty of faith and beauty. The Golden Temple radiated the selflessness of the voluntary services offered by the Sikhs. The hard work of the disciples was duly acknowledged by the Guru. All the Sikhs who offered *seva* as worship were rewarded.

Simultaneously, with the construction of the temple, began plans for the expansion of the town of Amritsar. They scoffed at the idea of a city around a big tank in a low-lying area. It was feared that it would be a great risk to the large investment, especially during the rainy season when the raised water level would penetrate into the localities and eventually damage the habitations. The businessmen of Amritsar were alarmed. They approached the Guru and expressed their fears. The Guru assured them all protection and foretold the future prospects of the city. Guru Arjan Dev composed the following hymn setting out the attributes of the holy town:

"Eternal is this city of my Guru, my God.

Contemplating (herein) the Name, I have
Attained Bliss".[11]

The fame of the newly constructed holy place spread far and wide. Local Sikhs visited the temple daily, while the Sikhs of nearby areas paid frequent visits. Those from afar visited Amritsar at least twice a year, on the occasion of *Diwali* and *Baisakhi.*

The main structure rises from the center of the sacred pool, 150 square meters, approached by a causeway, bordered with balustrades of fretted marble. There are sentinel lamps at close intervals, their great lanterns set upon marble columns. The 52 square meter base of *Harmandir*, to which the causeway leads, stands on a 20 square meter platform. The lower parts of the *Harmandir* are of white marble but the upper parts are covered with plates of gilded copper. The plan was executed by Guru Ram Das under the counsel of Baba Buddha. The inauguration was in traditional Indian style, with distribution of sweets after prayers. Then the kilns were laid and a number of hutments were built for members of over 50 caste groups.

The construction and development of the *Harmandir* was under the direct control and supervision of Guru Arjan Dev assisted by Baba Buddha, Bhai Gurdas and devoted Sikhs. The Guru appointed his trustworthy followers, such as Bhai Salo, Bhai Bhagtu, Bhai Piara, Bhai Bhalo and Bhai Kalyana to supervise the construction and arrange for building materials. The assignment of brick making was entrusted to Bhai Bahlo, an expert.

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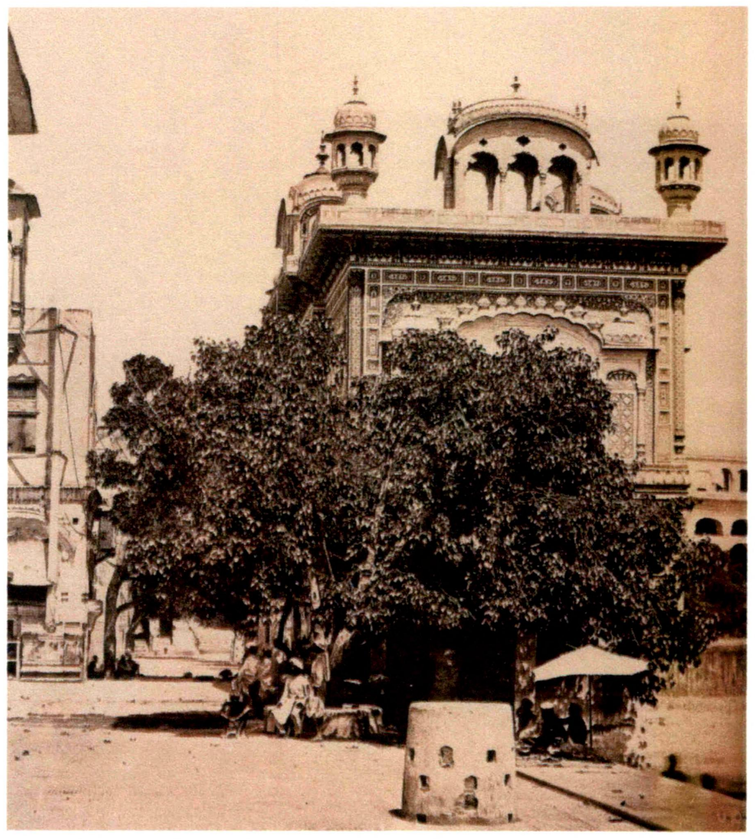
[12] Ibid

Dev laid the foundation of *Harmandir* on 1st *Magh Samvat* 1645(A.D. 1588). However, the later Sikh tradition holds that the foundation was laid at the request of Guru Arjan Dev by a *muslim* divine, Pir Mian Mir of Lahore, in *Samvat* 1645Bk. This version is supported either by early Sikh sources or any of the Persian accounts, including the biographies of Mian Mir.

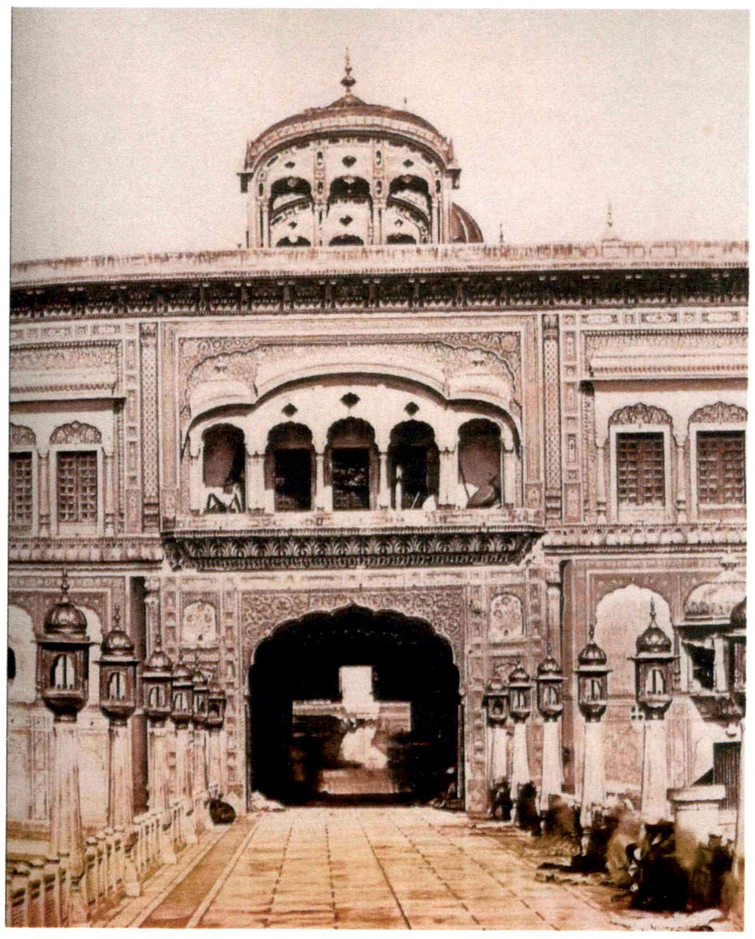
When we look at more elaborate Sikh sanctuaries, we find that the architects had to integrate four elements which had become the fundaments of Sikh sacred architecture: the enclosure, its gateway, the temple itself and the pool. An early and attractive example, which probably dates from the time of the *misls*, is the Ram Sar Gurudwara at Amritsar. The temple itself is two storeys high; and although it is a relatively simple building, it anticipates some of the features of the great temples built or renovated by Ranjit Singh. The bottom part of the lower floor is covered with marble slabs; and these are decorated very delicately in low relief designs, in a way that makes the walls seem light and almost paper-like. The dome crowning the temple is a simple version of the magnificent lotus-domes that seem to have been a favorite design of Ranjit Singh. The enclosure around the temple consists of a wall facing the outside world with rooms on three of its inner sides facing the courtyard. On the eastern side of the enclosure is a great gateway. Outside the enclosure and to the South is the pool which is linked by a doorway through the rooms on that side. The pool is surrounded by a geometrically inlaid marble pathway. The end result is quit pleasing. Later *Gurudwara* complexes have also tried integrating these different elements.

The center of the sanctuary is clearly the Golden Temple, and everything else radiates from it. The temple, the pool and the path for circumambulation are perfectly integrated here through the ingenious device of placing the temple in the middle of the pool. In the nineteenth century, the complex was still open to the outside world, so it must have appeared to blend into it and spread all the way to the horizon. Later, a colonnade was constructed on all sides, but this does



An early photo representation of the Darshani Deorhi as it presents a backdrop to one of the *beris* or jujube trees that can be found around the Golden Temple complex

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.



An early photograph of the bridge that joins the Harmandir to the inner sanctum. The photo has been taken probably from the sanctum angle

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

not in any way distract from the impression of a vast open space. The impact of the vast light reflecting pool (147 x153 meters) with its evocation of openness and infinity is enhanced by the path around the pool, which is so wide that it makes the worshippers seem tiny. They are veritable little humans in the face of the Infinite. The geometric designs on the marble pavement create a quick rhythm, which invites the visitor to walk around. The colonnade, the pool and the path all revolve around the temple, as if they themselves were performing a great circumambulation in its honor. The centrality of the temple is emphasized by the four doors, which open out in all directions. The focal point is, of course, the Great Book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, in the central hall with its mezzanine gallery of rooms. The whole arrangement looks like a model of the planets going around the sun. Each part of the sanctuary follows its orbit at a fixed point from the Holy Book which lies sat the center of this solar system.

Everything about the Golden Temple reveals the presence of a Reality that lies beyond mere appearances. It does not seek to impress the senses like the temples of the ancient Romans; instead, it overwhelms them. It exhorts the mind to go beyond the world of the senses. We are struck not by its mass and its surfaces, but rather by its quiet open spaces. The shining and intricate surface of gold on the temple's upper storey creates the impression of an elegant jewelry box floating on the water and rising into the air. It is hard to realize that we are actually looking at a mass-bearing structure that the white marble walls are working hard to bear the weight of the roof above. They seem weightless; it is their delicately carved, abstract surface decoration that gives this ethereal effect.

The edge of the roof is decorated with no less than fifty-eight little golden onion-shaped domes, which bewilder the senses as they run around the roof. The four domed kiosks at the corners of the roof are matched by the great flat dome that crowns the entire building. This dome is adorned with a gigantic lotus-motif, and the little spheres that run around it have the same motif. The room just below the dome lies right above the central hall and the Holy Book in a way that

the dome makes the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib visible even from the outside.

Apart from its great historical significance, the Temple has a number of other distinguishing features. For example, as against the normal practice, elevated sites were rejected in favour of the present low-lying kind in which the holy book is installed on a throne and the worshippers are required to kneel and bow as if in the presence of the Divine Reality itself. The unrestricted entry into the sanctum sanctorum by the Sikhs and the non Sikhs, the relay teams of professionally trained *ragis* or singers who sing devotional songs to the accompaniment of classical musical instruments, in the prescribed musical measures all through the twenty hours at a stretch add to the sanctity of the holy temple. The only other authorized activities inside the sanctum sanctorum include prayers, in which everyone present participates by standing up respectfully with folded hands, and listening to the after-prayer ceremonial readings from the Granth Sahib.

Amritsar was the seat of the Gurus for half-a-century, from 1577 to 1628, during which period several other spots in the town became holy places where *Gurudwaras* were later established.

The *Harmandir Sahib*, also called *Darbar Sahib,* which is known to the English-speaking world as the Golden Temple on account of its scenic beauty and the golden coating on its exterior above the first-floor level. It was built under the direction and direct supervision of Guru Arjan Dev, who according to current tradition, got its foundations laid by a well-known *Muslim* preacher, Mir Muhammad, better known as Hazrat Mian Mir of Lahore, on the first of *Magh* 1645 *Bikrami* corresponding to 28th December 1588. On completion in about 10 years time, it became the venue for the daily religious services, *kirtan* and discourse. When Guru Arjan Dev had compiled the compositions of the Gurus including his own and of a number of Hindu and Muslim saints into a single

volume, now known as the *Adi Granth* or *Guru Granth Sahib*, he installed it in the *Harmandir* on 16th, August 1604. Baba Buddha was appointed the first official. The routine and liturgy set by Guru Arjan Dev himself is still operative with very little change. *Kirtan* commences in the *Harmandir* between 2.00 a.m. and 3.00 a.m. depending on the season and continues incessantly, with only *ardas* or supplicatory prayers intervening occasionally, upto 10.00 p.m. or 11.00 p.m. The Holy Book is then taken in procession to a room in the *Akal Bunga* for rest, and is brought back to the *Harmandir* again in a procession at about 5 a.m. The intermission is used for the daily cleaning of the premises.

Royal Patronage

By the 18th century, the Sikhs had formed 12 confederacies or '*misls*', to protect themselves and their territories. The Afghans invaded the Punjab nine times between 1747 and 1769 A.D. and *Mughal* persecution was often brutal. Internal squabbles prevented the '*misls*' from uniting to control the region until the most powerful group, the *'Sukerchakia Misl'* rose to supremacy under the leadership of the young warrior chief, Ranjit Singh. By 1799 A.D. his 'Khalsa' army had captured Lahore and two years later, he was proclaimed Maharaja of the Punjab. By the time Ranjit Singh died in 1839 A.D., the Sikh kingdom stretched across the Punjab hills and Kashmir, and over the Himalayaș as far as Ladakh in the North.

Birth and Childhood

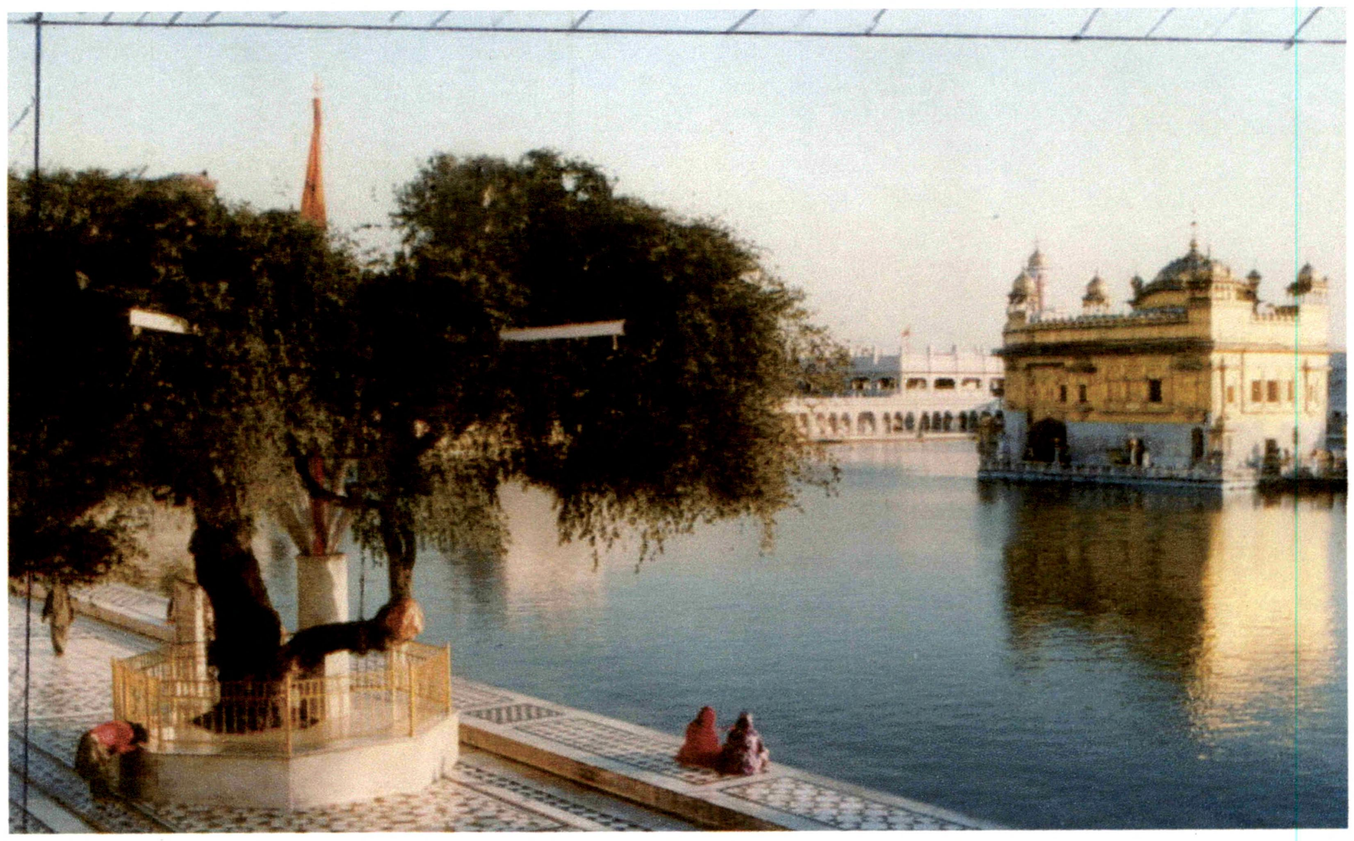
On 13th November, 1780, Mahan Singh became the proud father of a son who was destined to play a unique role in Indian history by establishing a mighty empire in North India. The child was given the name of Budh Singh but when his father got the happy news in the thick of battle, he decided to change the name to Ranjit Singh, meaning 'victor in the battlefield'. True to his name, Ranjit Singh rose to be a renowned warrior who fought many battles, sometimes in adverse

situations, and never suffered a major defeat in his long and checkered career. As a young child Ranjit Singh suffered a virulent attack of small pox, which not only left permanent scars on his face but also deprived him of vision in his left eye. An adventurous child that Ranjit Singh was, he was not deterred by this handicap from pursuing his favourite activities of warfare, horse riding and swimming. Ranjit Singh accompanied his father during most of the military campaigns when he was less than ten years of age.

Chief of the Misl

The sudden death of his father in 1790 made Ranjit Singh the leader of the *Sukarchakia Misl*. Ranjit Singh's mother worried as to what would happen to the territories conquered by her husband. Young and confident, Ranjit Singh is said to have assured her that he would not only keep the ancestral territories intact but would also extend them further and bring honour and glory to his family. Initially his mother acted as a regent but later Ranjit Singh took the administration of his *misl* in his own hands, and displayed rare tact and ability in the management of the territories under his control. At the age of sixteen, Ranjit Singh was married to Mehtab Kaur, daughter of Rani Sada Kaur, an ambitious and capable lady.

Ranjit Singh was much ahead of his times in almost every sphere - army organization, civil administration, foreign policy and, above all, the treatment of his subjects belonging to diverse faiths and cultures. Rising from the position of head of one of the twelve confederacies in Punjab, he became the first Indian ruler who stemmed the tide of continuous invasions from the North-West and succeeded in carrying his flag into the homeland of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali - the Afghan invaders and plunderers of the affluent Hindustan. His encounter with Shah Zaman, grandson of Ahmad Shah Abdali was so fierce that Shah Zaman could not muster sufficient courage to face the powerful challenger and retreated with his troops under cover of darkness. Ranjit Singh triumphantly



The tranquil waters of the sarovar invite the devotee to immerse his or her sorrows into their depths and take with himself the sheer calm and peace immersed in them due to the constant chanting of the hymns of the Gurbani in the Harmandir Sahib



The marbled Parkarma, the still waters of the sarovar and the pristine white walls of the Harmandir surmounted by the rich golden plating present tot he devotee a haven of fulfilment of which he or she can never have enough. Merely reflecting upon the scene transports one from the worries of earthly endeavour

entered the Lahore fort and laid the foundations of the mighty empire in the North-West, with the Sutlej in the East, China in the North and the deserts of Sindhu in the South.

Ruler of Lahore

Based upon papers in the family archives of the distinguished Fakir brothers, who served as ministers under the Maharaja, Fakir Syed Waheed-ud-Din, a descendant of Fakir Aziz-ud-Din, author of 'The Real Ranjit Singh', on entering the Samman Burj of Lahore Fort, Ranjit Singh found a shadow which appeared like a tiger. When Ranjit Singh tried to retreat he heard a voice calling him from inside the tower: "Ranjit Singh, don't be frightened, come in". Upon entering the *burj*, Ranjit Singh found himself in the presence of a frail, white-bearded old man of medium height who motioned to him to come up. When he had done so, he prophesied that he [Ranjit Singh] would soon establish an independent kingdom in Punjab and advised him to observe the following rules:

Say his prayers every morning without fail.
Never hold court sitting on the throne of the *Mughal* emperors.
Treat his subjects equally, without distinction of caste and creed.
Respect and befriend Fakir Syed Ghulam Mohd-ud-Din of Lahore, a godly man who had been appointed spiritual guardian of the new state and whose sons would serve it truly and well.

The story[13] may or may not be literally true, but what is true is that the commandments of the godly man remained the epitome of Ranjit Singh's policies and personal conduct till his death in 1839.

The Golden Temple, as it stands today, with its luminous exterior plated with gold is chiefly the work of Ranjit Singh. He ordered the architectural shape of

the Golden Temple to be redesigned. He took deep interest in getting the temple artistically decorated. For this purpose the Maharaja, made a grant of Rs 500,000 in 1803 A.D. and invited skilled Muslim architects, masons and wood carvers from Chaniot, now in Pakistan. Yar Mohammed Khan Mistri was the technical expert for the gold plating carried out in 1830.

Thus, a group of *Muslim* architects, masons, carvers and other craftsmen were brought to Amritsar and lodged in a huge building known as *Haveli Chaniotian*, situated inside the Lahori Gate. (The *Haveli Chaniotian* was situated in *Kucha Tarkhana*, *Gali Qabarwali*. During the riots of 1947, this *Haveli,* along with its adjoining mosque, was demolished. The ruins of the mosque can still be seen there, but there are absolutely no remnants of the *Haveli*.) The *Naqqashi* (floral decoration) and *Jaratkari* (stone inlay) work was done by these artists under the supervision of Badaru-Mohiudin, the chief architect. After the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839, the task of completing the work fell on three Sikhs, viz., Bhagwan Singh, Mangal Singh Ramagarhia and Rai Bahadur Kalyan Singh. Later, when the Muslim craftsmen emigrated through lack of patronage, the rest of the work was completed by local Sikh and Hindu artisans.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was fond of giving away and gifting paintings, gold ornaments and fine textiles in the course of his diplomatic dealings. Thus he had invited and patronised a number of artisans and accomplished painters from the *Pahari* regions of Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and Jodhpur. At his request, the *Pahari* painters (of whom only Parkhu's name is recorded) as some from Delhi, such as Jeevan Ram and Hasan-al-Din, came to settle in the plains of Punjab, both in Lahore and Amritsar. Along with the painters came the *Pahari* folk-songs and the art of cooking *Pahari* dishes as well.

The courtyard of the Golden Temple was extended and remodeled in our own time. Amenities for hundreds of devotees who visited the town everyday

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[13] Kushwant Singh, 2001. Ranjit Singh - Maharaja of the Punjab. Penguin Books India.

were provided. Ranjit Singh had displayed remarkable foresight in inviting *Marwari* traders to settle in Amritsar, for he well knew that trade had an important part to play in the evolution of a society. Among the eminent *Marwaris* of the time was Seth Ram Krishan, a social worker, and Padma Prakash Maheshwari. Both deserve special mention for their philanthropic deeds and contribution to the embellishment of the city.

During the reign of Ranjit Singh, a leading figure among these *Marwari* traders was Raja Bhan: a scholar - priest, who brought along a number of *Marwari* merchants. He built a shrine, known as Vir Bhan-ka-Shivala (Vir Bhan was a devotee of Siva), inside the Ghee Mandi Gate and commissioned painters to decorate its walls.

Through Ranjit Singh's initiative, Amritsar became a flourishing business centre. A business street now known as Katra Ahluwalia was at first *Nauriah Bazar,* named after a well-known community of the *Marwaris*. There is a popular tale retold by the old folk which further substantiates the habitation of *Marwaris* in this area. It is said that the *Marwaris* entreated Ranjit Singh to lay the foundation stone of Katra Ahluwalia. It was a momentary slip on his part that he laid the first brick in a slanting position, where upon a priest, who was present on the site predicted: "It is inauspicious that this has happened thus; now, instead of prosperity and good fortune, the reverse would befall." Ranjit Singh, the noble and generous king, allotted each shop for a paltry consideration of a rupee and a quarter by way of compensation and assurance against any future loss[14].

Ranjit Singh also encouraged the nobles of his court to reside in Amritsar. This triple patronage of trade, religion and aristocracy was soon to find reflection in the manifestations of art and architecture in the area. Numerous *Hindu* Temples, palatial *havelis* and *burj* (residence of the rich), *akharas* of Mahants (priests), *dharamshalas* for the convenience of pious pilgrims, sprang up.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was continually in the process of devising new ways to enhance the glory of *Harmandir Sahib* to perfection. He wanted the temple to be not only a place embodying the fountain of spiritual philosophy for the Sikhs but also be a place of such magnificent appearance that the pilgrims visiting it should be overwhelmed with awe and devotion. To fulfill this dream of devotional love he chalked out a plan to decorate the upper half of the Golden Temple with layers of gold. For this purpose he appointed Bhai Sant Singh *Giani* [1803] as Supervisor and the decoration work was handed over to the able artisan Mohammad Yaar Khan. It was after a lot of thinking and consideration that the work started and efforts were made to procure the best possible workers for the purpose.

The Temple was transformed into the Golden Temple when seven layers of gold covered the copper plates. The entire process took 27 years and the project was completed in 1887. As much as 162 seer of pure gold was used for the purpose. A commemorative plate fixed at the entrance door of the *Harmandir Sahib* is an invocation of humble thanksgiving to the Almighty for making it possible for Maharaja Ranjit Singh to do this service as a devoted Sikh.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh wished to make the interiors of the Temple extremely attractive and for this purpose he invited the most reputed carving experts to bring and exhibit their work specimens in Amritsar. After inspecting the exhibits personally he decided in favour of a style which was neither fully Mughal nor Rajput. He was satisfied to note that his choice fell on the work of Sikh *Ramgarhia* painters and artists. As a result of this he decided to make use of the services of *Sardar* Kehar Singh who had worked very hard to promote Sikh culture and style. He was conversant with all the intricacies and variations of '*Naqquashi*'. Being a *'puran Gur Sikh'* he rejected the Hindu style of painting because of its excessive portrayal of 'Incarnation' and did not approve of Mughal

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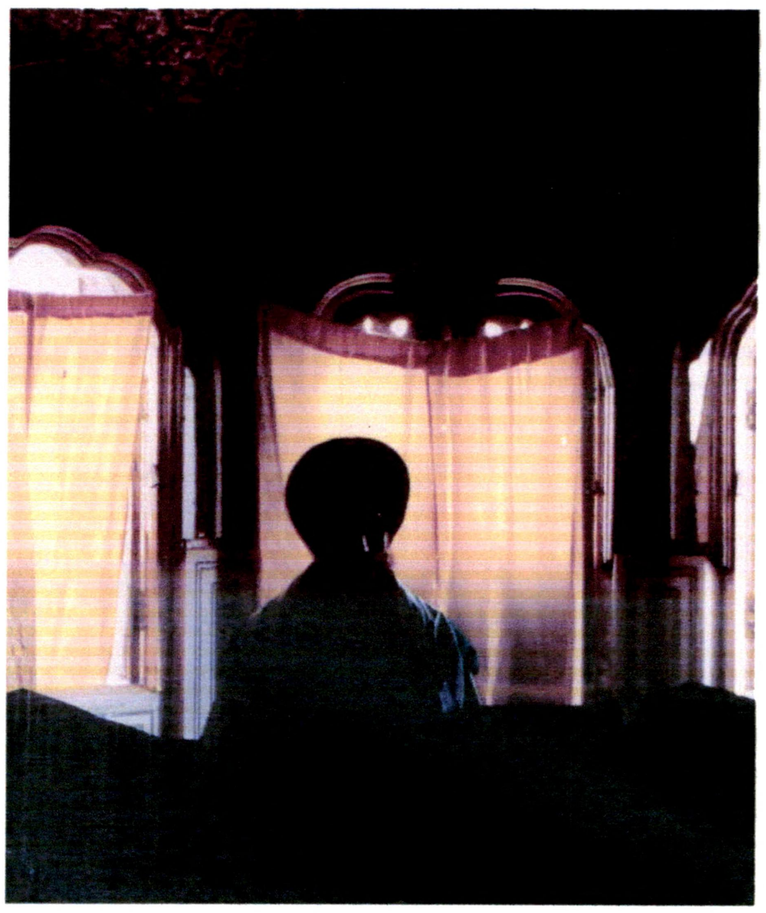
[14] K.C Aryan., 1977.. The Pool of Nectar. Marg. Vol XXX, No.3, June 1977. Marg Publications, Mumbai..



The Guru Granth Sahib
being carried in procession
as bearers take its golden palki
on their shoulders to the
Harmandir sanctum early in
the morning



The sheer presence of the Holy Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib
humbles the magnificence of the surface decorations as the devotee
finally finds solace in the words of the Guru

'*Mohrakashi*' for its gaudy style and showy exteriors. He thought that both these styles were not suitable for the simple tenets of Sikhism and a sober and pure place of worship like the Golden Temple.

The gilding of the embossed plate, above the marble skirt of the Harmandir, the renewal of the *pietra dura*, the embellishment of the interior, with lovely ceilings, adorned with floral relief and little mirrors – all these and more were all renovated, finished and perfected under the patronage of the great monarch. It was a provocation for men and women to brood upon the inner splendor, after gazing at the beauty and wonder of the outer house and body of the Temple of God.

The '*Harmandir*' was given its present appearance by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It came to be known as the 'Golden Temple' because of its lofty golden domes. The Maharaja employed artists at court, collected Mughal artifacts, jades, crystals, built monuments, laid out gardens, very much in keeping with the Mughal style. His court and its art was also influenced by the existing British / French presence and the adjacent *Kashmiri* influx of ideas, trends, motifs and techniques.

Ranjit Singh created an atmosphere of religious tolerance in which Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, French and British were all appointed to high offices. Artists and craftsmen, drawn from these communities worked for their patrons without regard for religious differences. The Sikh Maharaja's throne was made by a Muslim, and craftsmen of all religions worked on the new building of the 'Golden Temple'. Artists from the Hindu hill kingdoms moved away from their traditional patrons to find work in the Sikh empire, their styles having a major influence on the work being produced in the Punjab plains. Itinerant painters and illuminators from Kashmir traveled throughout the Sikh kingdom, producing manuscripts for whoever would employ them.

Special Ornamentation Effects

For the exterior, marble and gold has been extensively used for decoration. Marble has been used on the lower storey whereas gold in all its glory adorns the upper half upto the finale of the majestic bulbous dome. The marble has very fine pietra dura also known as '*Jaratkari*', a direct influence from the existing Mughal buildings particularly in Agra, Uttar Pradesh. Even today the marble workers come from Agra for the restoration work in the Golden Temple. In this technique various precious and semi-precious stones are inlaid in the marble. Around the Golden Temple we find mostly floral patterns. The exterior comes alive with the innumerable 'vegetation motifs' and designs consisting of flowers, foliage, fish, animals, birds, creepers, leaves, fruits and, of course, a few human figures. This truly states that 'there is no life without vegetation' and there is no vegetation without life'. Life is paramount in the Golden Temple thus making it a living place.

The upper half of the exterior is covered with gold. It is extensively decorated and embellished with gold plates fully or partially embossed also known as '*Chittrai*'. Basically three different techniques of gold plating have been used. Interestingly, for all the three techniques, different sets of artisans and craftsmen were employed. Like the pietra dura the gold also comes alive with the play of light and shadow on the vegetation and floral pattern relief created by embossing.

The beauty of the interior is still more breathtaking. Its richly ornamented floral designs, either painted in *tempera*, embossed in metal or inset in marble are a warm expression of the intense religious emotion of the Sikh faith as captured in visual designs. Arabesques with floral designs in the fine filigree and enamel work decorate the walls and ceiling of the central hall. Its arches are ornamented with verses from the '*Guru Granth Sahib'*, reproduced in letters of gold as was the case in the Mughal buildings where calligraphy was an inherent

part of Islamic Art. There are also decorative inlay figures and floral designs studded at places with semiprecious stones and pieces of reflecting glass in stucco. Hundreds of frescoes depicting floral patterns interspersed with animal motifs also decorated the walls. Some rare murals can be seen on the walls along the stairs, among them of special interest is a portrait of Guru Gobind Singh on horse back.

Amrit Sarovar: Some Myths and Facts

'Ram Das Sarovar nathae sab utrae paap kamatae'

By bathing in the Ram Das tank all the sins are washed away. [15]

The origin of the place where the *Harmandir* stands is shrouded in mystery. Some traditions trace its origin back to pre-historic times and declare it to be a place of religious importance having in its womb an *amrit kund* (reservoir of nectar). The version seems to have been borrowed from an ancient Hindu epic, the *Ramayana.* The place lost its eminence under the impact of the Buddhist movement which swept away most of the important Hindu places of pilgrimage. It does not, however, need much ingenuity to show that this site, before its association with the Sikh Guru, was a low-lying area with a small pond at the place where the *Dukh Bhanjani beri* (the *ber* tree which is the healer of pain) stands at present. The pond apparently lay on the route of caravans to the North-West frontier. Thus, its surroundings had a geographical importance and provided a commercial link between India and Afghanistan. The site lay in oblivion till it was later rediscovered by the Sikh Gurus. Legend and miracles connected with the origin of the *amrit sarovar* (tank of nectar), state that Guru Amar Das, later on the third Sikh Guru, found at the side of the pool a herb that could cure skin disease.

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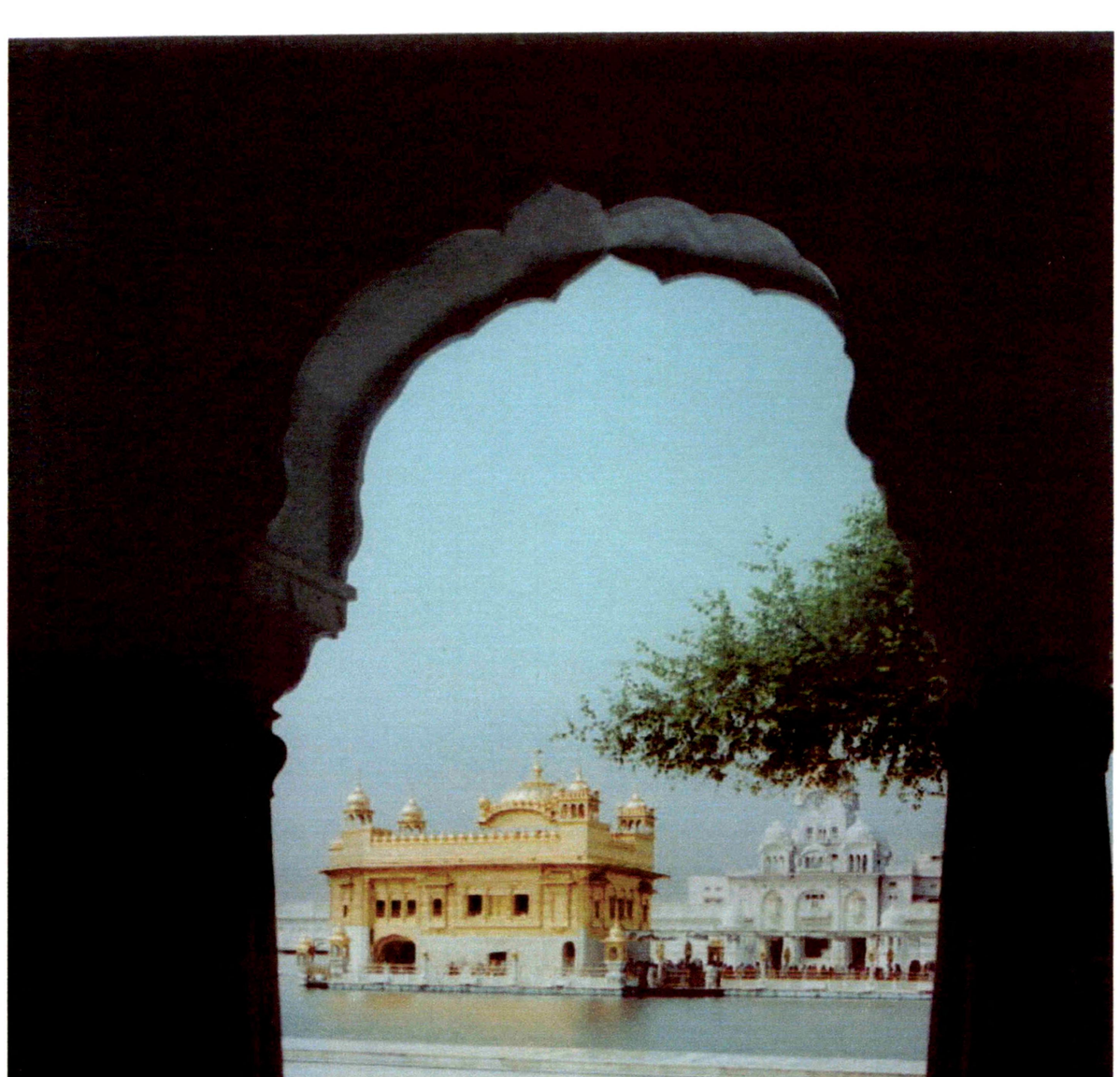
[15] Sri Guru Granth Sahib Panna, 625.

For the last 400 years every day and night this holy water has been constantly receiving and absorbing the celestial waves and emotions and impulses of the word of the Gurus or the '*Gurbani*'. It has imbibed the peace, tranquility and devoutness making it truly nectar or 'amrit'. It is saturated with the eternal sweetness of the Holy '*Naam*' of the wonderful Lord. Little wonder then that the waters of this holy tank do not ever go bad. There is no algae or growth of any kind. No insects enter in this blessed water.

Known as one of the most fascinating cities of northern India, Amritsar is also one of the most ancient and legendary sites in the Punjab. According to popular belief[16]- which is doubtless of local origin –Valmiki wrote his celebrated epic, the *Ramayana,* near the hallowed site of the "Pool of Nectar". It was here, too, that Sita stayed during the period of her *vanavasa* (banishment). Here again, the twin sons of Lord Rama, were taught the *Ramayana.* Yet another legend identifies the site of this pool with the place where the whole of Lord Rama's army was destroyed by his sons, *Lava* and *Kusha* and related the incidence of how a jug of nectar had descended from the heavens to restore the soldiers to life.

Valmiki's *ashram*, it is said, lay within a short distance of the renowned "Pool of Nectar". In Valmiki's time, the area was a thick forest and around Valmiki's *ashram were* some more tanks with historical associations. One such hexagonal tank, *Ram Tirth*, is at a distance of around 11 kilometers from Amritsar the others are Ramsar, Santokhsar, Ram Talai and Durgiana.

Guru Ram Das must have known of the mythological or legendary importance of the place when he sanctified the pool of nectar in the sixteenth century. The Sikh faith founded by Guru Nanak, and of which Guru Ram Das was the fourth Guru, was, in essence, an all-embracing faith. It took in its stride the egalitarian traditions of Islam and blended them with the transcendental



The geometrically patterned Parkarma is a pleasing foreground for the exquisite splendour of the Harmandir when seen at first sight

wisdom of Hindu thought. Actually, it was in 1574 A.D., that Guru Ram Das made his home by the side of the pool, which was regarded as blessed with miraculous powers of healing. The place where the Guru lived was known as *Guru-Ka-Mahal.* In 1577, Guru Ram Das, finding the air and water of his abode health giving, purchased the pool and some surrounding land from its owners, the neighbouring *jats*. It is believed that Emperor Akbar himself had offered the grant of twelve villages to the pool several times, but the Guru had, on every occasion, declined the gift.

This seat of the Sikh ideology and religion- the Golden Temple[17] has been graced with the *'Charankamal'* or lotus feet of eight of the ten Divine Gurus of Sikhism. The *Adi Granth* was first installed by the Fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, himself, at this shrine. This is why the Sikhs believe that the holy *Guru Granth Sahib* is the word from God Himself. *Harmandir*, the abode of God as also the *Darbar Sahib* or the Assembly of the Lord are the most appropriate names used for this holiest of holy places for humanity.

It is a most pious place of worship because the *Gurbani Kirtan,* in praise of the Lord, is continually and always being recited here. Other than *Kirtan, Ardas* and *Hukamnama* not a single other word concerning worldly affairs is ever uttered in the sanctum sanctorum. When any visitor or devotee steps down to enter the sacred *Harmandir* complex he is enthralled with the melody and resonance of *kirtan* that reverberates within the precincts and which transports him to the realm of ecstasy.

There are very few writers who have left behind eyewitness accounts of the events relating to the Golden Temple although there is a plethora of the oral and written traditions. The Europeans were the first to record the historical events

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[16] Ibid
[17] Percy Brown, 1995. Indian Architecture – Islamic; D.B Taraporevala Sons and Company, Mumbai.

and accounts of Punjab and the Sikhs. Most of these accounts unwittingly ignore the early history of the Golden Temple.

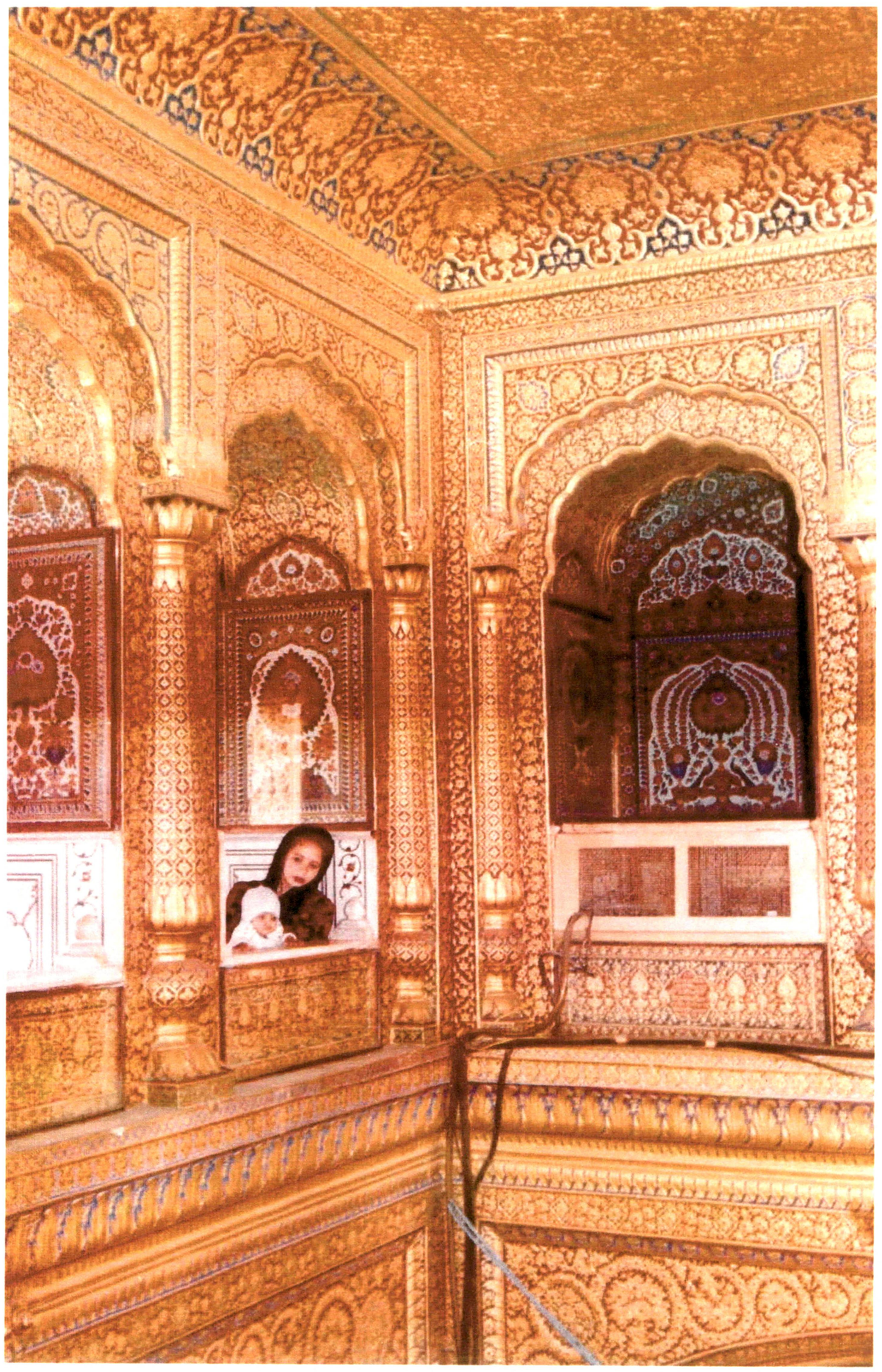
The Living Monument

A living monument of spiritual and historical traditions of the Sikhs, the *Harmandir*, popularly called the Golden Temple, has been a source of inspiration to the Sikh community ever since it was founded. Sikhism arose as a reformatory movement in the 16th century in the wake of the *Bhakti Cult*. The traditional visit to *Tirthas* [places of Hindu pilgrimage], had lost much relevance in the contemporary situation and could not cope with the exigencies and demands of the time. The Sikh Guru felt a dire need to reject dogmatic Hindu customs and to introduce healthy and progressive practices with a view to give Sikhs a distinct identity. Accordingly, they followed a policy of founding new Sikh centres of pilgrimage for their followers. The founding of Sri *Harmandir* at Amritsar was a landmark in this respect. The Temple, in due course has become an unparalleled place of pilgrimage and Sikh bards have sung paeans in its praise from time to time.

'Harmandir har(i) jio sajya merae Lal jio
Har(i) tis mein rahiya samaye Ram'

'My Lord has Himself created this Harmandir and He has merged in it'
(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Panna 542)

IDENTIFICATION AND LISTING OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF SURFACE DECORATIONS



The golden embellishments of the walls and ceiling of the sanctum are a magnificent example of the *gach* work done anywhere in the world as the sheer golden impact is irresistibly amazing to the common eye as the devotee reflects upon the Divine glory of the Creator

CHAPTER 3

The grandeur of the workmanship takes one beyond the realm of the mortal and provokes one to contemplate the celestial and the pristine, giving credence to the lines from the *Holy Guru Granth Sahib* – indeed the Lord Himself seems to have created the Harmandir and merged with it. As one looks at the embellishments of the sancto sanctorum one is truly spellbound with the exquisite beauty and superb execution. It evokes devotion and piety in the soul as one sits in the inner chambers. One is mesmerized by the delicacy of the embellishments in various hues and myriad forms. The sight in itself is enough to transport one to the heights of Divine ecstasy.

With art coming into contact with the Sikh mind, there emerged in the Punjab a distinct style of architecture. This style has been interpreted by Percy Brown[1] as a 'late' form of the Mughal style of architecture. But the Sikh architecture is at once striking and attractive and presents a certain character of its own although its exponents adopted the Muslim architecture and harmonized it with the Hindu style. Specimens of this style are the Sikh shrines at Amritsar. The most striking example of the synthesis wrought by the Sikh mind in Muslim styles of architecture is the Golden Temple which may be said to represent Sikh architecture in all its distinctive features. It testifies to the fact that the Sikhs had acquired skill in adopting patterns and motifs suiting their own taste, philosophy and way of living with the upper half of its exteriors covered with golden plates and the lower sheathed in marble, and with the interiors profusely decorated with fresco-paintings and filigree embellishments, the Golden Temple is without doubt, the acme of Sikh architecture.

The Structure, Architecture and Decorations of the Edifice

The main entrance porch has a dome in modern structure with a big clock fixed just below it. The sacred tank which holds the temple in its midst like a lotus flower, is 150 metres square and 17 feet deep. Running around the outer edge of the tank is a marble pavement (*Parkarma*) 60 feet wide, with marble slabs of various shapes, designs and colours arranged in vivid, geometrical patterns.

"The architecture of the Darshani Deorhi is extremely impressive. The kiosk like architectural features on the top of the Deorhi is modeled on the Bengal-Mughal *chhatri* style. The gate frame of the Darshani Deorhi is 10 feet by 8 feet. The wooden portals attached to it are made of *shisham* (Dalbergia sisoo) wood, and are six inches thick, covered with silver. The sides of the door have square and rectangular panels inlaid in artistic ivory work. There are geometrical and floral designs. Birds and animals (viz. lions, tigers and deer) are depicted in these designs. Green and red colours are used in the ivory inlay of the Darshani Deorhi. The overall effect of the craftsmanship is extremely rhythmical.

According to one version, the portals were got prepared by one Bhai Des Raj in AD 1765 i.e. during the *misl* period out of voluntary contributions made by the people, and the inlay in ivory was done by Muslim craftsmen of Chiniot [now in Pakistan]"[2].

A causeway, about 60 metres long, spans the water on the western side of the tank to connect the Temple with the Darshani Deorhi. The causeway has balustrades on either side. Each balustrade is crowned with elegant lanterns made of copper-gilt. They number nine on each side. Reaching the centre of the

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[1]Percy Brown, 1956. Indian Architecture – Hindu and Buddhist. D.B Taraporewala and Sons Co. Pvt Ltd. Bombay.

[2] Madanjit Kaur, 1983. The Golden Temple: Past and Present. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

tank, the causeway opens into a platform, 20 meters square, over which the Temple (52-meters square) stands.

The Harmandir Sahib Premises

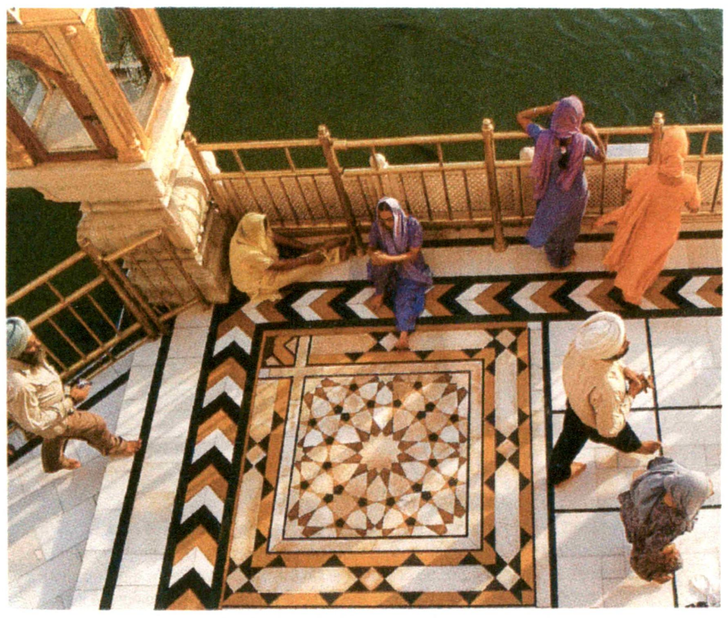
Special features of the central structure of the Harmandir Sahib are the balconies of the windows which are literally perched on carved brackets, low fluted domes and arches and other structural embellishments of similar order. The square building of the Harmandir has a dome-shaped roof, plated with copper-gilt. The central shrine is a two-storeyed structure over which rises a low-fluted majestic dome in copper covered with gold. The dome is designed as a lotus flower.

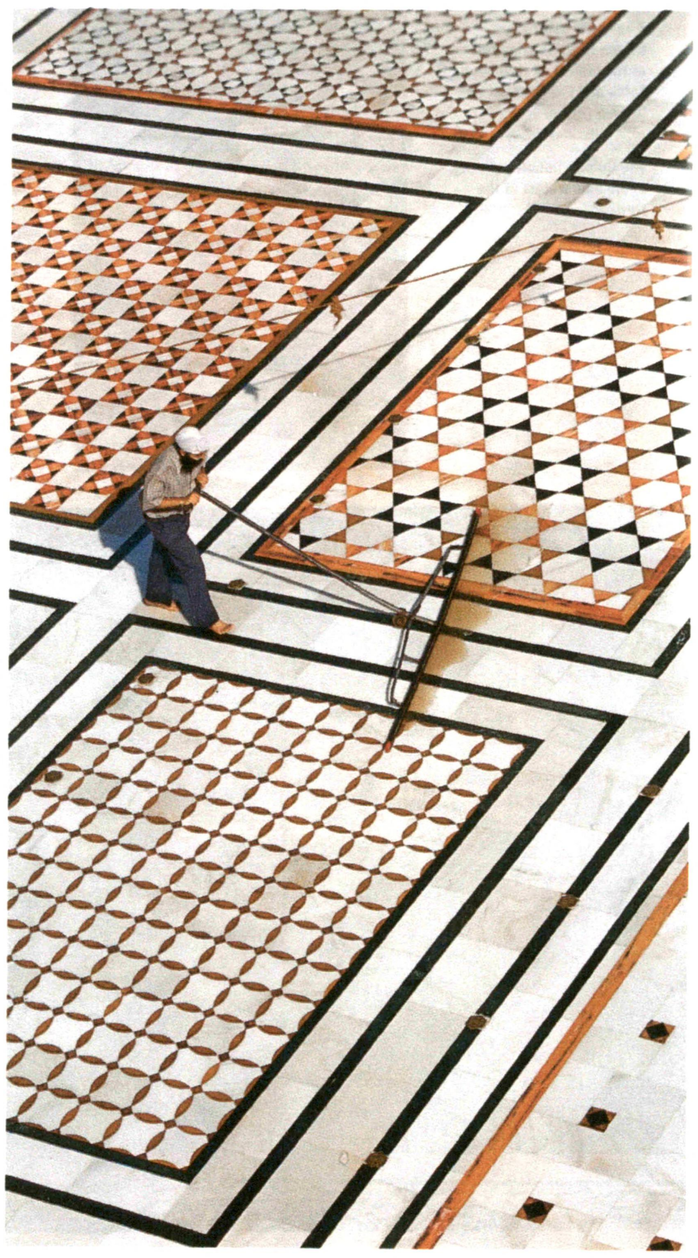
Architecturally, the dome presents neither exclusively the Hindu form nor the Muslim one. It shows an evolution of its own, which can be called a synthesis of the two styles. The central dome presents a splendidly sparkling appearance in sunshine. The glittering beauty of the dome has been a subject of absorbing interest for Punjabi poets, singing the *mahima* (glory) of the Harmandir.

The combination of several large, medium and miniature domes of gilded copper create a unique and dazzling effect, which is rendered all the more ethereal by the reflection in the waters of the *sarovar* below. Four *chhatris* (umbrella like structures) with fluted metal cupolas stand at each corner. The floor of the upper storey is paved with *Nanak Shahi* bricks [old bricks which have a typical size and structure that is unique of that period]. These red bricks are broad on the top and narrow at the bottom, and stand exquisitely laid in very fine brick-mortar and lime. They have a fine black clay lining too. The frequent introduction of windows supported on brackets and the enrichment of arches with numerous foliation on the first floor give a picturesque appearance. Intricate designs on marble inlaid with stones of different hues on the entrance to the inner sanctuary, are eye-catching in their excellence. The Darshani Deorhi,

infact, prepares the pilgrim for the glorious sights to come. A large hall forms the interior of the Harmandir. The holy *Granth* rests under a magnificent canopy in the centre of this hall. Fine filigree and enamel work in gold decorate the interiors of this hall. The door on the southern side of the central hall provides the approach to the water in the holy tank. The steps there are called *Har-ki-Pauri*. The staircase adjoining *Har-ki-Pauri* leads to the first floor of the shrine.

There is a small square pavilion surmounted by a low-fluted golden dome in this storey. The interior of the pavilion is set with pieces of mirrors of different sizes and shapes. These vie for attention with the semi-precious stones of many colours. The hall is 42 square feet in area. Its mezzanine has been designed so as to leave a square opening in the centre to facilitate a view of the ground floor from the balconies. This ratifies the Sikh tenets that there can be nothing above the Holy Granth Sahib. It is said that originally the first floor was a pavilion where the Sikh Gurus sat in meditation. The hall was profusely embellished with floral designs during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The inlay work on the ceiling as well as the walls of the *Shish Mahal*, is reminiscent of the great skill of our artists. This part of the building is now used for *akhand paths* by devotees from all over the world. The walls of the hall are decorated with floral designs and its arches are ornamented with verses from the *Guru Granth Sahib*. These are reproduced in letters of gold. This seems to be an imitation of the Muslim practice of engraving verses from the Holy Quran. The Sikh artists, however, have maintained the excellence of their art and juxtaposed it with tasteful renditions from the *Gurban*i which are given pride of place. The walls of the hall stand inlaid with figures and floral designs adorned and studded at places with precious stones. This *Jaratkari* (craftsmanship) reminds us of the pietra dura tradition. It somewhat resembles the Mughal technique used for the decoration of the Taj Mahal at Agra. But the *Jaratkari* of the Golden Temple has an edge over the *Jaratkari* of the Taj because the former has human figures also besides the usual floral designs so characteristic of the Taj. The Sikh artists seem to have evolved





Marble Flooring

Courtesy : Walking with The Gurus Historical Gurdwaras of Punjab

these motifs from their concepts of life as human figures in yogic poses can be glimpsed in these panels.

The walls of the first floor contain fine art work in plaster of Paris too. It has been technically called *gach* work. The ceiling of the central dome is admittedly a work of great craftsmanship. The surface decorations on the porch of the first floor display fine *naqqashi* executed in gold and are embedded with semi-precious stones of various colours and mirrors of different shapes and varieties. Likewise the walls of the stairs leading to the second floor abound in some of the rare master pieces of Sikh paintings.

Speaking of the lavish embellishments and the colourful decorations of the Golden Temple, Percy Brown[3] opines: "As an example not so much of architectural style but of religious emotion materialized in marble, glass, colours and metal, the Golden Temple at Amritsar is equaled only by the Dragon Pagoda in Ragoon; the former symbolizes the faith of the Sikhs and the latter is the highest expression in a very similar range of material of another Indian religion, that of the Buddhists".

The desire to see their temples gloriously constructed impels the devotees even today to present their offerings in the form of marble slabs and gold. The

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[3] Percy Brown, 1995. Indian Architecture-Buddhist & Hindu; D.B. Taraporevala and Sons Co. Pvt Ltd. Mumbai.
[4] Susan Strong, 1990. Decorative Arts of India , Studio editions. U.K.
[5] Ibid
[6] Till very recently no attempt had been made at any level to systematically document the various forms of embellishmelts of the Golden Temple from the perspective of any art historian. Because of their great intrinsic value it is necessary that a meticulous record be maintained of the workmanship, the techniques, the materials, the artisans, the themes and the specific areas of attention as regards the contents and composition of the embellishments. No doubt there may have been articulate registering of the people involved in the work done on the embellishments at some earlier date or when they were being made. The artisans must have some tracings, drawings etc, to go on, but with the passage of time these have been lost to history and at present no documentation remains, underlining all the more, the absolute significance of the present study in carefully putting together a record of the various embellishments. It is with this intent that the present scholar proposes to showcase the surface decorations within the Harmandir, its ancillary shrines and see how these embellishments have become the role model for subsequent Sikh shrines around the world.

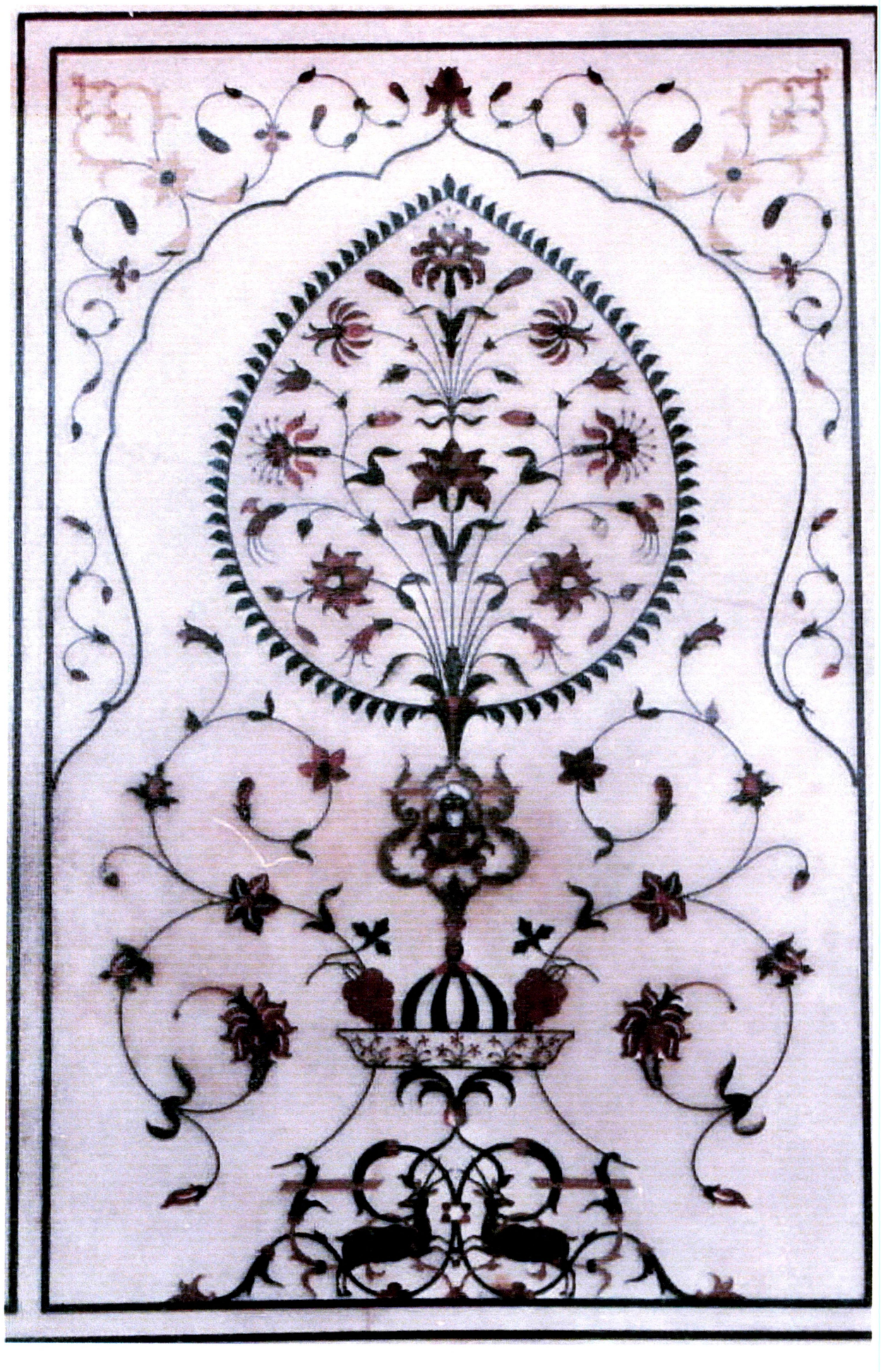
slabs are laid at various places in the Temple with inscriptions carved on them giving the names of the donors and the amounts donated by them.

As already mentioned, the Harmandir owes it present structure to the joint efforts of the *misls*. It began to take shape from the year AD 1765 by when the Sikhs had successfully beaten back Ahmad Shah Abdali and his hordes. The philanthropy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh contributed greatly to the ethereal beauty of the Golden Temple through the marble laying and gold-plating which came much later through the great reverence of the Maharaja for this nerve centre of Sikh ideology and power.

The architecture of the Golden Temple is marked by the beauty of its superb setting. The overall effect of the Temple is very striking. The Central shrine rising from the midst of a big tank, with its enchanting reflection in the clear water, with only a single bridge to reach it, imparts the entire edifice a heavenly look.

The Surface Decorations and their Techniques

There has been no chronicle testifying to the documentation of the embellishments being planned and carried out at any stage in history. Even during the times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the artisans were drawn from various regions and enjoyed royal patronage but there was never any record of the drawings done or the later work being improved upon in any manner. The workers carried out their tasks as if doing so with a devotion that would attain them spiritual gain and not mere monetary inputs and earthly fame. The present study has delved deep into the living and recorded evidences of the different types of work done to give the embellishments their present day shape. The surface decorations can be categorized into various types and forms. Although requiring great skill of the artiste they are evidently remarkable for being pure



The animal and human figures are so enmeshed in the trellis work of floral patterns that they seem at one with them. This is almost symbolic of man's equity with his environment

labour of love or *sewa*. These surface decorations must really have been and continue to be remarkable in their beauty whether it is *gach* work or *kach* work, peitra dura or the golden gilding work.

It is pertinent here to attempt a detailed listing of the different types of techniques used in the surface decorations within the Golden Temple Complex. It is also necessary to identify the sites where these techniques have furbished the décor and elan' of this most sanctified of shrines in Sikhism.

1. **Gold Plating or *Mohra Kashi / Chittrai*** : This is the art of plating a surface with gold leaf and embellishing it further with embossed patterns in relief that stand out with a beauty all their own. There have been different techniques of gold plating used in the Golden Temple.

2. **Marble inlay work or *Jaratkari***: Also known as peitra dura. It has been used on the exterior of the lower half of the sanctum. It has been directly influenced by the existing Mughal buildings of Agra in Uttar Pradesh. In this technique the inlay work was done by using various precious and semi-precious stones for inlay in marble.

3. **Flooring [Marble]**: The entire flooring within the Golden Temple Complex is of marble of various hues and many interesting geometric patterns. It is most evident around the *parkarma* or circumambulatory path around the Harmandir and the *sarovar*.

4. ***Kach* or Mirror work:** The technique of embedding circular, small mirrors in plaster of Paris [PoP] / gypsum in a myriad of delicate patterns is rooted in traditional Mughal, Pahari and Rajasthani themes. The size of the *kach* or mirror varies. This work can be seen on the walls and ceiling of the upper storey.

5. ***Gach* work or embossing in PoP / Gypsum**: It is the technique of embossing patterns on PoP or gypsum[4] base with the help of moulds. These embossed patterns or mouldings are decorated and embellished further by being painted in beautiful, rich colours most commonly red, gold, green and royal blue. This work is found extensively in the upper areas of the inner sanctum.

6. **Wood work**: There are references to the woodwork in the Golden Temple but at present most of the surfaces have been plated or have been replaced.

7. **Frescoes / Murals**: Fresco is a technique of wall painting. In the Golden Temple we find these frescoes on the walls of the first floor of the inner sanctum. These are beautiful panels of painted floral patterns in vivid hues done on a light base. Murals depicting episodes in the lives of the Gurus are used in the Baba Atal shrine. These frescoes take root from the Mughal, Pahari and Rajasthani techniques.

8. **Brick work**: Glazed bricks have been laid in interesting geometric patterns that tantalize one with their uniqueness and exquisite attention to detail. This work is found on the roof of the top floor of the Harmandir.

9. **Marble carving**: This is the technique of delicately carving relief patterns onto the marble panels around the peitra dura work. Another interesting aspect of this carving is the lattice work or the carving out of lacy patterns in marble and cutting out artistic spaces in the marble to allow the air to circulate through. This technique of *jaali* work was very popular in the Mughal era.

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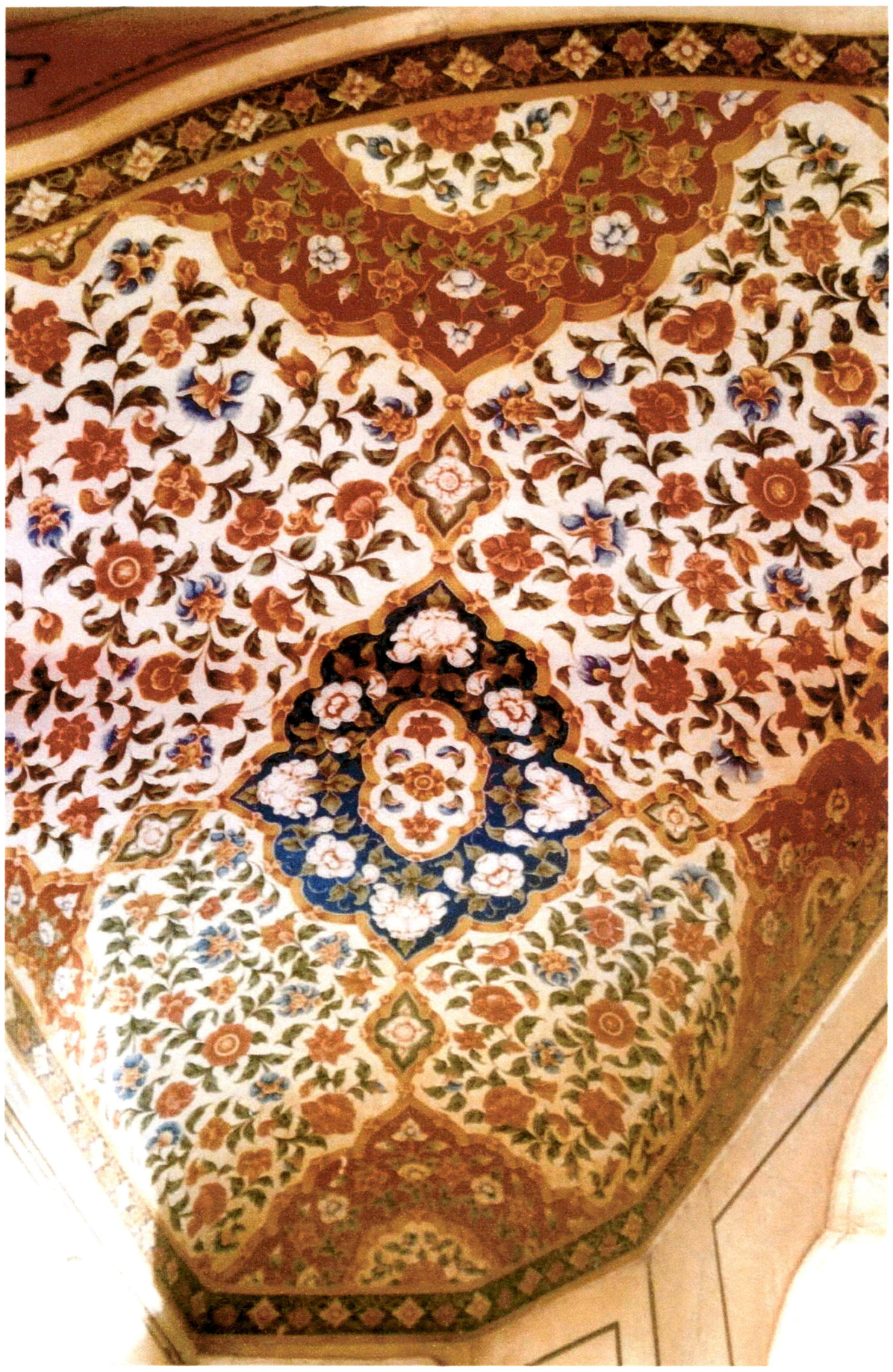


The ceiling of the sanctum is a saga of beauty that could have been equaled only by a resplendent display of jewelry and ornaments placed together closely on a surface. The colours of the surface and their positioning are most pleasing to the eye and show the dexterity of the artisan in reflecting his devotion onto the surface decorations.

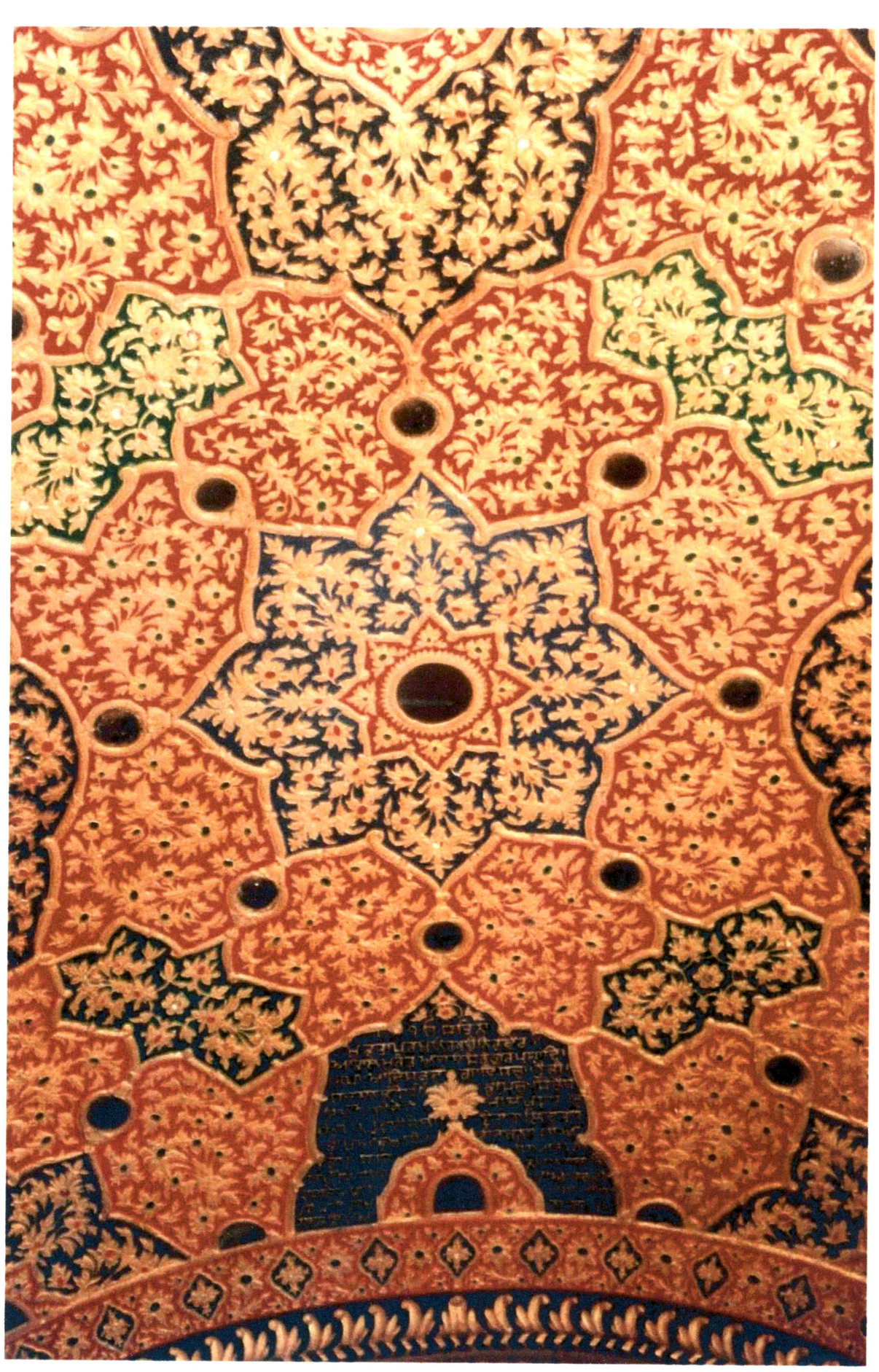
10. **Calligraphy:** Around the ceiling worked into the *gach* is very fine calligraphy in gold painted letters of *Gurmukhi* in a running hand that decorate the arches of the first floor. The calligraphy is of incantations or *patth* which are elaborately picked out in magnificent designs with intricate borders all around in a vivid kaleidoscope of colours.

This research study is, thus, an examination of how the above techniques have been used singly and in combination all over the precincts of the Golden Temple Complex. The extent of each technique, its merging with other techniques to bring out a well balanced façade and how these techniques are being cared for and supplemented in the present day will all be discussed subsequently to obtain a rationalization of the embellishments in terms of maintenance and preservation. Recent trends[6] in the preservation of this significant historical edifice will also be gone into and the expertise being used will be d%tailed appropriately.

Till very recently no attempt had been made at any level to systematically document the various forms of embellishments of the Golden Temple from the perspective of any art historian. Because of their great intrinsic value it is necessary that a meticulous record be maintained of the workmanship, the techniques, the materials, the artisans, the themes and the specific areas of attention as regards the contents and composition of the embellishments. No doubt there may have been articulate registering of the people involved in the work done on the embellishments at some earlier date or when they were being made. The artisans must have some tracings, drawings etc, to go on, but with the passage of time these have been lost to history and at present no documentation remains, underlining all the more, the absolute significance of the present study in carefully putting together a record of the various embellishments. It is with this intent that the present scholar proposes to showcase the surface decorations

within the Harmandir, its ancillary shrines and see how these embellishments have become the role model for subsequent Sikh shrines around the world.

Presented in the subsequent chapters is the detailed discussion of the various forms of embellishments, their location and their content. As the surface decorations are placed at specific sites within the Golden Temple a large number of slides were needed to adequately capture the true glory of the magnificent work.



The calligraphy visible amongst the embellishments makes on reflect upon the word of the Guru as one is transported into the deepest state of rapture when faced with the splendour of the gach work in Prussian blue, crimson, emerald green and gold

'Gur Seva Tae Sukh paeeyae
horat sukh [u] na phal [i]'

'Eternal bliss is found in the service of the Lord and cannot equal
any other form of pleasure nor can it be surmounted'
(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Panna 548)

ARTISTS, ARTISANS, CRAFTSMEN, EMBELLISHERS, DECORATORS

Link with the past and present

**Development and innovation of
technique material and equipment :
An analysis**



The frescoes are so vibrant in colour that they defy
the imagination of the ordinary pilgrim as he drinks in their visual feast

Chapter 4

The central point of the aspirations expressed in the verse quoted on the title page of this chapter is the Golden Temple in itself. The present day appearance and glory of the Golden Temple is the contribution of the pure heart and devout soul of the foremost Sikh Maharaja, Ranjit Singh who envisioned the golden magnificence of the Harmandir with his solitary eye.

Thus, it is due to these sustained efforts of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the deep devotion of the Sikhs towards the shrine that the Golden Temple became all the more glorious and magnificent in its purity. In brief it can be concluded that the Harmandir Sahib is a glorious souvenir or a trophy from the Almighty which has been given by Him with love and affection. The shrine is a historical monument which is the result of their untiring service and creates an attractive and captivating spiritual atmosphere which provides ecstatic pleasure and serenity to the soul of Man.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh donated Rs 50, 000/- to roof the temple with sheets of gilded copper, and the work was executed by Mistri Yar Mohammad Khan, under the supervision of Bhai Sand Singh. The first plate on the temple was fixed in 1803 A.D. The personages who donated for the embellishment of the ceiling on the ground floor included Tara Singh Gheba, Pratap Singh, Jodh Singh and Ganda Singh Peshawari, the last of whom made his contribution in 1823 A.D. the archway under the Darshani Deorhi was embellished with sheets of gilded copper by Sangat Singh, the Raja of Jind. Being the central shrine of the Sikhs, almost every *sardar* of any pretension contributed to it's architectural and decorative additions from time to time. That is why it is not feasible, except for a few date-inscribed works, to make a chronological account of the decorations, murals or other forms of art, in the Golden Temple.

According to another version[1], the portals were got prepared by one Bhai Des Raj in AD 1765 i.e. during the *misl* period out the of voluntary contributions made by the people, and the inlay in ivory was done by Muslim craftsmen of Chiniot.

For the exterior, marble and gold has been extensively used to decorate. Marble has been used on the lower story whereas gold, in all its glory, adorns the upper half of the sanctum right up to the finial of the majestic, bulbous dome. The marble has been worked upon with very fine peitra dura also known as *'Jaratkari'* which has been a direct influence from the existing Mughal buildings particularly at Agra in Uttar Pradesh. Even today the marble workers are brought from Agra for the restoration work concerning the surface decorations in the Golden Temple. In this technique various precious and semi precious stones are inlaid in the marble. Around the Golden Temple we find mostly floral patterns. The exterior comes alive with the innumerable 'vegetation motifs' and designs consisting of flowers, foliage, fish, animals, birds, creepers, leaves, fruits and some human beings like the '*yogi* in a trance' on one of the panels.

The upper half of the exterior is covered with gold. It is extensively decorated and embellished with gold plates which are fully or partially embossed. This technique is known colloquially as *Chittrai*. The gold plating has been done by three different techniques and different artists and artisans specialized in each of these forms of gold plating. Just as the pietra dura comes alive with the vibrant hues of precious and semi-precious stones so too the gold work when its is played upon by the natural light of the elements like the Sun and the Moon as well as the subdued lighting during the dusk and dawn. The clear and the cloudy skies as well as the artificial lighting has an amazing effect upon this gilded marvel. One is almost drunk with joy when witnessing the beautiful scene of the Golden temple in its entire splendor and its majestic reflection in the 'Pool of

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[1] Madanjit Kaur, 1983. Golden Temple Past and Present. Guru Nanak Dev University. Amritsar.



Life like images of the frescoes are wondrous examples of art imitating life.
They give the effect of Persian carpets hung on the walls. Just looking at the panels transports
the pilgrim into the realm of the Divine as he reflects upon their vibrant beauty





A close up of the motifs worked into the fresco show the creatures of every day life like birds, animals and exotic floral representations. The dramatic coloration adds to the visual impact

The fantastic placement of the real and the unreal worlds has been beautifully presented in this frescoe where the hermit is king and is shown as having gained sovereignty over all worldly lures while reflecting upon the 'True Name'

Nectar' or the *Sarovar*. The embossed floral patterns in gold seem to come to life when the light plays a staccato beat upon these embellished surfaces.

The beauty of the interior is still more breathtaking. It's richly ornamented floral designs, either painted in tempera, embossed in metal or inset in marble are a warm expression of the intense emotion of the Sikh faith captured in a visual feast. Arabesques with floral designs in the fine filigree and enamel work decorate the walls and the ceiling of the central hall. Its arches are ornamented with verses from the Guru Granth Sahib reproduced in letters of gold as was the case in the Mughal buildings where calligraphy was an inherent part of Islamic Art. There are also decorative inlay figures and floral designs studded at places with semiprecious stones and pieces of reflecting glass in stucco. Hundreds of frescoes depicting floral patterns interspersed with animal motifs also decorate the walls. Some rare murals can be seen on the walls along the stairs; among them of special interest is a portrait of Guru Gobind Singh on horse back.

The philosophy of the Sikh gurus revolved around simplicity and humility while attaining the highest ideals through *kirat* or effort. They extolled the virtues of humility and advocated that men rise above the baser vices of *'kama',krodh', 'lobh','moh'* and *'ahankar'.* It was in keeping with these salient features of their way of life that the Golden Temple was designed. It has been built at a lower gradient that the surroundings which give the Golden Temple, an impression of being immersed in the '*Sarovar',* and the whole effect is that of a veritable lotus afloat on the tranquil waters.

The concept of '*kaar seva'* or voluntary contribution of physical and skilled labour for performance of any of the tasks that may require the building, maintenance, embellishment, repair and restoration. The work of restoration was probably begun in the times of the first Guru Arjan Dev who performed the first *Kaar Seva* at Amritsar when he initiated for the deepening of the tank and brick

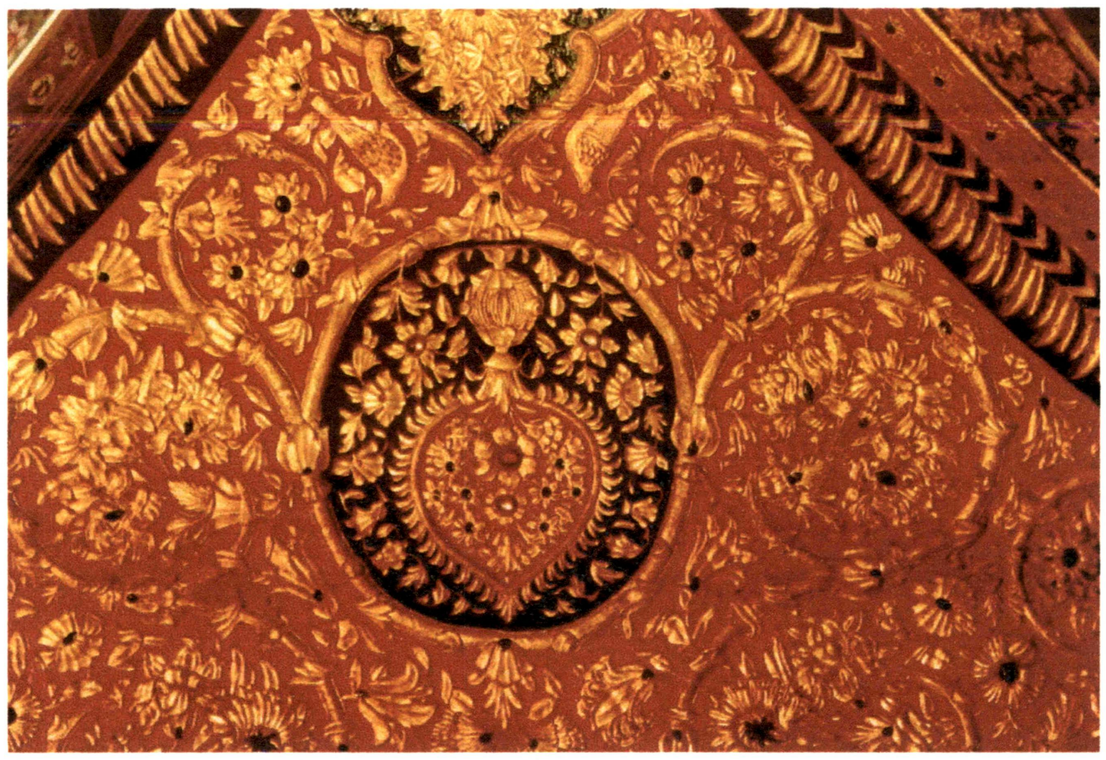
lining of its banks with steps leading down to the bottom of the pool. In this labour of love, devout Sikhs like Baba Buddha and others assisted the Guru.

History is evidence to the fact that the Golden Temple's creation, embellishment and gilding was more a labour of love as it was the total devotion of devout Sikhs who epitomized it as the fountain head of their philosophy of life as well as the living monument of their spirituality. It was taken over, defiled and demolished but it was resurrected again and again and every time it rose up more resplendent and more glorious as it reinstated the faith of the Sikhs in their spirituality. It goes to the credit of the greatest Sikh Maharaja that the present golden form of the Harmandir can be directly attributed to him and his generous contribution. He had amassed wealth but he gave of it in equal measure to add to the glory of the Sikhs through the beautification of the Golden Temple.

Although the Sikh belief and edicts against image-worship left very little scope for the development of visual arts for needs of religious worship yet the need of the common man for images to base his worship on flouted the taboos of faith, and brought about many depictions in paintings. They spent large sums of money for the beautification of their *Gurudwaras.* The initiative of the Sikhs to give liberally of their resources for the magnificence and splendor of their shrines took on fresh vigor under the tutelage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Contributions in the form of money, grain and labour was made lavishly by the Sikhs for the construction of the shrines was ritualistic of the *bhakti* cult. Many individuals had portions of the walls embellished as their act of dedication to their faith. The Sikh tenets prescribe that a tenth or '*daswand*' of the earning of a devout Sikh should be the ritual offering to the Guru. This would be used for further promulgation of the faith and its institutions. Till date this practice is faithfully adhered to by Sikhs in India and abroad.



Finely worked floral designs in gach work are skillfully encased
in geometric star-shaped formations to enhance the forceful impact
on the senses as one looks at it in awe and wonderment

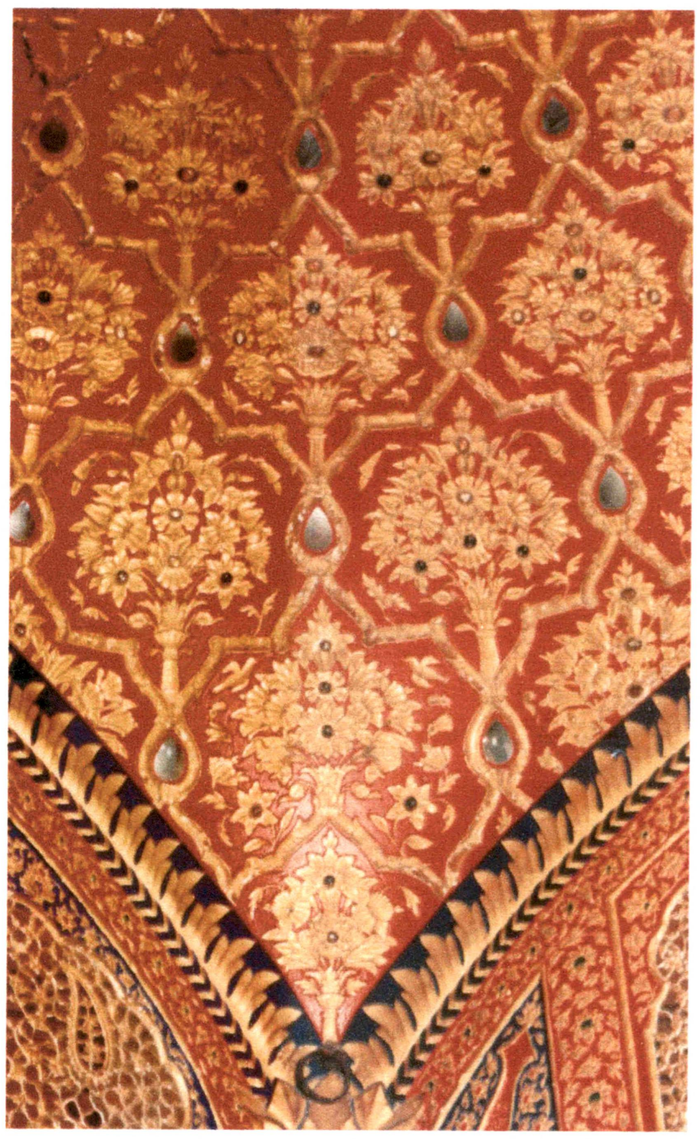


A tantalizing presentation of the traditional motifs like the tree
of life have been off-set by the symmetrical borders



Delicately worked borders capture the beauty of the workmanship in gold and
the earthy colours of blue, red and green interspersed with gold





A corner of the
ceiling of the inner
sanctum is a delight
in geometric patterning
juxtaposed with floral
designs having mirrors
worked in intermittently
to give the tantalizing
effect of several lights and
a mosaic of rich colour

Patrons

As the Harmandir embodied the central crux of the Sikh faith, all the devotees gave liberally of their wealth, resources and skills to help reconstruct the temple into the glorified image of the Gurus themselves and their teachings.

"To roof the Temple with sheets of gilded copper, he [Maharaja Ranjit Singh] donated Rs 5,000,000/- and the work was executed by Mistri Yaar Mohammed Khan, under the supervision of Bhai Sand Singh. The first plate on the Temple was fixed in 1803 A.D. The personages who donated for the embellishment of the ceiling on the ground floor included Tara Singh Gheba, Pratab Singh, Jodh Singh and Ganda Singh Peshawri, the last of whom who made his contribution in 1823 A.D. The archway under the *Darshani Deorhi* was embellished with sheets of gilded copper by Sangat Singh, the Raja of Jind. Being the central shrine of the Sikhs, almost every Sardar of any pretension contributed to its architectural and decorative additions from time to time. That is why it is not feasible, except for a few date inscribed works, to make a chronological account of the decorations, murals or other work in the Golden Temple"[2].

After the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839 the task of completing the work fell on three prominent Sikhs. They were Bhagwan Singh Jamadar, Mangal Singh Ramgarhia and Rai Bahadur Kalyan Singh.

Supervisors

The original structure of the present day Golden Temple has undergone several stages of phoenix-like revival and reconstruction. It was razed to the ground by Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1762 A.D. Since the Golden Temple was the

premiere seat of religion and philosophy of the Sikhs it was considered imperative by the 'sardars' or leaders of the Sikhs to quickly rebuild the Golden Temple and restore it to its former glory. Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Commander Supreme, of the *Dal Khalsa* gave the clarion call for collection of contributions in cash and kind for the reconstruction to commence on the sacred site. Bhai Des Raj was given charge of the responsibility of supervising the construction work being done as well as handling all the transactions of materials and men as well as finance.

Several of the Chiefs constructed their own *bungas* to manage their men as they contributed their *kar seva* for the construction of the Golden Temple. They goaded their men to work indefatigably. They either worked physically on the construction or helped the artisans who were working on the surface embellishments.

Many members of the new Sikh aristocracy developing under the tutelage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh had begun to settle in Amritsar permanently, they had their *havelis* and *bungas* built in the town and could go from the immediate site of the construction to rest at their homestead whenever they wished. Several of the royalty, settled all over Punjab chose to have their residential abodes prepared in and around the area so that they could sojourn there whenever they visited the religious capital to pay homage to the central shrine. This patronage was all the more profitable for the workers and craftsmen because it resulted in immense construction activity and, within a few years, Amritsar was replete with magnificent buildings.

Although there was an absence of any great artistic tradition in the newly established Sikh echelons, nevertheless, the urge to surround themselves with glory appears to have been intense among the emerging aristocracy. The newly attained wealth allowed many to employ masons for years together in the

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[2] Madanjit Kaur,1983. The Golden Temple: Past and Present. Guru Nanak Dev University Press. Amritsar .



The embellishment in gach work is most royal in appearance and many a monarch may envy its richness. Yet it is the humble offering of a monarch, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, that made the surface decorations an unequaled wonder of the world



The patterns following geometric lines especially in the borders are another example of the dexterity of the artisan who meticulously etched away the plaster of Paris to create this visually humbling effect



The calligraphic representation of the verses from the *Guru Granth Sahib* shine forth as gilded letter amongst the surface decorations that adorn the ceiling of the sanctum

The golden inner balconies of the sanctum have embellished arches that seem embroidered with precious stones embedded in gold thread. The impact of the gach work is such that the entire wall seems made of beaten gold embossed with the most precious of gems available in man's repository

construction of their mansions, in brick and lime. The best muralists of the time were hired to adorn the walls. In fact, for the status-seekers, murals and other surface embellishments became a status symbol. This work also kept the expert craftsmen busy as they were getting work of their choice at their rates for sustainable durations of time.

Simultaneously, with the new Sikh aristocracy, merchants and traders from all over the Punjab began to settle in Amritsar. Eleven Marwari traders, known as Nauhrias in local parlance, were invited to Amritsar by Ranjit Singh in order to establish it as a commercial centre. The wealth acquired by the traders encouraged the erection of splendid temples, adorned with murals. Their houses, too, were built in brick and lime and murals used to be an indispensable from of ornamentation greatly admired and patronized by the wealthy.

These groups of Muslim architects, masons and carvers who were brought to Amritsar were lodged in a huge building known as *Haveli Chaniotian* [named after the place of their origin,Chiniot, now in Pakistan] situated inside the Lahori gate. The *naqquashi and jaratkari* was done by these workers under the supervision of Badaru Mohiudin, the Chief Architect working on this project of rebuilding and decorating the Golden Temple.

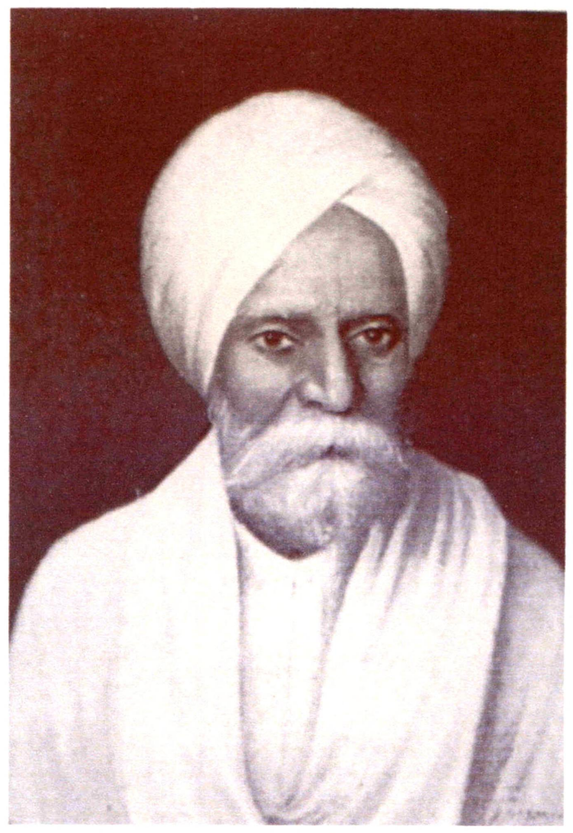
Amritsar formed the nucleus of artistic activity, where almost every structure, of any pretension, was decorated with embellishments and especially murals. The present day remains of wall paintings, comprising the murals painted in the *thakurdwara* of Ragunath Das date as far back as 175 0 A.D.. They enable one to see how this mode of embellishment was once so very popular in the city and remained perpetually in vogue for nearly two hundred years or as long as the craftsmen of this particular trade enjoyed the patronage of the well endowed residents of Amritsar.

On the Golden Temple front the brick lining of the tank as well as the construction of the *Darshani Deori* was completed by the year 1784. However, it was only during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh that the Golden Temple attained its present day appearance.

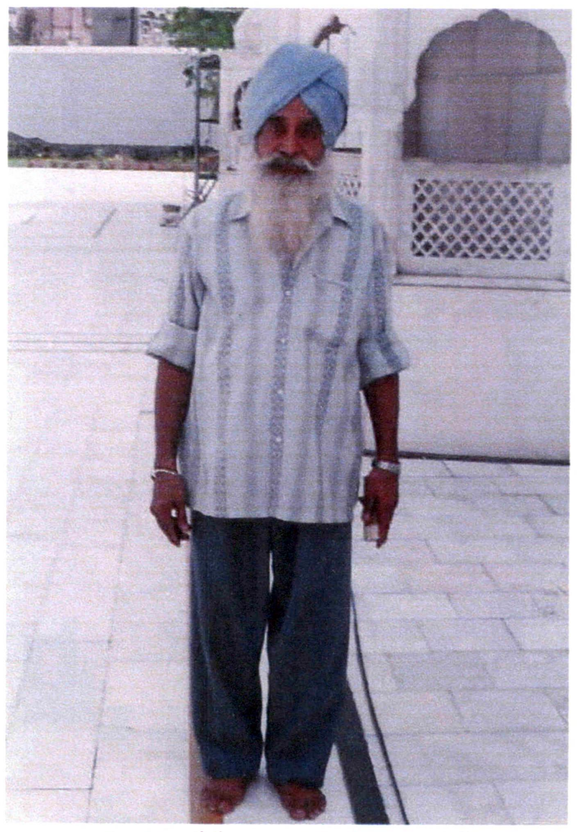
After the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839 that the task of completing the work fell on three prominent Sikhs.They were Bhagwan Singh Jamadar, Mangal Singh Ramgahia and Rai Bahadur Kalyan Singh. When the Muslim craftsmen returned to their homelands or to other places due to dwindling royal patronage, to which they had been at first attracted, the tasks left incomplete were taken up by local Hindu and Sikh artisans and craftsmen who had picked up these techniques over the years.

Most of the painters and craftsmen who worked in various branches of the mural arts and made contributions to the Golden Temple remained unknown. Therefore, barring few of the works it is almost impossible to attribute them to particular painters and craftsmen. The late Bhai Hari Singh, himself an artist, prepared a list consisting of 20 names of painters and craftsmen who worked in the Golden Temple. This list serially included the names of:

1. Baba Kishan Singh
2. Baba Bishan Singh
3. Kapoor Singh
4. Bhai Kehar Singh
5. Mahant Isher Singh
6. Bhai Sardool Singh
7. Bhai Jawahar Singh
8. Bhai Mehtab Singh
9. Mistri Jaimal Singh
10. Bhai Harnam Singh
11. Bhai Isher Singh



Bhai Gian Singh Naqqash
1883-1953



S. Harbhajan S. Naqqash
1999

12. Bhai Gyan Singh
13. Lal Singh Tarn Taran
14. Bhai Mangal Singh
15. Mistri Narayan Singh
16. Mistri Jeet Singh
17. Bhai Atma Singh
18. Baba Darja Mal
19. Bahi Veer Singh

Atelier of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Maharaja Ranjit Singh repaired the principal building in 1802 A.D. this act is commemorated by an inscription over the entrance to the central shrine which translated would probably read as follows: "The Sublime Guru, has in his wisdom, looked upon Maharaja Ranjit Singh as his exemplary servant and devout Sikh and very kindly bestowed upon him the privilege of making his humble contribution to the Temple."

The Maharaja did not alter the basic design of the *Harmandir* but endeavoured to embellish it in a manner that would immortalize it as the most glorious and grand holy edifice symbolic of the Sikhs. The Golden Temple in its present day structure is chiefly the handiwork of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He took deep interest in getting the Golden Temple artistically decorated. To be able to attain the sublime heights that the artisans were able to achieve, the Maharaja made a grant of Rs 5.00 Lac in 1803 A.D. and invited skilled Muslim architects, embellishers, masons, woodcarvers and metal workers from Chaniot, now in Pakistan's Sargodha district. He commission Yaar Mohammad Khan, a celebrated master craftsman to be the technical expert for the gold plating to be done on the upper reaches of the *Harmandir.*

After 1803 A.D., when Amritsar was incorporated in the dominion of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, its cultural, economic and political development accelerated. The vogue of mural painting, which had been taking root in the town since mid-eighteenth century, blossomed. To begin with, Ranjit Singh repaired the principal building of the Golden Temple, roofed it with sheets of copper gilt and commenced the embellishment of its walls with various arts like *mohrakashi, gach, tukri* and *jaratkari* works. Skilled masons and craftsmen were specially brought from Chaniot, to work in the Golden Temple.

The *jagirs* and grants given by Ranjit Singh as *dharmarths* to several shrines and institutions of Amritsar also helped these arts to flourish. Thus, another aspect of this attitude was that with liberal funds at their disposal, the monasteries knowns as *akharas,* belonging to the *Udasi* and *Nirmala* sects, vied with each other to provide a better impression of their establishments.

Amritsar, which had hitherto remained a religious centre, underwent a far-reaching transformation under the Sikh regime and synthesized it into a religious, commercial and cultural complex. Under the manifold impact, the walls of *temples, gurdwaras, havelis, bungas, burjs, akharas, dharamshalas, samadhis* and gateways were invariably adorned.

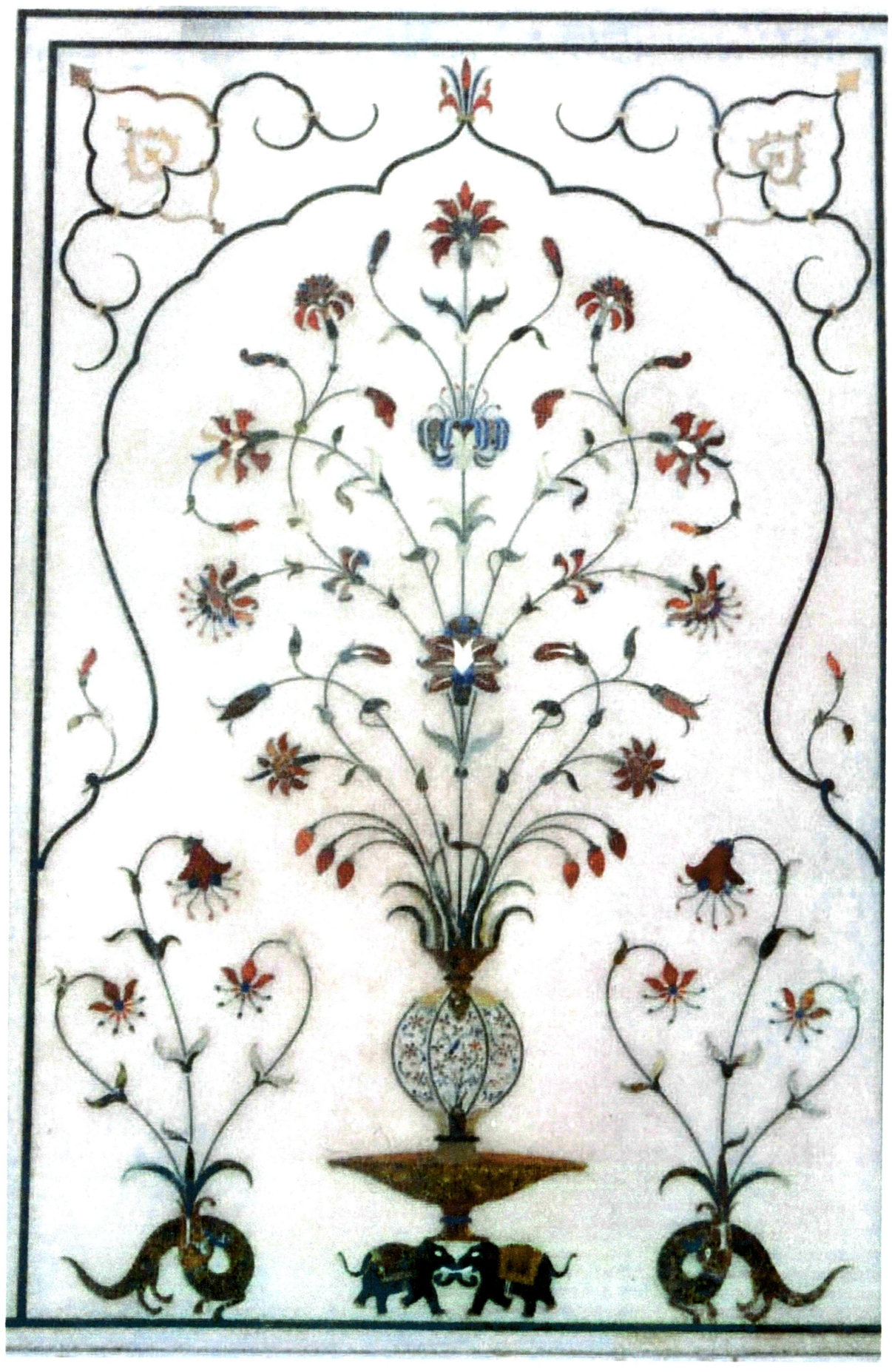
In the entire Golden Temple complex there is only one mural depicting human figure. It is to be seen on the wall behind the northern narrow stairway leading to the top of the shrine. The mural is a depiction representing Guru Gobind Singh on horseback. “According to the late Bhai Gian Singh Naqquash, it was painted by a Kangra artist especially commissioned by Ranjit Singh for this purpose. It is said to be a true copy of a miniature painting that originally was in the collection of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra, which Ranjit Singh had intended to get copied in the from of a mural in the Golden Temple. Since the artist of the



The ceiling of the sanctum is a fabulous example of the *gach* work and *kach* work done in the Golden Temple. The background of deep blue and vermillion that comes through at places under the golden hue of the *gach* work adds another dimension to the spectacle



This part of the ceiling of the sanctum makes one reflect upon the natural beauty of Divine Creation where the solar system and the sun at its centre are the source of light and beauty all over the world



Some of the creatures depicted in the jaratkari or peitra dura panels are so fantastic that they may have originated in the far East but the floral patterns and the other flora and fauna visible in these elaborate portrayals are reminiscent of the natural environment of man

miniature in question had already died the mural was executed by the painter's grandson. The name of the painter, however, is not known'.[3]

The surviving remains of murals in Amritsar from a very small proportion of what must have existed during that time. It is, however, not very surprising because mural paintings are the most susceptible to destruction by natural causes. The existent paintings, however, are sufficient in number to evidence that wall paintings formed an essential part of both the religious and secular architecture of Amritsar. Even today there are about 50 edifices still having remnants of paintings on the walls of that time, it is nevertheless, not possible, to attempt a description of the these in the present study.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh encouraged the use of local materials so as to best withstand the vagaries of the weather and also be available in ample quantities. He was of the vision that the architectural design and finesse of the works taken up under his patronage did not suffer due to sudden spates of scarcity due to any reason whatsoever. He instructed the use of the spaces of the city to the best of his knowledge. He did not touch many of the Mughal edifices in Lahore but did renovate the Shalimar Bagh in Lahore and the Rambagh in Amritsar to provide breathing arenas for the war weary soldiers after their long and tiring marches through all sorts of terrain during the many conquests and battles.

The placement of the *havelis* of the noblemen and courtiers was strategically near the seat of power and Supreme Divinity that is the throne in Lahore and the Golden Temple in Amritsar. To construct these as per the fashion of the day it became necessary to have masons for the walls, carpenters for carving the finely ornate doors windows and balconies. He commissioned lacquer workers, mirror workers for the ceilings of the rooms of the mansions especially the *zenanas*. There was royal patronage for weavers of shawls for presentation as well as the creators of other gifts worked in wood, ivory, gold,

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[3] R.P Srivastava, 1983. Punjab Painting. Abhinav Printers. New Delhi.

silver and precious stones. Some of the beautiful things fashioned by these craftsmen for the courtiers include medals, paintings, '*dushalas'* , ivories and utensils. Besides these there were many workers who made ordinary day to day use items like costumes for the courtiers, armourers for making swords, shields and helmets for the army, '*thathiars*' for making utensils for use in the households and the army camps, painters of the portraits and coincers for the royal minting of coins.

Artisans flocked to Amritsar from other parts of Punjab, Rajasthan and Mughal India. There was, however, no patronizing of any classical art but an amalgamation of various forms to result in the creation of beautiful things. The style that emerged was pragmatic in its expression of human appreciation of beauty. The culture that emerged was resilient and poignant in its bare-faced commitment to reality and truth.

It is said that everyone who knew Maharaja Ranjit Singh had only one eye but it was commended for its vision and inspired form of justice. "*Eko akh sulakhni jaedi taegaan maarae, jhuk jhuk karan salamman do do akhan walae*" [The one eye is above all in its splendour, all the two eyed ones bow to its vision]. In the words of Mulk Raj Anand, "What an eyel"[4]. He further expresses the observation that. "The art of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time is the collective expression of a new brotherhood, which renewed the decaying tradition, and brought a fresh flowering of the urges of a long suppressed people. It is an art imbued by the romantic sense of glory... As the present writer has seen the transition of the beginners in the craft of silversmithy, to the attainment of high skill in metalwork, painting, modeling and design, he can well imagine how the primitivist village craftsmen matured the folk vitalities in their hands into expressions of artistic impulses at various levels of intensity".[5]

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[4] Marg. 1977. Vol XXX, No 3, Marg Publications, Mumbai.
[5] Ibid
[6]W.G Archer. 1966. Paintings of the Sikhs. V&A Museum. London. He elaborated on the origin and adaptation of the Kangra artists to the Sikh visual art forms in the following words," Of grater significance

History is evidence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's interest in miniature paintings[6]. The generals, courtiers and the aristocrats, all wanted to recognize themselves in their new roles. So portraiture, in line and colour, flourished as the most important activity in the Lahore court and the provinces. The placing of new havelis for the nobles, both in Lahore town and in the vicinity of the Golden Temple Amritsar, was inspired by the Maharaja's wish that the courtiers may be available, morning and evening, for talk about matters of State, fresh campaigns for consolidation of the kingdom, and for the multifarious arrangements of day-to-day life, such as revenue collection, provisions for the army, giving jagirs, deciding of disputes and discussions of foreign policy.

In the reports of court life, given by Jamadar Khushal Singh to a scribe of the *peshwa* for transmission to Pune there emerges the Maharaja's care for details in everything. This is further demonstrated by the account when he sought the advice of Fakir Syed Aziz-ud-Din for an architect, who would build the wall around Amritsar to make the city impregnable against attack. A Muslim craftsman was chosen who belonged to a hereditary family of masons, and not a Sikh or a Hindu artisan. This shows that the Maharaja was aware of the value of tradition. The building of Govindgarh Fort was also entrusted to a body of craftsmen, especially Muslims, who were descendants of the artisans who had built defense structures for the Mughals. It seems, then, that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had a sense of continuity from the past in his programmes of expansion.

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as a social symptom is the phase of Kangra painting connected with the Sikhs. As was natural in a people with no traditional art of their own, the Sikhs had avidly adopted whatever art forms were current in the areas they ravaged. They were thus, unconsciously the 'art-carriers' of the Punjab Hills. From about 1810 onwards, certain Kangra painters seemed to have adjusted their subjects to Sikh requirements and thus a second provincial Kangra school was established, its chief centres being Lahore and Amritsar. Most of its products, however have a garish brightness which makes them a travesty of Kangra painting proper."

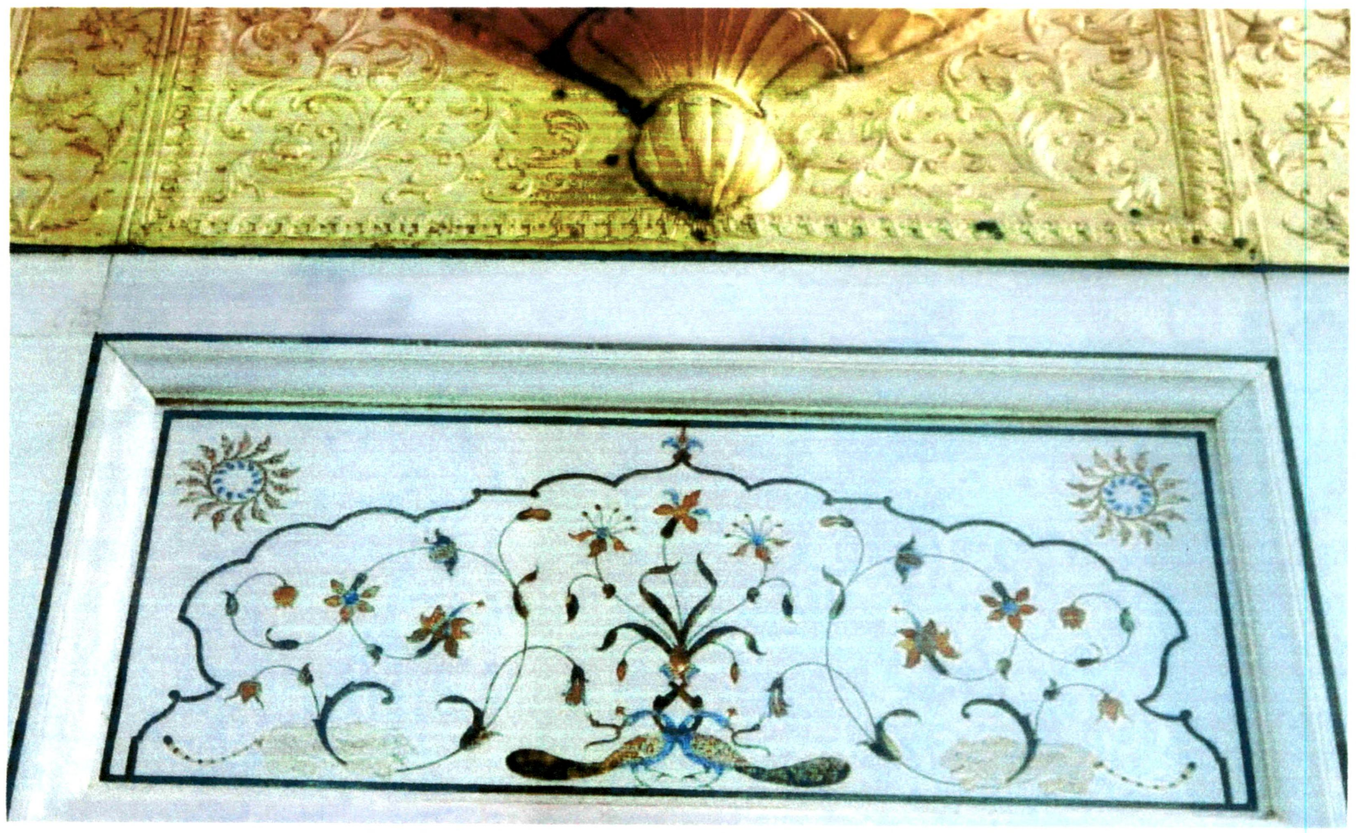
[7] Mulk Raj Anand. 1977. Marg. Vol XXX, No 3, Marg Publications, Mumbai.

He was also aware of the nature of materials, and of the actual skills of piling, layering, tightening and grasping of structures, against attack of big guns. In his myriad mindedness, he was rather like Akbar, who is shown, in a miniature painting in the Akbarnama, to have been in the habit of inspecting the buildings of Sikri every evening while the model town was being constructed.

If no dominant style, as such, of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's period, emerges from the buildings, at first sight it is because the *havelis*, built by his nobles, were in a transitional period in which the interchanging among the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh craftsmen, was taking place almost as a descent from one Imperial order to the other.

"One can easily visualize that, attached to the Sikh Court and patronized by it, there must have been a very large number of workshops where goods and objects mentioned repeatedly in his account were ceaselessly being produced. One comes to think here also of the need for and the existences of the kind of '*karkhanahs*' that Abu'l Fazl speaks of in the time of Akbar, great production centers of fabrics and textiles, pashmina, leatherwork, gold and silver work, arms and accoutrements, carpets, saddlery, glassware, musical instruments, brassware, jewellery, woodwork, furniture, tents and awnings, wines of all kinds and rare perfumes. Woven into this picture would not only be matters of labour, organization and payments but also of taste and control of quality. It may not be possible for us to speak of the kind of connoisseur quality that we associate with the great Mughal emperors and their grandees, but it is easy to piece together a picture of a court, a milieu, in which the quality of things and of life was a matter of concern. It was apparently a court that wanted to be known not only for its splendor but also for its culture"[7].

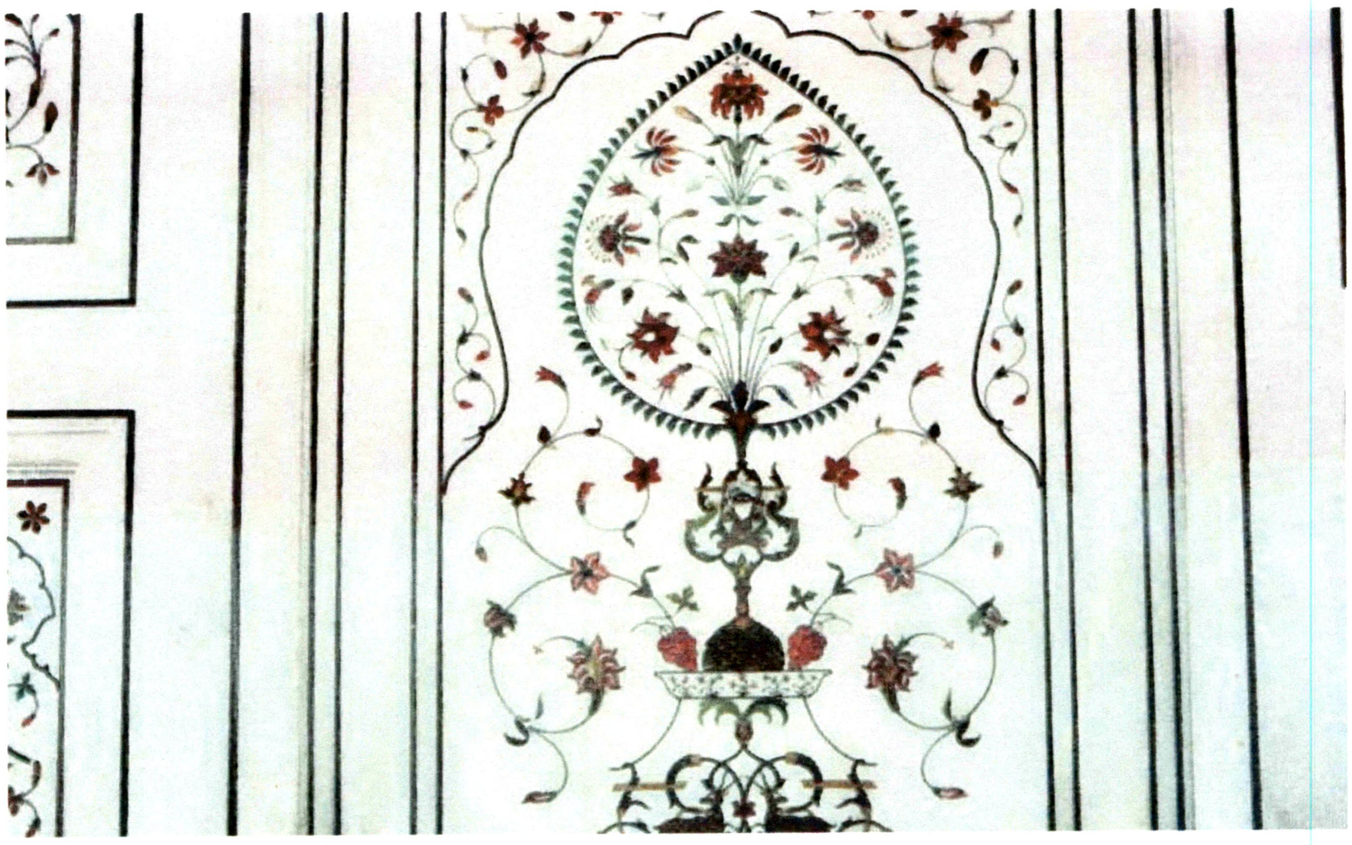
The empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was built up in almost one generation yet the mastery of form, force and unity in the structure and design especially evident in the forms of adaptation of the gardens shows glimpses of



The juxtapositioning of the marble with the gold work is quite imposing as the vivid colours of the peitra dura add to the sheer golden effect of the mohrakashi [golden embossing] above



The marble panels outside the sanctum are excellent examples of the finesse the craftsmen's skills attained in this delicate and creative work



Floral patterns mingle with the animal and human forms in the finely worked peitra dura on the marble panels which has been created in as near natural colours as was possible for the artisan to mix on his pallette with an unmatched vision and creativity



The marble may have lost its pristine whiteness but the vibrant colours of the peitra dura work are as alive today as they may have been when they were first created by the artisan

the practical genius of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He catered to the construction of the solid structures leaving room only for later changes as per the environment.

Whatever remains of the architecture of his time shows that the artisans were fully aware of the problems of support, hook, tension and overhang, sensitive to the curvature of the old Indian building traditions that emphasized the flow of one space into the other.

Whenever we speak of the art and paintings of Punjab, what comes prominently to mind are the portraits of the royal personages of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court. Although he was shy of getting himself painted he enjoyed the representations of the special benevolence. However, the range of subjects that the painters in the Punjab plains during that time used was much wider. They covered their murals with themes that were mythological and had a deeper religious significance. The illustration of the '*Janam Sakhis*' or the representations of the episodes in the life of Guru Nanak had been worked by the Pahari painters who settled in Punjab. Later on they were to be the recipients of the royal patronage for working on the embellishments of the various royal buildings and especially the Golden Temple.

The degree of interest Maharaja Ranjit Singh took in the arts and their various forms is evident from the existing magnitude of work available in his vast collection. However, the surface decorations of the Golden Temple are perhaps the most sublime example of the Maharaja's intention to use his knowledge of the arts totally to embellish this premiere seat of Sikhism.

'Jion jal mein jal ayae khatana

tiyoon jyoti sang jyoti samana'

'Even as the waters mingle with water the luminous spirit
of the individual merges into the great Divine Light'
(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Panna 278)

MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUES OF THE SURFACE DECORATIONS



A blueprint of the frescoes that were worked in later on,
considerably after the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Courtesy: Chitravali, one of the works of S. Gian Singh Naqquash.

CHAPTER 5

The rendition of the embellishments in itself is a form of devotion rarely exhibited in any of the expositions of craftsmanship in the Old and New Worlds. The choice of medium for the work as well as the various techniques used varies from site to site within the premises of the Golden Temple complex. Detailed study through primary and secondary literature as well as the personal observation of the investigator has brought up the several mediums utilized in the work of the surface embellishments as well as the dexterity of technique that qualifies them as exquisite works of art.

An attempt to study the surface embellishments in their setting as also the need to trace their origins was felt at the very onset of the research work. All efforts have been made to be able to document as much of the details as possible from all sources – the past as well as the contemporary. [The Nishkam Seva Jatha based in Birmingham, U.K have undertaken to do the restoration and repair of the surface embellishments of the Golden Temple Complex which is still going on]. A locational overview and detailed discussion of the surface decorations of various sites is attempted below.

Sites, Mediums and Techniques

The entrance porch has a dome in modern structure with a big clock fixed just below it. The sacred tank which holds the Temple in it's midst like a lotus flower is 150mts sq and 17mts deep. Running around the outer edge of the tank is a marble pavement (*parkarma*) 60 feet wide, with marble slabs of various shapes, designs and colors.

The architecture of the Darshani Deorhi is extremely impressive. The air-chambers on the top of the *deorhi* stand modelled on the Bengal-Mughal *chhatri* style. The gate frame of the Darshani Deorhi is 10ft by 8ft. The wooden portals attached to it are made of *shisham* wood, and are six inches thick, covered with

silver sheets. These in turn, are ornamented with panels inlaid in artistic ivory work. There are geometrical and floral designs. Birds and animals (lions, tigers and deer) are depicted in these designs. The colours green and red are also used in the ivory inlay of the Darshani Deorhi. The overall effect of the ivory craftsmanship is extremely rhythmical.

An interesting story[1] related to the acquisition of the portals of this gateway is often narrated. It is believed that they originally belonged to the famous Somnath Temple and were taken away during one of the invasions. These were later on recovered by armies of Ranjit Singh from the Afghans and got fixed in the Golden Temple. But there is no historical evidence to support this oral tradition.

The term "Amritsar Murals" evokes in the minds of most people the image only of the Golden Temple which is richly decorated with floral designs painted in tempera and embossed in plaster. Only one small mural depicting Guru Gobind Singh astride a horse with a group of attendants exists on the 2nd floor of the Harmandir.

The murals earlier existed on the outer circumambulatory passage or *Parkarma* and on the walls built around the holy tank of the Golden Temple, outside the main shrine, but they no longer exist, having been allegedly destroyed by some fanatics.

Very few murals on Hindu and Sikh subjects could earlier be seen on the walls of the Akal Takht complex. The floral designs and marble inlay on the outer walls of the Golden Temple, termed as *gach* [gypsum] work, is, however, present. Each portion is a combination of semi-precious stones and *tukri* work

[1] K.C Aryan,1977. Punjab Murals. Rekha Prakashan, New Delhi.





The wooden panels are inlaid to give an earthy effect to the ethereal beauty of the Golden Temple

Courtesy: Susan Stronge. Decorative Arts of India.



Some of the patterns worked into the wooden panels.
The placement of the geometric and the non-geometric present a most pleasing effect.
The use of colour is all the more fascinating when seen interspersed
with the linear and curved designs on the borders and main body of the panel

Courtesy: Susan Stronge. Decorative Arts of India.





A splendid example of the wooden panels that formed another form of surface decoration in the Golden Temple

Courtesy: Susan Stronge. Decorative Arts of India.

that involves the setting in gypsum of pieces of glass of various sizes in the required area, and painted. Floral designs are to be seen in the interior of the holy sanctum, particularly on the first floor. A detailed study of the forms, techniques and their mediums is attempted.

Fresco-Paintings

The walls of the Golden Temple contain a variety of excellent *mohrakashi* or fresco-paintings. These frescos are said to be modelled on lines of the wall paintings of that time found popularly in the Kangra Valley. Most of the fresco-paintings of the Golden Temple are representations of Hindu mythological themes. They reflect the original spirit of the *Vaishnava* cult, but the technique has been suitably modified to suit the needs of Sikh art. It is to be noted here that the tolerance of the Sikh religion towards other religions motivated the Sikh artists to borrow extensively from the Hindu and Muslim traditions. Moreover, it also reflects the practical outlook of the Sikh artists who realized that they would not have enough time to make experiments of their own. Hence they borrowed the fresco technique from the Hindu tradition. For example, the fresco-paintings depict a number of animals pouncing upon one another which is symbolic of the struggle for existence. Then there is one of the few human figures - a Yogi in *padmasan* or the lotus pose in yoga. Besides these there are also a number of ferocious animals like the tiger, the lion, and the snake. This depiction of flora and fauna has a deeper meaning. It symbolizes man's mastery over animal instincts and worldly fears, especially a man who has sought the true path through devotion and service. Similarly another symbolic reference is to the *Kalsa* (a water-pot) with fruits, flowers and leaves all symbolizing material prosperity and good-will.

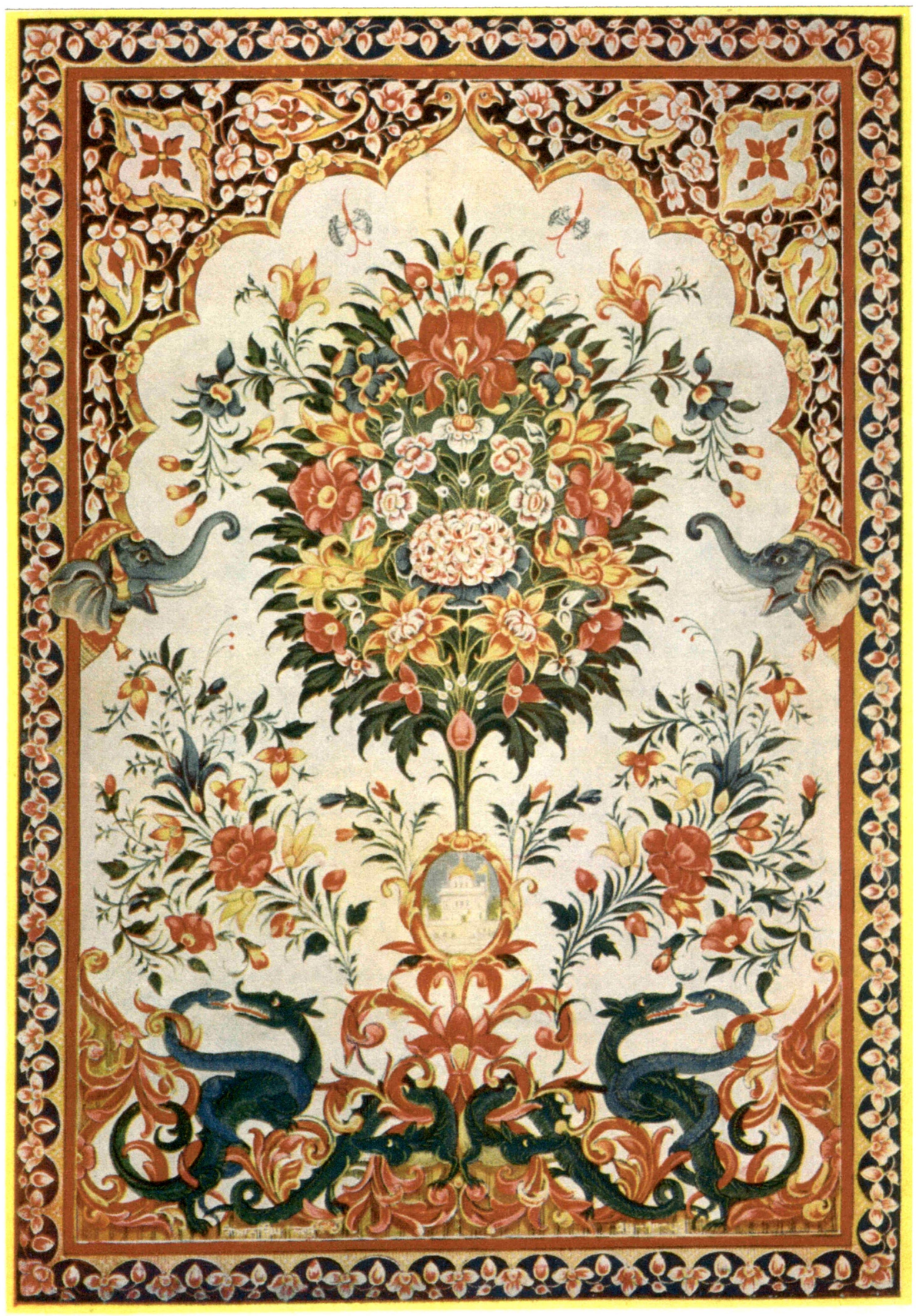
Most of the fresco-paintings are, thus, an adaptation of the Hindu, the Persian and the Mughal motifs. Still the distinctive setting and combination of plants, flowers, birds and animals project an ethereal yet palpable originality

which is refreshing in form, style and content. These motifs do not merely repeat the old themes in the older forms but infuse in them a newer spirit and format. The style is no doubt there but it shows dimensions with added meanings. The Sikh craftsmen expanded the canvas of the Hindu fresco from the Krishna cult to the pantheistic trend. Although the Sikh artists adopted the Mughal *mohrakashi* style involving the Persian motifs comprising bold flowers in glorious colours and geometrical designs, yet the Sikh artists penetrated deep into the spirit of the art and depicted fine samples of their own. Consequently human figures, animals, birds, flowers and leaves can be seen drawn in their natural yet, beautiful settings. Bright colours, cut-glass and coloured stones have frequently been used. Beautiful borders in traditional designs enhance the aesthetic value of the mural paintings.

It goes without saying that the art work represented in the Golden Temple is a major contribution to the development of the art of fresco-painting which lies in the preservation of the native traditions and is an extension of the art of the Kangra and allied schools of art.

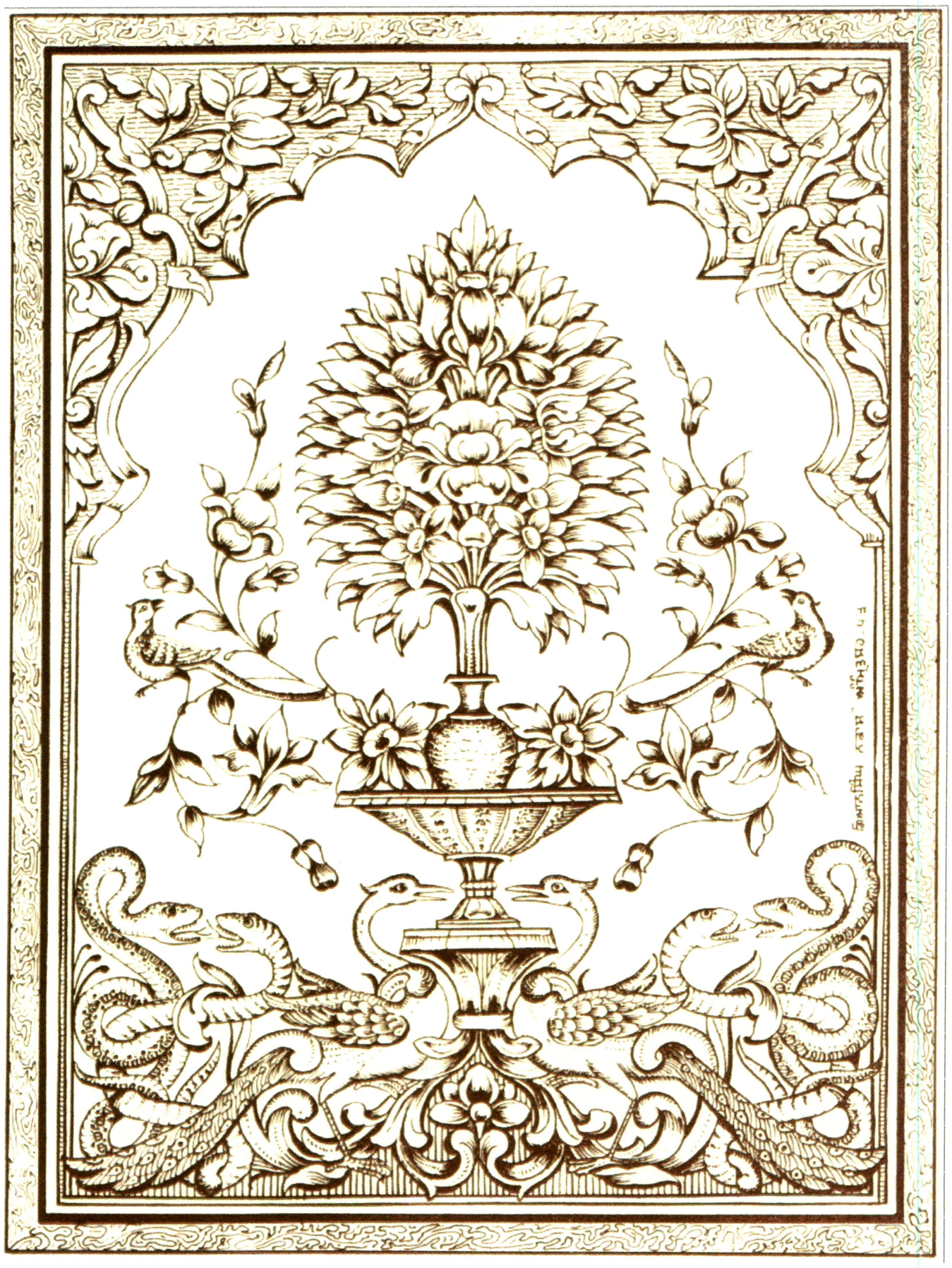
Motifs for Frescoes

The frescoes of the Golden Temple represent floral patterns interspersed with animal motifs. There are hundreds of such patterns decorating the walls of the Temple. From a distance these murals give the appearance of exquisitely woven Persian carpets. The patterns can be classified into a variety of categories. "Among these the most prominent is known by the name of *Dehin*; a medium of expression of the imaginative study of the artist's own creation of idealised forms. *Gharwanj* is the base of the *dehin*. This is also a decorative device involving knotted grapples between animals"[2]. In the Golden Temple are seen *gharwanj* showing cobras, lions and elephants clutching one another, carrying flower vases in which fruits and fairies have been depicted. According to



One of the frescoes worked by the artist on the panels and ceiling of the Golden Temple.
It is especially remarkable for the vivid coloration and the classic juxtapositioning
of the triumph of good over evil in the struggle for existence

Courtesy: Chitravali, one of the works of S. Gian Singh Naqquash.



A representation of the blueprint for frescoes worked by the artist on the panels and ceiling of the Golden Temple

Courtesy: Chitravali, one of the works of S. Gian Singh Naqquash.

Gian Chitravali[3] the *Dehin* is a "well known item in the fresco painting branch of the Sikh school of painting. It is a medium of expression of the imaginative study of the artist's own creation of idealized forms. The style was generally used in decorative panels on the walls of aristocratic houses or religious buildings". In the plate named 'Dehin' we see "a variety of richness in the colorful representation of floral and zoological design. The Botanical and Zoological symbols have been dexterously juxtaposed to convey an impression of an organized integral whole. The heads of royal elephants on the sides provide an appropriate balance to the knotted reptiles below. Apparently symbolic of power, these creatures have been tactfully set against tender leaves and flower patterns thus giving the whole thing a touch of lyrical strength : a unique feature in Art expression. Religious tinge to the picture is provided by the inset of the Gurdwara at Tarn Taran"[4].

Pattha[5] is a decorative border design used around the *dehin* and often depicted through creepers. It is also depicted through birds, animal and other motifs in various colours. "Such styles are generally after the *naqquashi* school and do not conform to natural patterns. Symmetry of forms is the keynote of such style"[6]. Madanjit Kaur[7] had detailed the elements of the design of these works of art and describes them elaborately, "apart from floral depictions there are a number of fresco paintings depicting creatures, as if from real life. To give them their appropriate setting aquatic animals i.e. the *machh* (fish), the *kachh* (crocodile) etc. are drawn on the nether part of the frescos, with the animal figures in the middle and the birds in the upper parts of the fresco". The symbolic message conveyed through depiction of *jal-jivas* [water creatures] is probably that just as these creatures have the natural setting of the aquatic or water

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[2] Madanjit Kaur, 1983. The Golden Temple: Past & Present, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar.
[3] Gian Chitravali, produced and published by G.S Sohan Singh, Amritsar, is a documentation of the Masterpeices of Late Bhai Gian Singh Naqquash.
[4] The picture referred to is from the Gian Chitravali [Plate1] and has been described as "a sincere dedication of the flowers of the artist's [Late Gian Singh Naqquash] devotion to his diety". This design was finalised by the artist just 5 days before his demise.
[5] Gian Chitravali [Plate9]
[6] Gian Chitravali [Plate9]
[7] Madanjit Kaur, 1983.The Golden Temple Past and Present, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar.

environment, so also the *jiva* (living human being) is surrounded by the lures of *maya* (desires). His life time endeavour should be to rise above them.

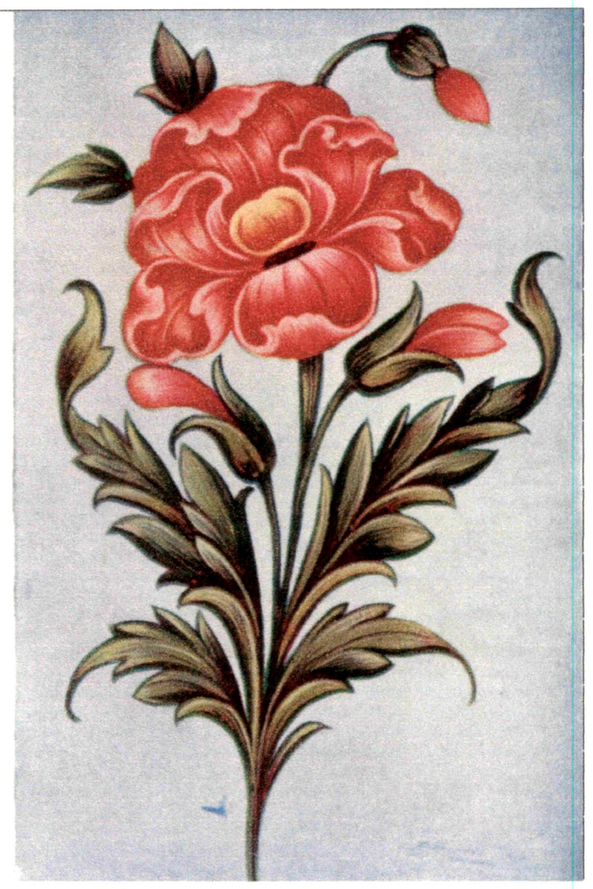
She goes on to say that the "central parts of the walls depict *asthal jantus* (earthly creatures), e.g. the elephant the serpent and others. The elephant symbolizes splendour and power in man and the snake represents greed (conforming to the traditional Indian view). Some of the paintings show elephants in chains, the idea appears to be that human passions can be controlled and mastered through mental discipline and the recitation of *bani*"[8]. Sometimes a child may also be shown as representative of the innocent soul of man. If a snake is shown coiled around the child, it is suggestive of the idea that the innocent soul (jiva or being) is a prisoner of greed of the world (maya). The leit motif underlying these portrayals is to provoke the human soul to forsake its suffering by opting for the path of tranquility by virtue of *nam* and *simran* (the recitation of God's Name), the soul is released from the clutches of greed. The upper portions may carry representations of the winged creatures i.e., birds. For example, the *mor* [peacock] and the *Kabutar* [pigeon]. The peacock represents the good self (super ego) in man and the pigeon is a symbol of peace. In some paintings the "fairies have Persian caps on their heads reminding the onlookers of the Persian influence in these paintings".[9]

Drawings for Frescos

The designs for the frescoes were first prepared by sketching with pencil or charcoal on a thick sheet of paper. These were then transferred to the required area of the wall through a perforating process whereby the imprint was outlined by a number of tiny perforations and then posted onto the wall by rigorous rubbing with a dye which percolated through the perforations onto the wall. The detailed processes of this procedure have been minutely gone into by

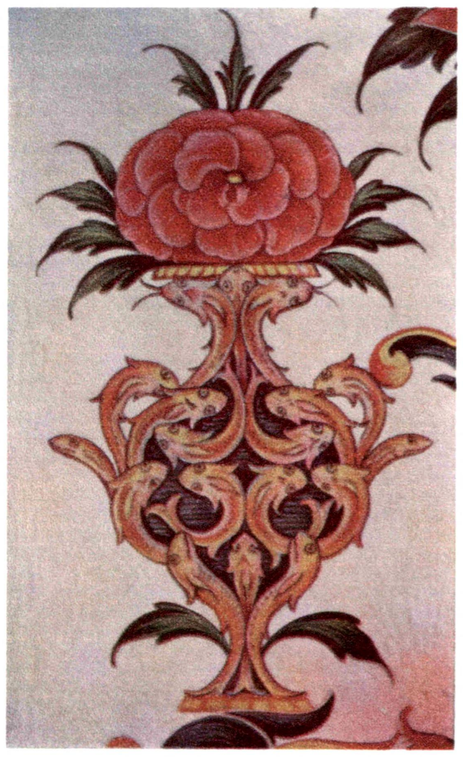
[8] ibid
[9] ibid

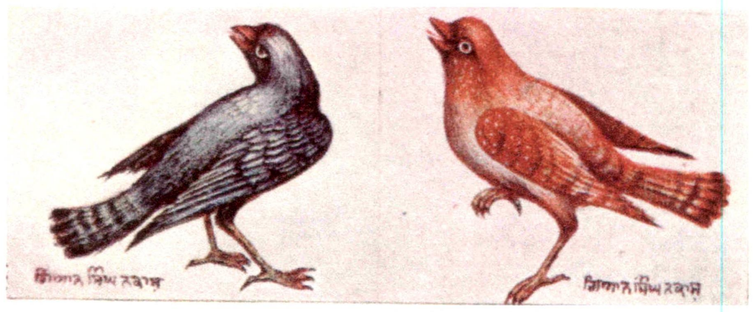




Details of some of the motifs used for frescoes are found abundantly on the various surfaces in the Golden Temple Complex

Courtesy: Chitravali, one of the works of S. Gian Singh Naqquash.





Madanjit Kaur when she looks into the act of …"preparing the *'khaka'*[10] or map, It consisted of a number of sub-processes. First, the required area of the wall was washed and made wet by the incessant sprinkling of water. This area then, was covered with lime plaster called *pora*. The *pora* was then given a layer of *doga*, a sort of thick white plaster prepared from burnt and drenched marble. But this was done only after another lime plaster called *katta*, had been applied to it. This plaster was intended to make the *doga* stronger and whiter. When the *doga* was still wet the design intended to be sketched was transferred through the perforation technique onto the area with the help of charcoal dust sprinkled over the paper design with a *potli"* (a cloth poultice or a small cloth bag).

After this process the desired colours were filled in at the intended places in the design. The colours were worked into the plaster by means of a small wooden shovel, called the *nehla*. To avoid flaking of the surfaces, the *nehla* was kept constantly thumping on the wet plaster to keep it natured and pliable. The whole process required utmost skill, patience, finesse and concentration to bring about the perfect rendering. While the colours were still wet, several coatings were added on. These were done to bring out the finer details. The most essential condition for the success of the whole process was a degree of wetness to be maintained on the surface being worked upon. The ideal situation would be for it to be not too wet nor towards drying. This wetness was advocated to allow for the paint to seep into the many layers so that even if the top level was chipped off the colour seeped in would continue right down to the bottom layer. This layering and coloring technique is of ancient origin and usage in India and is witnessed in the frescoes of Ajanta.

Colours in Frescoes

The colour scheme in the frescoes is so vibrant that it holds the voyeur breathless with its spellbinding hues. The variety of colours is marvelously rich,

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[10] ibid

the major hues used being red, blue, green, yellow, and black with clever shading effects in all. Their combinations and tones impart brilliance. The ingredients from which the colors were prepared were of distinctive quality. Little wonder then that they could endure the vagaries of the clime and the regressive impact of time, especially the extreme climatic changes experienced in a place like Amritsar. The colors were prepared by craftsmen according to their need in a special manner. The common method of preparing colours was as follows:

(i) **Red:** This colour was prepared from clay called *huramchi* which was procured from the hill areas. The vivid scarlet was obtained when this clay was finely powdered fine by grinding it on stone slabs with gradual additions of water. To ensure fineness the powered clay was further shaken through a porous piece of cloth which worked as a colander.

(ii) **Green:** The green colour was obtained from a special kind of green stone called '*sang-i-sabz*', imported from Jaipur (Makrana). The colour paste was prepared by finely grinding small chips of the *sang-i-sabz* in water.

(iii) **Black:** Black colour was prepared from charred coconut shell which was finely ground in water.

(iv) **White:** White paste was obtained generally from the Agra and Jaipur quality marble slabs. The burnt marble chips would be drenched in water (like limestone). This sedimented mixture would then be sieved through a sieve. A thick paste would be the resultant which was called *doga* .

(v) **Blue:** The rich blue hues would be prepared by mixing *neel* or ultramarine with Prussian blue.

(vi) **Yellow:** This colour was prepared from the yellow clay or *gachni* readily available in the local market.



The vibrant colours of the
frescoes are a depiction of the
glorious vision the artist had
of the Creator and thus
strove to embellish his work with
a brush that resembled or bettered
Nature in an invocation to the
Divine Artist Himself

Courtesy: Chitravali, one of the works of S. Gian Singh Naqquash.



Details of the colourful borders that
adorn some of the fresco panels
in the Golden Temple Complex.
The ochre and black lines highlight
the borders and change of motif and theme

Courtesy: Chitravali, one of the works of S. Gian Singh Naqquash.

The range of colors used by the artists in the fresco-paintings of the Golden Temple is noteworthy. Generally, all the colors, excepting the green, were toned up by mixing them with white colour. The green colour was usually treated with yellow clay. Great care was taken to preserve pastes when not in use. They were kept wet in earthen pots with regular additions of water. No doubt as the preparation of these colors was such a painstaking process, and done under strict supervision, it was necessary to maintain the tones to the maximum longevity possible.

A special mention must be made of the brush which is so important for fresco-painting. Brushes used by the painters were personally prepared by the artists (naqqashes) themselves from the tail hair of the squirrel or camel. The thickness and the fineness of the brushes was determined by the length and thickness of the hair used. The artists had their own specialized forms and lengths to suit their grip and posture while painting.

The Fresco-Painting Technique

The techniques employed in fresco-painting of the Golden Temple have a few special features. Their foremost characteristic is their endurance and attention to detail. The artists seemed to have worked hard to secure a lasting effect for their portraits. That is why the fresco paintings at the Temple have stood the ravages of time, and look as fresh as at the time when they were first completed and exhibited.

Arts allied to Fresco-Paintings

The following techniques of art forms related to the fresco-paintings at the Golden Temple are of special interest:

(i) *Gach* work

(ii) *Jaratkari*

(iii) *Tukri* work

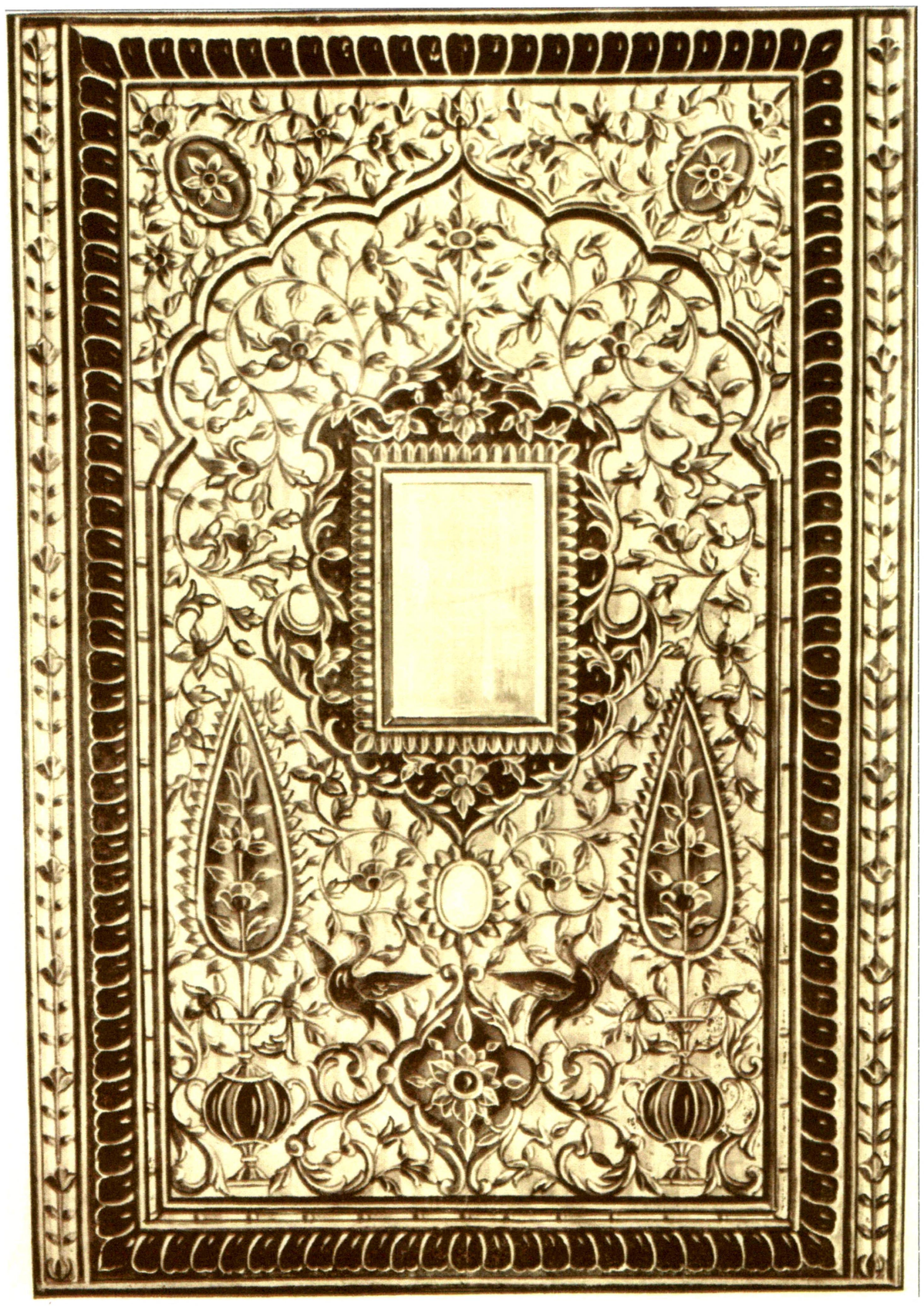
Gach Work

Gach, which in Persian means lime stone, refers to work executed in gypsum in the Punjabi language. The preparation of *gach* paste was a simple yet interesting process. At the outset the gypsum was pounded and heated in a pan with small sprinklings of water [very little quantity] added to it at frequent intervals. When the needed temperature was attained the paste would be utilized in making intricate designs usually embodied as delicately winding creepers. Only the essentially required quantity of the gypsum would be prepared which could be made use of at one sitting. This was necessary because the material tended to dry up quickly and had the ability to turn hard as stone again due to desiccation.

In the form of application there is little variation in the application of the lime or the gypsum pastes. The process after the initial application, however, differs. The gypsum was then scraped through with a steel cutter called the *nehla patti*, and other implements to give it the required floral design. The whole process had to be completed while the *gach* paste was still soft. When the paste became dry, it was painted yellow and was then coated with varnish before finally being pasted over with gold-leaves or foil called waraks to attain the royal effect visible in the ceiling and dome of the Golden Temple.

According to Madanjit Kaur[11], "Excellent specimens of this art can be seen on the first floor of the central shrine, specially the part that covers the *Har-ki-Pauri*. Verses from the holy Granth also stand out inscribed in beautiful

[11] Madanjit Kaur,1983. The Golden Temple, Past and Present, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar.



Innovative design techniques have been adopted in the working of the kach and gach work creations and motifs to make the overall impact of the surface decorations truly spell binding. intricate gach work

Courtesy: Chitravali, one of the works of S. Gian Singh Naqquash.



Devotees of all ages draw inspiration from the awe-inspiring workmanship of the golden gach work and life-like frescoes on the first floor of the Golden Temple. The ornately carved pillars and jhallar of the balcony are a masterpiece of the intricate gach work

calligraphy in this manner. The *gach* work in question was executed by the late Bhai Gian Singh Naqqash towards the close of the nineteenth century".

Jaratkari

Traced to the Mughal school of Art the *jaratkari* is the art of inlaying coloured stones in marble, in a large range of patterns, schemes and motifs. Initially a sketch of the intended design is created. This is transferred to the marble slab to be worked upon and made *pucca* by technical experts or the *naqqashes* [stone or marble engravers]. After this the next step is to requisition the stone-engravers. They engrave the design or pattern to the required depth, onto the marble slab. Once this is done the original sketch, replete with colour scheme and delicate shading prepared by the *naqqash* is then assigned to the third kind of expert i.e. the *begaria* or the coloured stone-dresser. He specialises in cutting the patterns from multi-coloured stones according to the design and colour requirements of the sketch. After this stage comes the time for the stonedresser or *pattharghara* to inlay the colourful pieces of semi-precious and precious stones onto the patterns designated. *Jaratkari* makes heavy demands on the workmanship, skill, industry, patience and perseverance of the worker. The beauty of the *jaratkari* is by no small measure a valuable addition to the beauty of the Golden Temple. A marvellous and rich collection of precious and semi-precious stones in a myriad of hues has been used in the *jaratkari* at the Golden Temple and are vividly detailed below:

1. The Arabic *Sumaq* -light black or the black marble
2. The *Haquique*- red and pink shades
3. The *Khattu* –Yellow and orange
4. The *Lajward*- ultramarine and sky-blue
5. The *Neelam* – blue sapphire
6. The *Sabz patthar Ghar*- dark green
7. The *Sabz patthar nargas* –green

8. The *Sang pashm*- light green
9. The *Sang Yashb*-of different varieties and colours viz. green, light green, white, and blue.
10. The *seep*-milky white
11. Various kinds of stones in their natural hues with fibres and fascinating textures, i.e. the *abri*.
12. The *Surkha*-dark red
13. The *Zahr mohra* –green

Several other kinds of stones, not covered by above list, have also been used for *jaratkari* but sparsely. These stones were procured from Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Agra and Madras. In the entire process of inlay work or *Jaratkari*, the cutting of the coloured stones requires the greatest skill. This is done by highly skilled labours that have practiced this art form for generations with the help of highly specialized and very fine implements. The cutting is done with extreme care and precision so that the exact shavings can be matched to fit in with the size of the etchings in the marble slab. Many skillful efforts are made to reach the exact size and the needed shape. Fine cutting is also done to prepare the striped borders or the *gaz* and the *bankari*. These refer to the borderlines of the Jaratkari. The mortar for affixing the fine slivers of precious and semi-precious stones is prepared with a cement-like substance and gum acacia.

Tukri work

Tukri work or mirror inlay work comprising the process of inlaying mirrors of small sizes in the intricate *gach* patterns embellishing the walls and the ceilings, was resorted to in a large measure for decorating the ceiling of the central shrine. It is an adaptation of the Mughal art which was popular in India and can be seen in the architectural style of many of the *Shish Mahal* buildings.

The main technique in the *tukri* work consists in the setting of the *kach*, or pieces of glass turned into mirrors in *gach* which is applied and cut into the needed pattern. The pattern is inlaid with pieces of coloured glass, mirrored or silvered glass and gold leaves or *waraks*. Before the setting process the lower sides of the *tukris* are covered with mercuric oxide. A scalpel like implement called the *krund* is used to do the finer cutting. The distinctive feature of the *tukri*-work at the Golden Temple, is that pieces of precious stones have been inlaid intricately with mirror pieces. The *Mohrakashi* (fresco), the *tukri* and the *gach* work at the Golden Temple owe their execution, progress and excellence to the benign patronage extended to the craftsmen by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Marble Work

The data collected from the records of the Golden Temple and the information gathered through personal interviews establish the fact that marble was laid in the Harmandir for the first time during the *misl* period by the Sikh Sardars. Later, Sardar Lehna Singh Majithia got marble slabs worth Rs. 10,000/- laid through one, Mistry Yar Muhammad Khan, in the inner *parkarma* of the Harmandir, in 1890 BK (AD 1833). Maharaja Ranjit Singh was so pleased to see the marble *parkarma* that he ordered for marble slabs worth Rs. 21,000 and used it to beautify the Temple.

Again in 1893 B.K (1836), under orders of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, white marble slabs were affixed onto the walls of the Temple. These were later adorned with beautiful filigree work and blandished with enamel coatings. When completed, the Maharaja was much impressed with the craftsmanship of the masons and bestowed upon them many coveted awards. In 1894 BK (1837), the Maharaja ordered marble slabs to be laid in the *parkarma* in front of the Sarkar Bunga. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, his successor Maharaja Kharak Singh, continued the work in the Golden Temple, as per schedule. He obtained marble worth Rs. 50,000 and put 500 masons and 1000 labourers on the job.

The project was to pave the floor from the Darshani Deorhi to the Akal Bunga. After Maharaja Kharak Singh was dethroned in October 1839, the work on the Golden Temple was completed by his successor Kanwar Naunihal Singh.

The short span of rule by the Mother Regent, Maharani Chand Kaur, and thereafter the rule of Maharaja Sher Singh, witnessed the continuation of the marble laying work without interruption. No progress, however, could be made in this task of construction work at the Temple for the turbulent year that followed after which, on receiving charge of the Regency on behalf of Maharaja Dalip Singh, Sardar Jawahar Singh restarted the work through Bhai Parduman Singh Giani. This was continued by Giani Gurbaksh Singh even after the fall of the Sikh empire. But soon there was a slagging of the pace of the construction activity under the administration of the Britishers. The work was resumed, however, with renewed vigour when the Singh Sabha Movement gained momentum towards the close of the 19th century. Presently the process of laying of new marble slabs and replacement of those that have weathered, become chipped or cracked is going on.

The ground floor of the *Harmandir* was decorated with marble for the first time during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Thereafter a considerable part of the Temple, including the floors, walls, the causeway and the entire passage around the tank got paved bit by bit.

The desilting operation of the Tank in 1923 gave further impetus to the work of laying the marble slabs in a considerable part of the *parkarma* and also on the steps of the tank. The devotees made large and generous contributions in cash and kind to see the work accomplished soon. The *parkarma* got fully covered with marble by 1966.

Marble Work Techniques

The marble used in the Golden Temple is of many colours, tones and different hues. It ranges from white, yellow, green-cum-grey to black. Prominent among these of course was pristine white with some variations in the grains. The marble was brought from Agra, Jaipur (Makrana), Kota, Jaisalmer, Bombay, Calcutta, Madhya Pradesh and Madras. It is interesting to note that the marble slabs used are quite thick. This is probably because the means of transport in those early days were not so sophisticated nor as speedy. Also as there were probably many stoppages and shifts in transporting the material in many different vehicles, it must have required much handling from the place of origin to the final destination. Many a times there was breakage. Thus, the reasoning that thicker the slab better the chances of its survival, must have come into play.

The marble slabs used today, however, vary in their thickness (gauge) because the forms and means of transportation have undergone revolutionary changes as compared to earlier times. The techniques of etching and marble-cutting have also undergone much change.

Technique of Rubbing and Polishing

Marble is to be worked upon to a smoothness and brightness through the processes of rubbing and polishing. The rubbing comprises the procedure of scraping the surface with sand and *vatti* (a piece of granite stone). This vigorous rubbing process also succeeds in removing stains from the marble and in totally cleansing it. The end product after the process is a smooth, shining slab that is inviting to touch and conducive to other processes of decoration.

Process of Marble Cutting

This is a very delicate process and involves a lot of care. The marble slabs are brittle and delicate and tend to breakage. The cutting of the marble is done with chisels and special implements (*nehla patti*). These have withstood the test of time and have not undergone much change. The cutting implements may have become more powerful but the fine work is still resorted to with the older implements.

Engraving Process

The next step of the process is the setting of the marble as per the prescribed designs. The fixing of this marble is done with mortar prepared from white cement. The marble slab is laid usually on a basal substratum of lime-concrete and broken bricks. The marble used in the central hall of the Harmandir had been set up in the first decade of the nineteenth century and can be safely considered to be the oldest. It is estimated that the life of the marble used in the Golden Temple is 50 years. But it can only be the glory of this spiritual seat of the Gurus that it has the self same beauty today as it may have had a century ago. At some places only has the marble become tarnished but it has been observed that the slabs are being replaced as soon any signs of decay or yellowing set in or even when any cracks or other flaws like chipping appear.

The marble 'karkhaneh'

Marble laying is a highly specialized job and requires years of painstaking labour as often the laying and setting of marble is an arduous and time-consuming job. Therefore, few people get attracted to it. Most of the workers in this trade are bought from Agra and Rajasthan. They belong to the Hindu and Muslim communities. Even today Muslim *sangtarashes* or marble-engravers can be seen working in the *Karkhaneh-i-Sang-i-Marmar* which comes under the

maintenance department run by the SGPC. The factory had been created during the earlier times because a large quantity of marble was to be laid in the Golden Temple. This was all the more necessary because the work to be done on the marble is very slow and time-consuming and would involve a lot of time. Initially, however, it was at Maharaja Ranjit Singh's initiative that the marble factory was set up. He put Bhai Sant Singh Giani in charge of the factory[12]. Subsequently the charge was held by his son Gurmukh Singh and then, by his grandson Bhai Parduman Singh, and even later by his great grandson Bhai Gurbakhsh Singh. Gurbakhsh Singh, was in-charge of the *Karkhana-i-Sang-i-Marmar* in the early 80s[13]. The artisans of the marble factory were involved in all sorts of surface decoration work especially *jaratkari* [stone inlay work] and *naqqashi* [frescoes work] besides the preparing and laying of the marble. The factory was financed with donations and the income accruing from their *jagirs*. The factory staff at any time comprises:

1. Senior Masons or *Raj mistris*
2. *Sangtarashes* or marble engravers
3. *Naqqashes* or frescoe workers
4. Junior Masons or *mistris*
5. Carpenters or *tarkhans* and *mistris*; and
6. *Majdoor* or Labour

The operations of the *karkhaneh* was more or less on the lines of a guild that had a senior and experienced veteran in charge who would see to the taking on and completion of any given task.

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[12] Madanjit Kaur, 1983. Golden Temple Past and Present, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar.
[13] Ibid

Gold Work

The central shrine of the Harmandir is covered with gilded copper and is also richly ornamented with gold. The total amount of gold used for various purposes in the Golden Temple was estimated at 162 Kgs[14]. Most of the gold was from the coffers of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's treasury. There were various donations made for gilding the splendid building. "Sardar Hukam Singh Chimni donated gold for the western and southern domes. For the remaining two domes, gold worth Rs. 3.50 lac was again donated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1862 BK. Gold for the central dome costing Rs. 2.50 lac was donated by Sardar Fateh Singh Ahluwalia. Maharaja Ranjit Singh further donated gold worth Rs. 53,735 through Bhai Gurmukh Singh, who was entrusted with the gold plating work after the death of his father Bhai Sant Singh. Three walls of the central shrine were got inlaid with gold by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and one wall was decorated with gold donated by the Maharaja's mother-in–law, Sada Kaur, who inherited the Kanhaiya estates after the death of her father-in-law, Jai Singh Kanhaiya"[15].

Among those who made major donations to the gilding of the Golden Temple were Maharaja Sarup Singh of Jind who contributed gold for the gold-plating. Other noteworthy donors of gold were the Rajas, the *Misldar sardars*, and many of the members of the Sikh aristocracy. Not so grandiloquent, but by no means any lesser, were the contributions of Sikh devotees and visitors to the holy shrine. Devotees professing other faiths have also, on various occasions, donated gold contributions for the purpose of gilding the pristine shrine. Some of the donations have been acknowledged in inscriptions on the gold. One of the acknowledgements records that a considerable amount of gold was donated by the Sindhi (Shikarpuria) community. According to Gian Singh Giani the total cost

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[14] Ibid
[15] Ibid



Embossed gold panel depicting Guru Nanak in meditation with his disciples, Bala with the famous rabab [a string insturment] and Mardana who is wielding the fly whisk or chauri

The intricate floral patterns on the windows of the first floor are an example of the gold embossing done on wood. The play of the light during various times of the day on these surfaces is breathtaking



The finer s details of the birds on this gold embossed window shows the deep devotion the artisan had for the task at hand



The play of the sunlight on the rich gold embossing casts many
a shadow on the relief work of the windows

of beautifying the temple with gold and *naqqashi* was Rs. 6,411,000 out of which the Maharaja donated Rs. 1,639,000[16].

The Gold Work Technique

There has been a traditional form of gold work associated with the gilding of the Golden Temple. The gold leaf or *waraks* have been inlaid on doors and windows of the Temple giving it its reputed name. In fact the reflection of the shimmering Golden domes in the tranquil waters of the *sarovar* is a sight to bring an upsurge of pride and devout affection in the hearts of all Sikhs. The work on the domes is one of the best specimens of this form of plating or gilding among all the examples of a similar medium in Indian workmanship.

The techniques involved require much patience and skill. At the outset the intended designs are embossed onto copper plates. These plates are of 24 mm and 8 mm gauge and are set / fixed by technical experts. The art of setting gold plates with inscriptions from the Guru Granth Sahib, the *Gurbani* and also details of donors who contributed the gold is honed to a state par excellence given the limitations of that time period. The holy texts were embossed on gilt-metal or copper plates and then gold leaf was inlaid upon them. The plates were fixed on the base with layers of mortar. Then these plates were inlaid with gold. This layer then was subjected to *naqqashi.* As the gold work is so precious it is carefully protected during the washing and cleansing processes to avoid damage and yet to maintain the magnificence.

A special concoction is utilized for the cleaning process. It is made from *kishta*[17] and *ritha* (soap nut) solution in water. In the present day the *Farash* or Cleaning and Maintenance Department was asked about the cleaning process and they said that it was a part of the *seva* and whichever cleaning agent was

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[16] Ibid
[17] Ibid

donated was used. The warm glitter of gold is obtained by rubbing with soft cloths soon after the washing.

Metal Work

"The upper storey of the Golden Temple is sheathed in plates of richly embossed and heavily gilded beaten brass and copper. The embossed work has been done by *chateras* (chasers). The doors of the central shrine are covered with silver"[18].

It is said that there had been an idea of decorating the Temple sancto sanctorum with gold, jewels, pearls, precious stones etc. But this idea was abandoned for fear of plundering and pilferage. It was then that the idea of using plates of gilded metal was adopted. "It is believed that the idea was borrowed from the Hindu temples at Varanasi. It is a known fact that Maharaja Ranjit Singh donated a number of gold canopies for the domes of Lord Vishwa Nath's Temple at Varanasi. The idea to cover the Harimandir with gilded copper plates may, therefore, have come from there"[19].

Wood Work

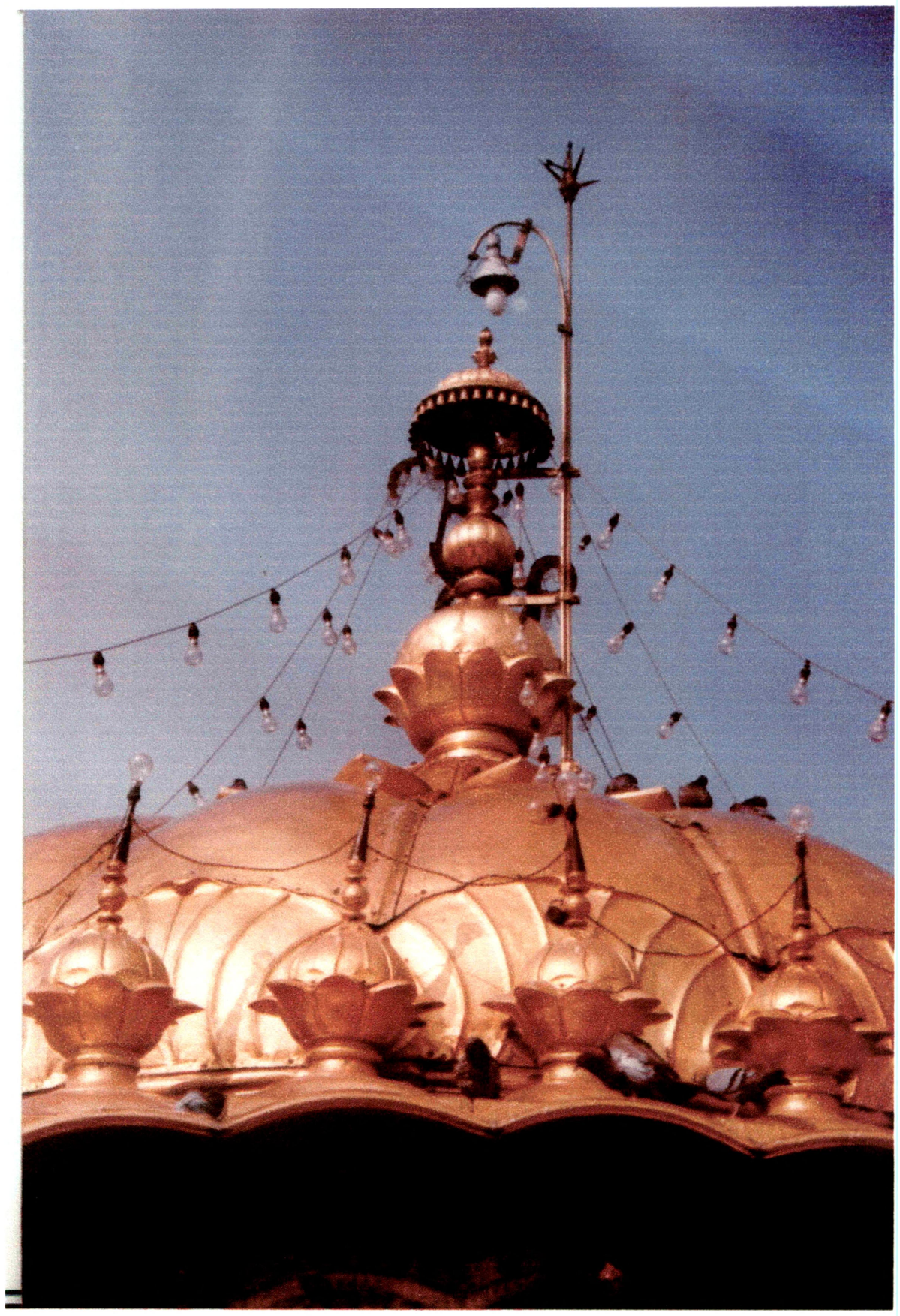
"The artistic beauty of the woodwork done on some of the doors and windows of the Temple has, indeed, been enhanced with gorgeous paints, rich colour ivory mosaic and several other devices. The door of the room adjoining the Darshani Deorhi where the *palki* used for carrying the Holy Granth is kept, and the wood work of the Kotha Sahib at the Akal Takht, where the holy Granth is laid for rest during the night, contains some of the finest pieces of craftsmanship in the sphere"[20].

[18] Ibid
[19] Ibid
[20] Ibid





Comparative details of the gold embossing on different surfaces.
Plate shows the work on the walls while Plate is an example
of the intricate embossing on the door.



The golden dome in the classic lotus shape is a sturdy roosting place for
sundry pigeons as strings of light bulbs festoon the highest
pinnacle to mark the outline of the edifice at night
and on special ocassions.



The fabulous array of workmanship and skill sof various types that went in to the making of the Golden Temple Complex is exhibited in this photograph where the resplendent golden effect of the gold plating on the dome is juxtaposed against the delicate and fine peitra dura work on the marble panels

Presently, however, there are few examples of this form of workmanship still existent in the Golden Temple Complex.

The mediums and techniques used in the surface decorations of the Golden Temple are an amalgamation of several influences which have been discussed in detail in the following chapter. Due to lack of literary evidence the genesis and modification of the techniques cannot be traced. Nor would it be possible to obtain an idea of the chronology and authorship of these adaptations and adoptions and hence much of the treatise would be attributed to surmise and conjecture on the various of steps of evolution many of the techniques may have undergone. It is, nevertheless, possible to make a presentation of the comparisons between the various forms and styles to better understand the rudimentary forms and their possible contemporary face.

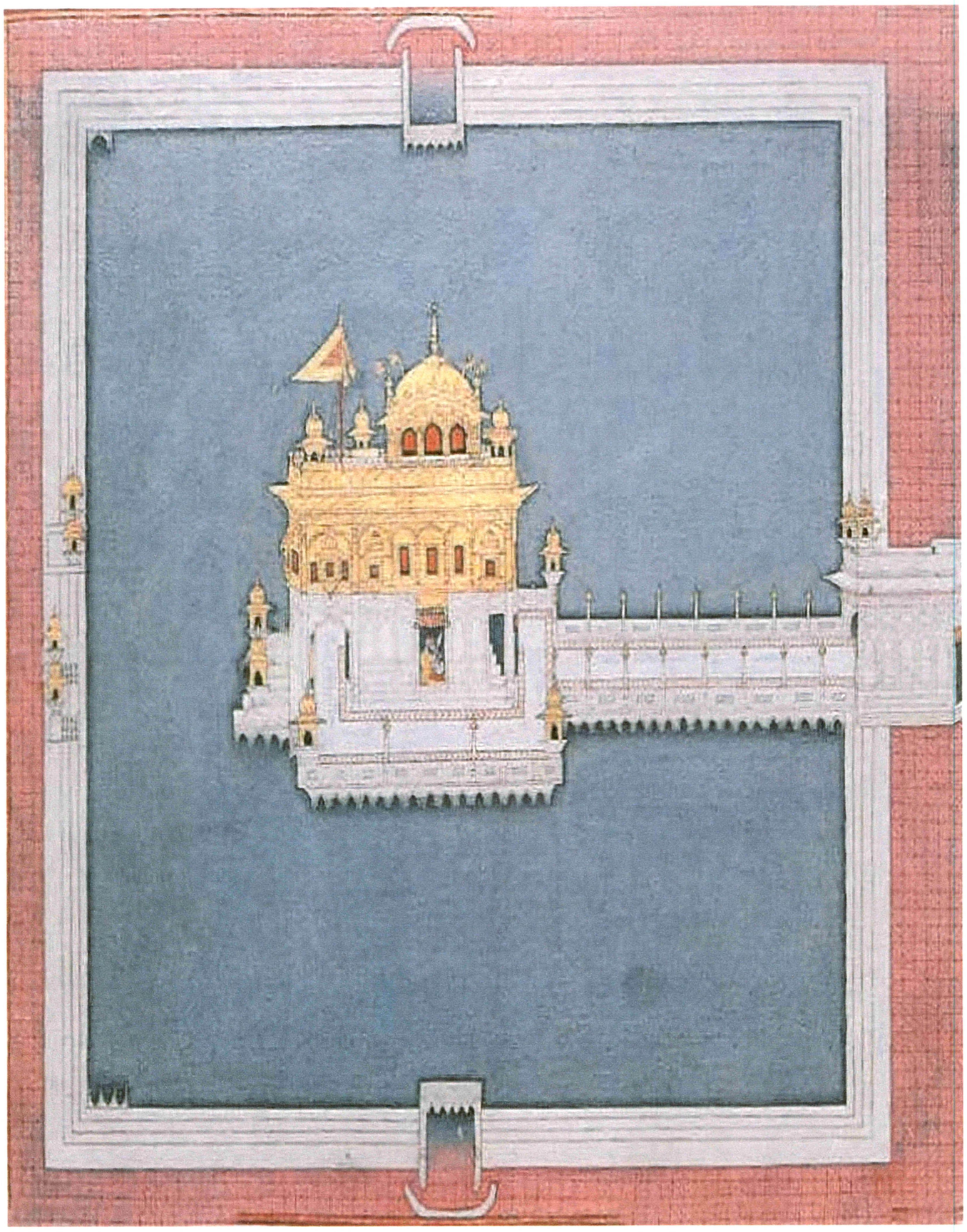
'Jis kae seir upar tu swami
so dukh kaisa payae'

'Why shall he worry, above whom you are the Lord'
(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Panna 749)

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Stylistic Analysis

The Method



One of the early representations of the Golden Temple Complex

Courtesy: Susan Stronge. 1999, the Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms, V&A Publication

CHAPTER 6

The words of Niharranjan Ray[1] give an astute and concise idea of the contents of this chapter. The following words frame the very essence of the arguments presented. "Form is therefore a matter of notion and technique too, in a very large measure though not absolutely, one reason why our writers or poetics and *silpa,* for instance, devote so much space on and attention to the manner and method of the arts which they were respectively concerned with". Thus the purpose of this chapter is not merely to enumerate and explain these techniques but to examine and analyze the principles on which the question of technique is based.

Stone, metal, wood, ivory, are the elemental three dimensional materials which form the base for an artisan's works. He may also embellish the creativity of his work with clay, stucco, lime compositions or any other plastic material. If he is a painter he works on the two dimensional surfaces of wall, paper, canvas, silk or wood. Each embellisher has his or her tools to work with and all their tools have a specific meaning and significance to the extent that the artist endows them with. The special characteristics of the tools, indeed their shape, weight, fineness or sharpness, nature, quality etc. are all determined just as much by the artist as by the nature or the vision and the theme being worked upon by the artist. The nature and character of the material, which the artist chooses to work with determine this also to some extent, as it is closely inter-linked in a very meaningful manner for the perceiver of the work of art as well as the embellisher. The artist sees every piece of material as imbued with its own particular grain, texture, feel, warmth or coolness, colour, etc. According to the artist these features are in absolute consonance with the theme, vision, or idea waiting to be

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[1] Niharranjan Ray, 1974. in 'Content, Form, Reality, Method and Material' in An Approach to Indian Art. Panjab University Publication Bureau, Chandigarh.

articulated and developed. He envisions and seeks to bring about a complementarity of the materials with his concept and attempts to have it match its feel, colour, appearance, essence and atmosphere. He seeks to bring out the nature and character of the material while at the same time adhering to the basic tenets of his theme and motif.

An artist therefore chooses his material keeping in view which material would be the most suitable for the communication of the idea, vision, or theme that he has in mind. He chooses a particular piece of any material because he considers that the chosen piece has within it the potentiality of the form he has in his creative imagination. More often than not in the process of articulation, the original conception, which is sometimes just a hint or a mere suggestion, undergoes changes of varying degrees before attaining its final shape. Thus the chosen material plays a considerable part in the artist's creativity.

Stylistic Analysis

"Content generally speaking is what constitutes the meaning of art, both explicit and implicit, that is, direct and indirect. The manner and method by which the meaning is brought forth is its form which is as varied and as inexhaustive as content itself. In art experience, however, as much as with the artist himself, content and form are practically inseparable; creative idea and imagination involve the two in one common co-functioning process, since objects and their meaning present themselves to him according to his notion of form. He sees or views the objects, that is, his contents, in terms of his notions, inherited and acquired. Conversely, contents too, may affect as indeed they do, his notions. In any significant artistic activity an art products content and form therefore constitute one single integrated unit. But for purpose of analysis and understanding they are separable, and analyzable too[2]".

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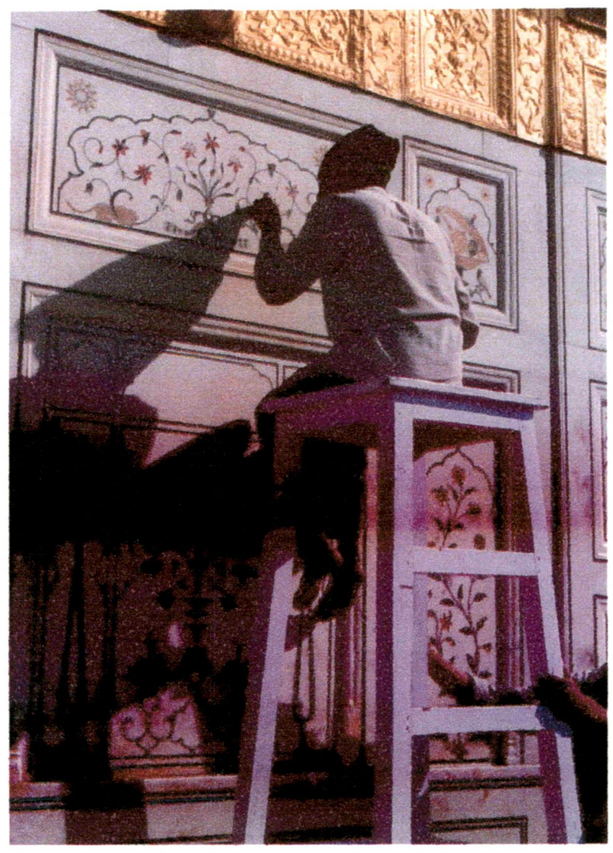
[2] ibid





Despite the passage of ages most of the tools and the astute love of the devotee for the Divine Entity remain unchanged. The artisans to this day bank upon the learning of years bygone to effect minor repairs in the delicate peitra dura and marble carving

The arts, which are the most sublime human expression, are the supreme embodiment of style on the most meaningful level. James S. Ackerman [1962][3] expounded his theory of style in 1962, "We distinguish one style from another by noting differences in the use of conventions, materials, and technique. We do this by referring to an image of norms of a style as a whole-style in a stable sense but the whole image does not help to determine chronological or geographical limits". In 1963, Prof Ackerman improved upon his explanation of style, "...The concept of style is a means of establishing relationship among individual works of art. In this it resembles the concepts of society and culture, which are based on similar definitions of relationships. Anthropologists are wont to use the word 'style' to designate a complex of behavioural patterns seen in the dynamics of a society... conventions of form, norms and mores, of symbolism and conventions as well as the ritualized folkways and accepted ways of a people .... All these are portrayals of style, a wide spectrum of traits make up a distinctive style."

Paul Zucker[4] goes a step further in concretizing the conceptualization of style in art forms when he talks about the development of a style, "Every genuine work of art consists not of emotional, topical or decorative qualities but also of visual images that tell us something of the spiritual life of the age that produced it. The artist personally communicates elements of a bygone or contemporary age which cannot be transmitted by historical documents, statistical reports, diaries, or letters ... the true artist crystallizes his vision in a doubly real picture, in

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[3] James.S. Ackerman, 2002. Origin, Imitation, Convention: Representation in the visual arts. ISBN 00262011867. In 1963, Prof Ackerman improved upon his explanation of style, "...The concept of style is a means of establishing relationship among individual works of art. In this it resembles the concepts of society and culture, which are based on similar definitions of relationships. Anthropologists are wont to use the word 'style' to designate a complex of behavioural patterns seen in the dynamics of a society... conventions of form, norms and mores, of symbolism and conventions as well as the ritualized folkways and accepted ways of a people .... All these are portrayals of style, a wide spectrum of traits make up a distinctive style."

[4] Ibid

which the beholder may read two distinct images: a collective truth and personal experience".

According to the above author, there are five major factors that lay outside the artist's individual intent and that decisively influence the range of choice open to his genius. A glance at these will make clear the affinity between his creative imagination and his time locale. The five factors are: period, country, social and political systems, spiritual movements (religious and cultural), materials and techniques.

"An analysis of the formal qualities would make it clear that their main purpose was to bring out as sharply and significantly as possible, the full meaning of the content; but this purpose was served most when form and content were unified and integrated in perfect harmony, in such a manner as not to make the form look as if it was subserving the content. In the formal qualities themselves too, one would find a conscious attempt to stress those that helped to produce in the eyes and the consciousness of the beholder, first, trust and acceptance, secondly interest and engrossment, and thirdly an overall inner sense of the total formal effect. It is this total unity and harmony that appealed to ones senses and the mind and thus helped one to achieve the relaxation of the inner tension and the detachment without which experience of aesthetic delight is not just possible[5]".

The Method

Centers such as Lahore, Amritsar, Patiala, Kapurthala and Jind offered court patronage to artists who were characterized with various local appellation of dynastic styles. Paintings done in Lahore drew inspiration from Pahari as well

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[5] Niharranjan Ray, 1974. in 'Content, Form, Reality, Method and Material' in An Approach to Indian Art. Panjab University Publication Bureau, Chandigarh.

as Mughal sources and as such the paintings executed there have a clear resemblance to the style of work of the Pahari and Mughal courts.

Mughal art has been defined by Edith Tomory[6] as "Inspired by Persian art, the Mughal Emperors introduced a new type of painting which bears their name. … Although the Persian school of painting gave a vast stimulus to the birth of the Mughal its influence did not last. Indians learnt from it the use of brilliant colours and refinement of lines. In the animal representation, the Indian genius manifested itself with that intimate knowledge and love which characterizes it. … The well organised imperial atelier at Delhi attracted hundreds of artists from all over northern India. Those who could not meet the exacting standards of craftsmanship and proficiency expected of them by the Persian *Ustads* [master artists and supervisors] managed to find employment at the palaces of the grandees of the realm. …. Many Hindu aristocrats also considered it a matter of prestige to employ artists".

"The term Pahari refers to the mountainous region watered by the five rivers of the Punjab and divided into numerous small and isolated states each under its own hereditary chieftain. 'Pahari painting' therefore includes the work of all these states because it expresses the common spirit of the various schools. … Research shows that Pahari miniature painting is a hybrid – a distinctive, creative, composite of pre-existing elements of the Gujarati style of manuscript illustration, the Mughal style of the Aurangzeb period [1658 to 1707] and of the Rajasthani school of the first half of the 17th century – the last named itself resulting from the influence of the Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan schools on the static, over-conventionalized Gujarat manuscript illustrations. Add to these the quasi-historical folk element and the result is a new art of exuberant expressive power and amazing technical finesse.[7]"

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[6] Edith Tomory, 1982. A History of Fine Arts in India and the West, Orient Longman, Chennai.
[7] ibid.

Due to migrations and changing scenario of patronage by royalty of various states there was a definite tendency amongst the artists of the nineteenth century to carry with them the working methods of painting to the newer centers of cultural concentration. Positively the previous traces of paintings, compositions of paintings, colour schemes applied to the painting continued for sometime until some local changes manifested themselves and were gradually adapted. There are evidences to show that even the religious faith of the artist played an important role in borrowing certain peculiar styles of painting. For instance Muslim artists of Lahore and other Pahari regions preferred to work in Mughal style. Colour schemes, landscape surrounding the figures, individual portraits, use of halo around the principal figure, use of gold in the border etc. were freely imitated from the Mughal period. The reason most probably behind this is that Lahore at one time was the provincial capital of the Mughal Empire.

Mughal art in turn is the product of the innovative genius that borrowed liberally from Indian, Timurid and even European sources. The Mughal artists interpreted these borrowed forms both in terms of symbolism and style to their own purposes. However, it must be acknowledged that the Mughal art and especially its architecture was the first to make extensive use of the indigenous motifs along with standard Islamic forms e.g. domes and arches. Even long after the Mughal rule the imperial Mughal stylistic embodiment of art in the various forms and especially its traces in the many architectural innovations found all over India are evidence of its profound impact on the minds and hearts of the Indian artists.

Artists' ateliers existed at Lahore from the times of Humayun when Persian masters of calligraphy and painting came and settled down in India. It must be considered, however, that the content or the subject matter as embodied in the motifs and styles, as well as their manifestation in a work of art changed with the change of locale and masters.

The Mughal and Pahari schools of art were adapted and adopted freely by the artisans of the Sikh court. For example, in the hills Sansar Chand and the princes of Guler and Basohli were the major heroes for the artists of the Pahari school but in the Punjab plains, there was a total change in the subject and tone of the focal matter. The court scenes of Sansar Chand faded out to be replaced by the court scenes of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the verdant environment of the undulating hills gave way to the plains areas and the resplendent scenes of the cities of Lahore and Amritsar. Pahari chieftains were replaced by Sikh personages, Sikh nobles seated in the *durbar* of Ranjit Singh or with Sher Singh, Dalip Singh and their courtiers. Temples and Gurdwaras were painted with scenes from the lives of the ten Gurus. Many of the *havelis* and *samadhs* were painted with Sikh religious and Hindu scriptural motifs.

Thus, the entire style of painting changed in Punjab. Symbols, conventions and other ingredients of painting made a subtle yet astute departure from the schools and style from where it originated. A unique form and frame emerged giving rise to a characteristic art that came to be canonized as Sikh art. There are, nevertheless, several departures from this school of thought. Some refused to give it the place which was its due and others drew conclusions based on scanty evidence. W.G Archer[8] opines, "Until quite recently historians of Indian art have tended to adopt a cautious, even at times, a caustic attitude to paintings of the Sikhs. The Sikhs, they imply, are humble products of the Punjab plains, new comers to Indian culture and, in origin, rough and simple peasants. They are a non-artistic race ….".

In another reference Archer states that Sikh painting is mainly an art of portraiture as it is chiefly concerned with "historic characters and we can only grasp its significance by knowing who these were. Not only we must get their names right but we must have some idea of the part they played in events, what they were like as people and how they were regarded by their own and later

times. We must understand why particular persons were chosen for portrayal, what Sikh needs were satisfied by portraiture and why Sikh painting focussed on this type of art. Since the Sikh religion frowned upon art, we must explain how Sikh painting began, where painters of the Sikhs came from, what styles they employed and how they were influenced by the Sikh environment. Finally – since Sikh painting is a product of the 19th century – we must consider the influence of European artists and the role of the British in Sikh affairs[9]".

He further discusses the similarities and diversities that relate to the evolution of the Sikh art when he comments that, "Like another Indian sect, the Jains, the Sikhs began as a separate religious community and dispensed with the Hindu scriptures which underlie so much of Hindu painting. The Sikhs had no traditional mythology or imagery, and as their history shows, they also had no feudal system. Their history is, in essence, a struggle for two kinds of freedom – spiritual and political. The first was achieved through the teaching of the ten leaders or Gurus. The second was won by Maharaja Ranjit Singh[10]". Thus he felt that the development of Sikh art emanated from this struggle and it was only to certain people who played crucial roles in its evolution can its refinement and chronological manifestation be attributed.

New symbols, new trends, new ideas and a new environment gave birth to a new style of painting which is sometimes known as Sikh School of painting. There are, however, scholars who have already done some work in this direction and are averse to designate it as such. The type of work which was done under the patronage of Sikh rulers of Punjab is associated with ruling chiefs of the time.

The genesis of an art form and its emergence as a socially accepted norm of a particular time and clime has been detailed succinctly by Niharranjan Ray in

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[8] W.G Archer, 1966. Paintings of the Sikhs. Victoria & Albert Museum, London.
[9] ibid
[10] ibid



The marble columns mounted with golden lamps and the sevadar in his saffron
riament both stand as silent sentinels as devotees pass them by.
Each over the centuries has done his duty in helping
the pilgrim reach his ultimate destination.

the following argument: "It has become almost a universal but irrational practice to periodize the history of Indian art dynastically, following the custom that usually obtains, even to this day, in the writing of the so-called political or dynastic history of India. One is thus faced with a roughly chronological narrative arranged according to the sequence of royal dynasties; Mauryan art, Sunga art, Kushan art, Gupta art, Pallava art, Pala and Sena art, Chola art, Hoysala art, Sultanate art, Mughal painting, and so on and so forth. Or, where dynastic labels are found inconvenient, one uses the geographical provenance of the form of art referred to, namely, the art of the Indus Valley, Gandhara art, Andhra art, Rajasthani painting, Pahadi painting. One recognises that these are all but convenient labels to denote either the time or the place or both which an art form belongs to. Yet it can be somewhat misleading from more than one point of view. First, Indian art history knows of schools or forms of art which were directly organised and patronized almost exclusively by royal dynastic courts; even the ideas, themes and forms were very largely laid down by the patrons themselves and it was their tastes and preferences which were by and large reflected in the products of the respective schools or forms. The arts of the Maurya and Mughal courts were of this kind, and perhaps also to a certain extent, those of the Rajasthani and Pahari courts. But when one speaks of Sunga or Kushan art, or Gupta or Chola art, for instance, one is not certainly speaking of the dynastic court art at all; all that is meant by such phrases is that the products of the particular art form or forms, school or schools, belong chronologically to the respective periods covered by the respective dynasties and may be, also within the jurisdiction of their respective kingdoms."

"Secondly, there is a more important consideration why such dynastic labeling should be avoided except in those cases where an art form is directly the product of a dynastic court, as I have pointed out, the main reason being that such labels come in the way of both social and formal analysis of the art which one is concerned with. One recognizes that very large scale monumental rock-cut caves, *rathas*, temples and reliefs like those of Udayagiri, Mahabalipuram,

Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta, temple cities like those of Bhuvaneshwar and Khajuraho or even a stupendous individual temple like that of Konark, could not have been undertaken and carried out without a great deal of state initiative and patronage respectively of a *vichitrachitta* Mahendravarman, of the Chalukya and Rashtrakuta kings, the kings of the Chandela and Kesari Dynasties, for instance. But in no such monuments there is any evidence to suggest that in their art and architectural forms and in their thematic contents there is any reflection of the ideas and ideologies, tastes and temperaments, preferences and prejudices of their respective individual royal patrons. What, however, is emphatically indicated in all such monuments are the particular religious creed or creeds and the contemporary socio-religious ethos of thousands of others in various walks and socio-religious strata of contemporary life, including those of the royal patrons. In other words these works of art articulate the collective will and psyche, ideas and ideologies, tastes and preferences etc of the people subscribing to the socio-religious creed or creeds which these are concerned with".

Thus, the stylistic analysis presented is a statement of the methods and materials used why they were used and how they were modified to fit into the amalgamated form of art that rose from the various veins described in time and space over centuries of refinement and experimentation to culminate in what we now know as Sikh art.

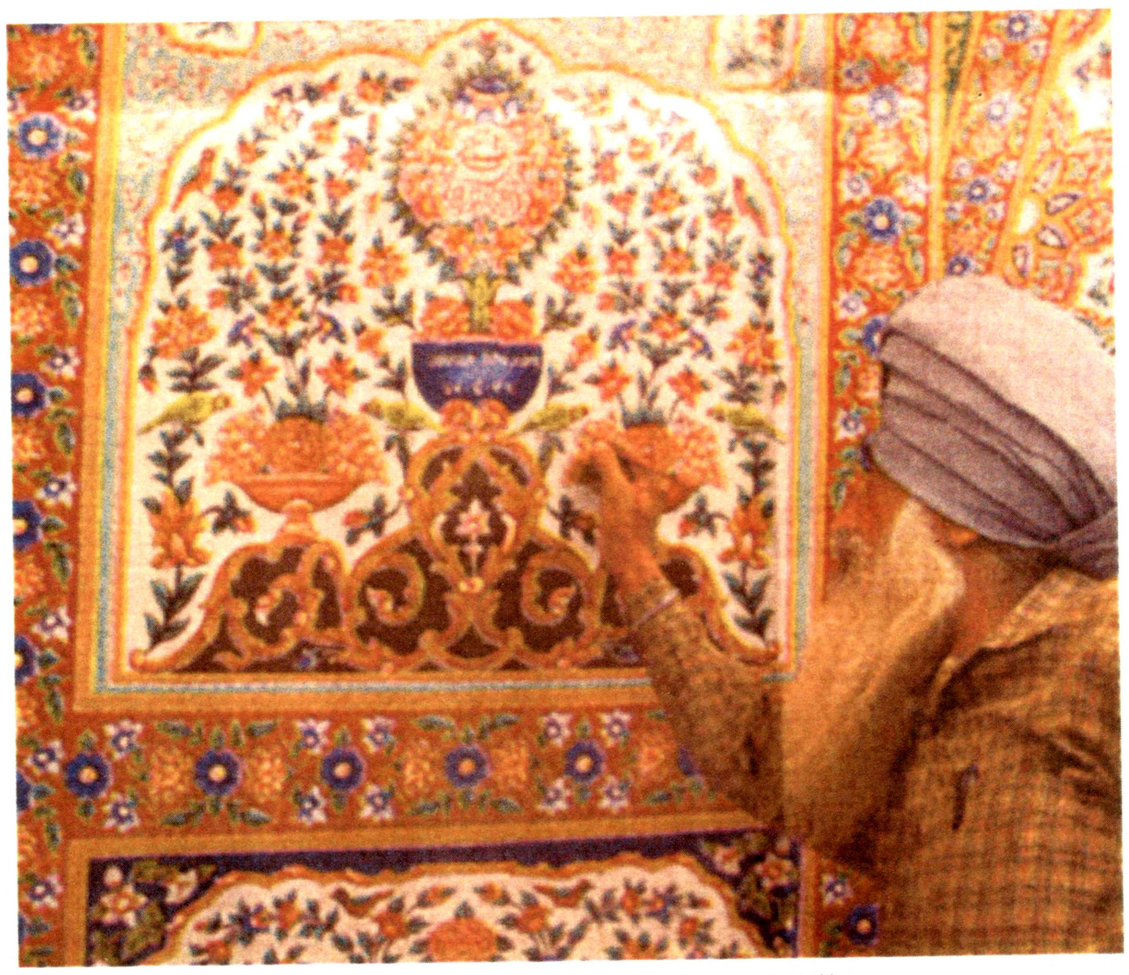
'Gur Seva Tae Sukh paeeyae
horat sukh [u] na phal [i]'

'Eternal bliss is found in the service of the Lord and cannot equal
any other form of pleasure nor can it be surmounted'
(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Panna 548)

ARTISTS, ARTISANS, CRAFTSMEN, EMBELLISHERS, DECORATORS

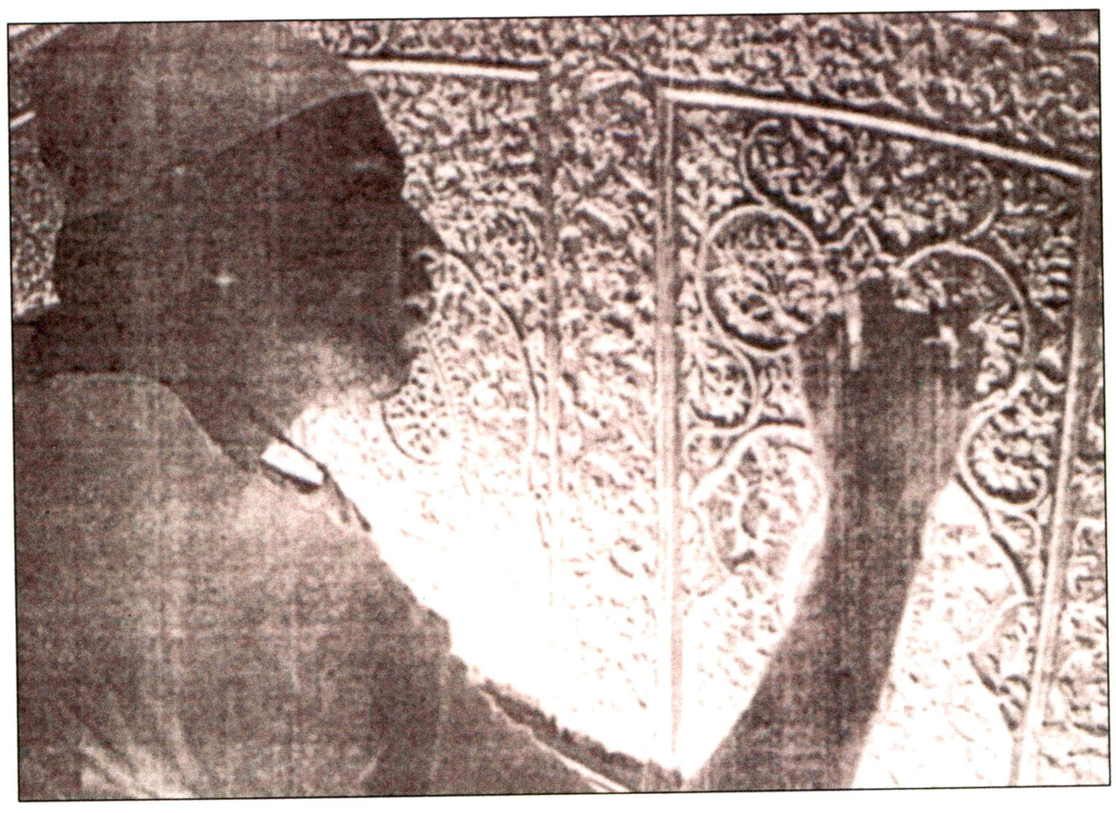
Link with the past and present

Development and innovation of
technique material and equipment :
An analysis



Artist Harbhajan Singh Naqqash working on a fresco in Akal Takht.

Hindustan Times, June 6, 2004



The work of gilding in progress at the Golden Temple despite opposition by some experts.

The Tribune, April 22, 2003

CHAPTER 7

No description of a work of art is complete without an attempt to understand the basic criteria used by the embellisher in his piece of art, the innovations applied and the peculiar signature, that he may have, which marked his work as unique and his own. According to R.P Srivastava, while discussing the role of 'Punjab Painting', "A critical analysis will lead us to think, on the basis of output quality and style, that this school stands out as the best among the provincial centres of Indian painting. But the irony of the situation has been the attitude of the art historians, who, either due to ignorance or due to bias did not write anything about it". In the present study, an attempt has been made to locate who was the particular artist who worked at a particular place and site.

Link with the Past and the Present

Artists' families have been identified who worked at the major centers of work, namely, Lahore, Amritsar and Patiala. Contemporary chroniclers like Sohan Lal Suri, Maulvi Ahmad Baksh Yakdil, Noor Ahmad Chishti, Rai Bahadur Kanhaiya Lal, Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Qureshi Lahori, Sayyad Mohammad Latif, Imam-ud-din Riazi, Ali Akbar Sirazi, Dr Mohd. Abdullah Chugtai, Mohammad Abdur Rehman Chugtai has shed light on the artists of Punjab, specially of Lahore. One most significant documentary evidence in the form of official *Jama-Kharch* [official receipts and expenditures] of the court of Lahore kingdom, showing the responsibilities of several ministers / officials in respect of construction work, beautification works, *Dharmarth* work etc., of the government has also come to light. The record has also established the fact that [of] the restoration and renovation of Golden Temple ....[1]"

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[1] R.P Srivastava, 1983. Punjab Painting. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi.

With the passage of centuries, this complex of Sikh ideology and culture grew from the embankments of a sacred village pond into a centre of spiritual-temporal understanding. The impassioned pilgrims of the faith initiated by Guru Nanak (15th century), the Guru who united Hindu and Muslim elements and initiated a reformation in the Bhakti Movement, have been coming to this spiritually ordained place generation after generation. Among them were also dexterous craftsmen of the North who were devoted to exhibiting their skills in a manner that would provoke the devotees to raise their souls in exultation at the glory of the Lord. The shining splendor of the Golden Temple is witness to the high skill of the traditional craftsmen[2].

Srivastava[3] further goes on to describe the types of workmen who vied for attention and patronage during that age, "It should be stated that there were two categories of artists working in Punjab viz., *Naqqashes* and *Musawirs.* They worked independently of each other, in their own sphere, in techniques and styles of their own."

"*Naqqash*, in fact, was a decorator, illuminator and ornamentator of addresses, letterheads, *Nikahnamahs*, *Idis*, Janam *patris,* and other similar types of documents. Sometimes they were also employed to undertake the illumination of Arabic and Persian manuscripts and sometimes they embellished the specimens of calligraphy. It was not rare that a calligraphist had the additional qualification of an illuminator. The choice of material of the *Naqqash* is very different from that of the *Musawir".*

The *Musawir* or painter used to draw pictures of animated objects like *Musawir* Kishan Singh who skillfully portrayed personalities at the Sikh court. Chajju was famous in Amritsar for his pictures of Sikh saints. Imam Baksh and Mohd. Baksh used to observe human beings in the main bazars of Lahore, and

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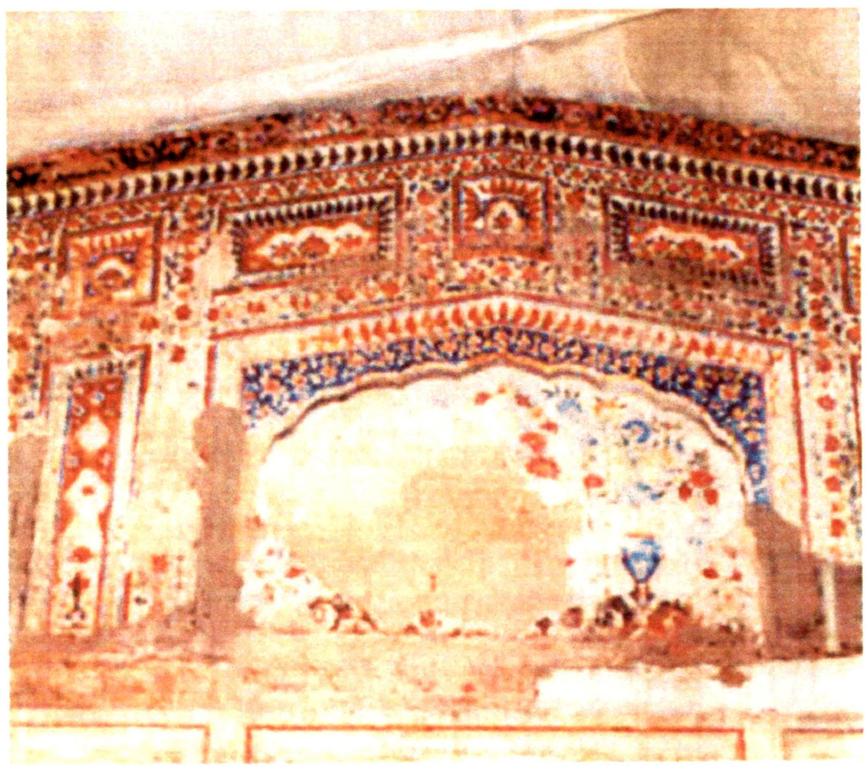
[2] Marg. A magazine of The Arts. A Tata enterprise.
[3] R.P Srivastava, 1983. Punjab Painting. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi.



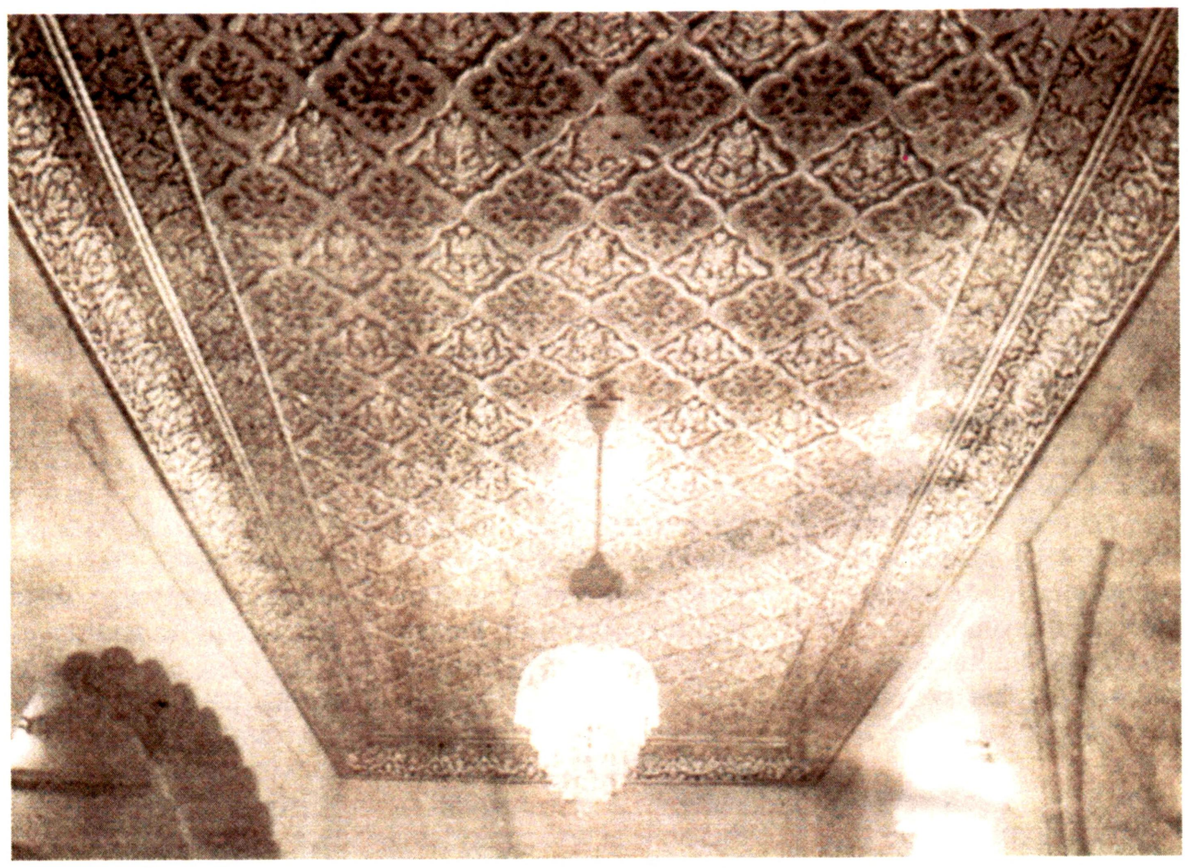
Akal Takht demolition after Op. Bluestar, it was built again.

Hindustan Times, June 6, 2004



A closeup of the wall painting in Darshani Deori.

The Times of India, April 17, 2003



The ceiling in Akal Takht redone using synthetic colours

The Tribune, June 6, 2004



Mr. B.N. Tandon (left), technical expert on marble maintenance, directs **kar sevaks** on the use of material to clean the marble pillars at the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

The Tribune, August 17, 2004

on return to their studio, used to portray them from memory. Then these pictures were either sold to patrons, or fixed in *havelis* and religious places. Or gifted to nobles and rajas as momentoes". Srivastava has traced in detail the documentation of the work and workers just before, during and a little after the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He found that there were various families permanently employed in such work of embellishment and has projected their genealogies a case in point being the Chugtai family where for generations the work of embellishment of surfaces has been handed down from father to son. The family trees of the embellishers who have been known to have contributed significantly to the Golden Temple are presented here.

Amritsar emerged on the spiritual map of the world as a centre of the divine Grace of the Gurus. In fact it was earlier known as 'Guru ka Chak' because it has been associated with the presence of almost all the Gurus who graced the site. It is said that Guru Nanak Sahib[4] arrived here in 1532 A.D and liked the peaceful environment. The fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ram Das had the tank dug deeper and bigger and renamed it as Amrit Sarovar or "Pool of Nectar" from which later on the city of Amritsar got its name. The origins of this city were in the settlements of Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and other sections of the business communities who set up residence and business around the tank. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had invited *Marwaris* and artisans from various parts of the northern states to inhabit the place.

The digging of the tank of Amritsar was initiated on the orders of the third Guru, Guru Amar Das. He paid 700 Akbari gold coins to Emperor Akbar for the purchase of the land on which the Golden Temple stands today. The fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das was ordered by the third Guru to begin the digging process on the tank in 1574 A.D. The pond was, thus, the starting point around which the entire city of Amritsar revolved and still does even today. However, with the demise of the fourth Guru, Guru Ramdas, the work came to a standstill and could

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[4] Dr Saroop Singh Alagh, 2001. Excellence of Sikhism. Alag Shabad Yug, Ludhiana, India.

only be restarted in 1576 A.D. The work began with great enthusiasm on the part of the *sewaks* and could be completed within a time period of thirteen years.

A good deal of the old work, particularly mural in character, has disappeared from the precincts of the Golden Temple. Initially the disappearance of the murals started at the close of the 19th century when devotees were permitted to present contributions in the form of inlaid marble slabs, which were fixed on the walls painted with frescoes.

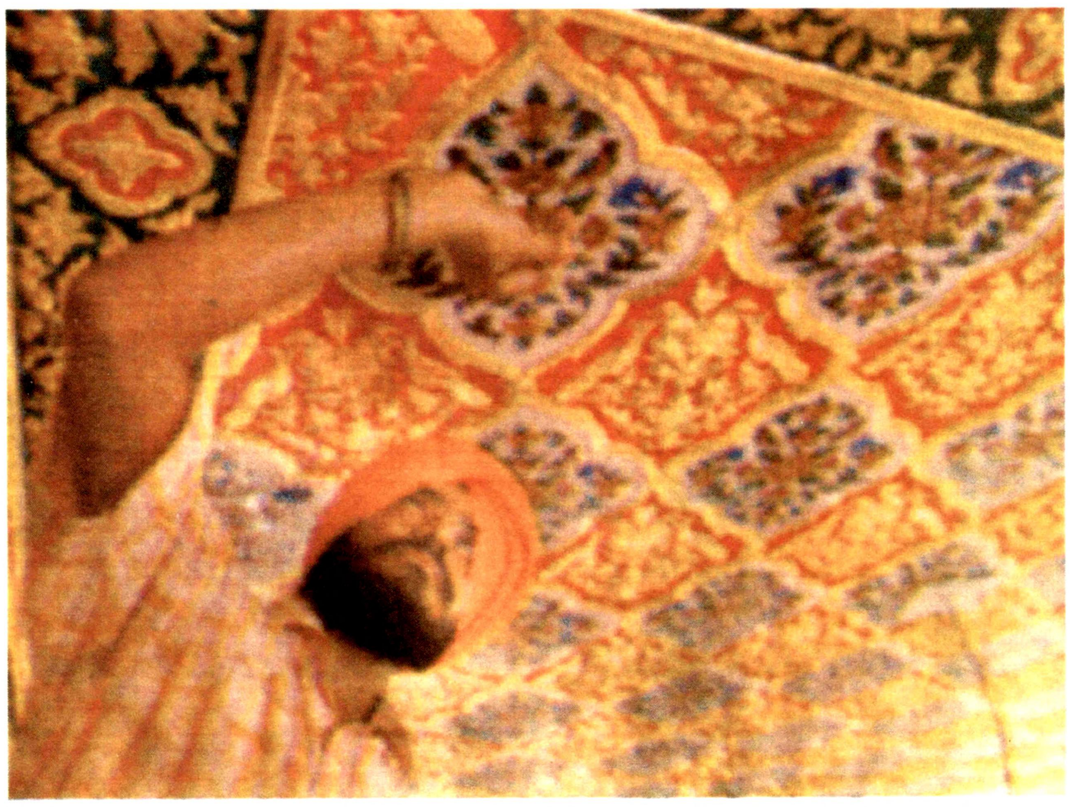
By this time the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev was enthroned and he initiated the work of the construction of the Harmandir in the middle of the tank. To enhance the beauty of the Harmandir the Sikh Emperor, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, arranged for the decoration of the exterior of the Harmandir with gold leaf on the top half and enameled marble slabs at the bottom half. His devout service is all the more commendable in the fact that he commissioned the further beautification of the interiors of the sanctum with gold plated *gach* work and *kach* work which is unequalled anywhere in the world. In all it took the Maharaja 27 years to complete the task which took up 162 seers [approximately 162 kg] of pure gold valued at Rs 66 lacs during his time.

It has also been established that the "restoration and renovation of Golden Temple [destroyed several times by Ahmad Shah Abdali] was entrusted to one Rahim Baksh of Lahore. This Rahim Baksh and Mohd. Hayat belonged to the Chugtai family of Lahore. Soon after taking over Lahore, Ranjit Singh first gave this task to Mohammed Salah Mimar, father of Rahim Baksh. Then it was carried on by Rahim Baksh and Mohd. Hayat in collaboration with their two brothers Yaar Mohammed and Mohammed Yaar. Moreover, relations of these artists were also found working in Poonch and Jammu States of the western Himalayas[5]".



The staircase within the Darbar Sahib, with pealing plaster and nails and electric connections carelessly installed on the walls.
On the right the mural (left) is a plastic tile painted over to match the decaying original at the right.

Indian Express, July 23, 2000



The ceiling of Akal Takht getting a makeover.

Hindustan Times, June 6, 2004

In contemporary times the "Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha" based in Birgimham, U.K is carrying on the work of restoration, renovation and conservation of the Gold Temple. Recently with the advent of the '300 years of the Khalsa' restoration work on the Golden Temple was taken up by this organisation on 3rd February 1995. They completed the task well before the Baisakhi [13th April] of 1999 which was the 300th anniversary of the Birth of the Khalsa. It is estimated that about 700 to 800 kgs of gold was utilized in the entire process. It is also estimated that the 24 layered gold plates that had been fitted would last for another 400 years without loosing their allure or lustre.

Naqqashes were engaged for carrying out the decorative work by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1805, when he visited the Harmandir and made lavish grants for its beautification. Giani Sant Singh was asked to supervise the work. The Giani happened to hail from the ancient town of Chiniot. In those days the *naqqashes* of Chiniot excelled in *naqqashi* or the art of finer embellishments and were famous throughout the Punjab.

With the passing of time Giani Sant Singh's office became virtually hereditary. His successors served the Temple in the same capacity as the great Giani himself may have done – with self-same devotion and piety. The members of the family became renowned for their excellent contributions. Giani Gurbaksh Singh was the last successor of this illustrious family in the service of the Golden Temple.

With the emergence of the local *naqqashes*, there emerged a new style of *naqqashi* at the Golden Temple which marked the origin of the Sikh School of *naqqashi*. The earliest specimens of this Sikh School of *naqqashi* are preserved in the murals at Baba Atal. This style got developed still further in the murals of

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[5] R.P Srivastava, 1983. Punjab Painting – Study in Art and Culture. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi.

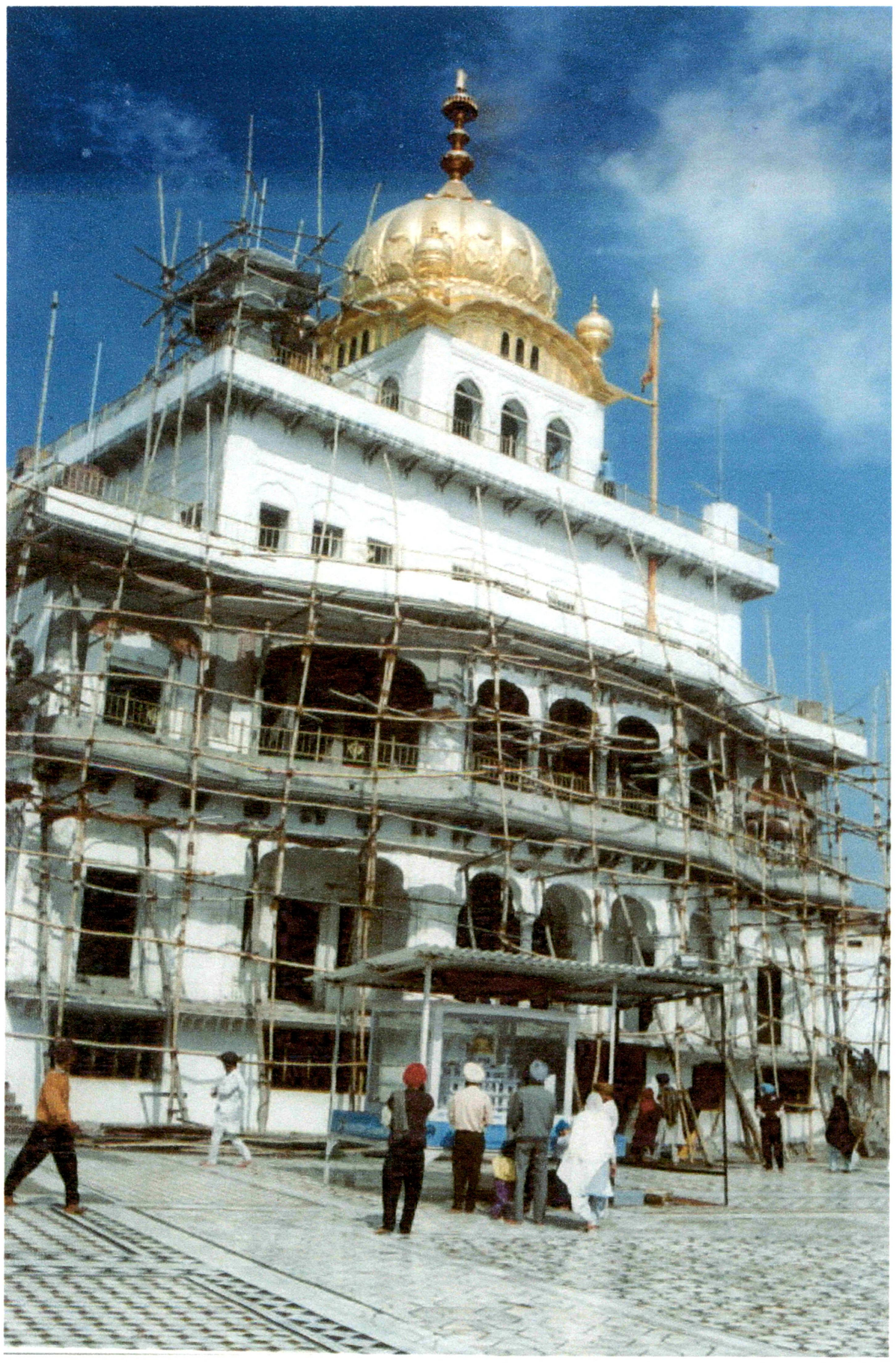
the Golden Temple. The Sikh artists surpassed all their predecessors in the conception of these works and their execution.

Kehar Singh was the foremost artist who put in unstinted service in the Golden Temple during the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Kehar Singh's name initially had been Sher Singh Naqqash. He was, however, renamed Kehar Singh by the Maharaja. Despite the fact that Keher Singh served the Temple for a very long period, none of his paintings survive. A few of his miniatures, however, have been preserved in the Central Sikh Museum in the Golden Temple Complex.

Kehar Singh was succeeded by his two nephews who were also his devout disciples, Kishan Singh and Bishan Singh. Both of them perpetuated the style of their uncle and developed it still further by adding rich colours all the while incorporating into their paintings the scintillating effects of light and shade. Regrettably enough the paintings of Kishan Singh and Bishan Singh, too, have not survived to any great extent.

The naqqashi work attributed to Bishan Singh, located on the first floor of the Central shrine, was preserved by the timely action of Sardar Arur Singh, the *sarbarah* or guardian of the Golden Temple. He got the paintings covered with glass. This was sometime in the first decade of the twentieth century. These paintings on the panels of the western side to the main hall are fine specimens of his skill. The last work of Bhai Bishan Singh dated 1941 BK (AD 1834) is preserved in the eastern wing of the first floor. Mahant Ishar Singh was another *naqqash* of this school. He adopted Kehar Singh's style. His works stand depicted in frescos on the Darshani Deohri. Another name to be mentioned in this realm of craftsmanship is that of Jai Singh. His paintings can be seen on the staircase of the Central shrine.

Bishan Singh was succeeded by his sons who were also his understudies: Jawahar Singh and Nihal Singh. Both these brothers proved themselves worthy



Renovation at the Akal Takht has the scaffolding reaching
the skies as devotees put in their efforts

of the family traditions and carried them on while at the same time they improved upon the work of their predecessors in the *tukri* and *gach* work areas. Their work is open to perusal in the hall of the first floor of the central shrine. The younger brother Nihal Singh was succeeded by his pupil Gian Singh who served the Temple for a long span of more than three decades. Gian Singh showed excellence in surface decorations attributed to the *tukri* and *gach* work. The superb *naqqashi* done by Gian Singh on the dome of the central shrine has immortalized him in the history of the Golden Temple. Gian Singh was honoured with a *siropa* (robe of honour) by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee [SGPC] in 1949 for the exemplary services that he rendered to the Harmandir. As a master of *naqquashi* he maintained the traditional motif of flower and leaf, but introduced figures of animals (in miniature). He took great care in blending the subjects and maintaining the harmony in drawing as well. His flower motifs were rendered in a realistic manner with tender undulating twists and curves here and there.

Gian Singh was an exponent of the Kangra school which he made use of most elaborately and beautifully. Because of his dexterity, the *naqqashi* of the Temple attained newer dimensions of excellence. He was in all respects the last master of the Sikh School of *naqqashi*. After his death, no artist came forward to replace him. Consequently, the *naqqashi* (*gach* work) has been given up and only oil-painting has been resorted to. This change of medium for fresco painting indicated the decline of the art that set in after the death of Bhai Gian Singh.

After his death, Bhai Harnam Singh was employed for carrying on the fresco-painting at the Temple. He discarded the traditional *gach* style and adopted the mixed style of *gach* and oil. He was succeeded in turn by Atma Singh. While retaining only a few traits of Bhai Gian Singh's style, he switched over to oil painting. Atma Singh did a lot of *naqqashi* in the interiors of the Temple and also retouched some of the decaying murals. At present, no great artist can be said to be engaged in the *naqqashi* at the Temple. Efforts are being

made to some extent to preserve these old paintings from decaying. Dr Rajiv Khanna[6], an eminent restoration-conservation expert engaged by the *Jatha* has claimed that all the material testing of the Golden Temple was being got done by accredited agencies in foreign countries. At the preliminary stage, the efforts of the experts will be to establish details of historical developments of the art work. "It will be our effort to register as to why the art work got damaged so that it should not further decay after the restoration is done", Dr Khanna adds that he will also try to identify the, "Man-made" damage too. He claims that while carrying out "patch work" of the art work in the past much damage has already been done which should be eliminated.

Thus, going over the work of the master *naqqashes* it may be summarized that Kehar Singh was the pioneer producer of an artistic style which was conducive to the communal spirit and could be said to emerge from the inner piety of an artisan. The ultimate result was an art manifestation so pure that it would become a beautiful aid to the human spirit in the attainment of ecstasy, spiritual kindling, serenity and happiness of the mind. This spiritual bent of mind provoked the artisan to opt for natural scenery instead of the portrayal of traditional gods and goddesses or other such motifs. Instead he thought of and opted for the portrayal of the glory of nature which was just what was needed for a place of spiritual magnificence to emphasize the glorious Creation of God or *kayanat*. The birds of paradise, multi-colored, large as life blooming flowers and the entwining verdant creepers on the walls of the Golden Temple provide for a soothing atmosphere that instills a much needed solace and tranquility to the tired human soul and mind. Kehar Singh and his sons, Kishen Singh, Bishen Singh and Sardar Jawahar Singh contributed in their way towards this art of decoration by utilizing their skills attained from practice and the inborn yearnings of their hearts.

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[6] Varinder Walia, 2003. The Tribune, 22 April, 2003. Article titled 'Ifs and buts of gilding the Golden Temple'.

Many other artists like Mahant Ishar Singh, Bhai Nihal Singh, Bhai Atma Singh and Gian Singh are also deserving of special mention. Their efforts resulted in a veritable visual feast for the eyes. One is humbled into paying homage and reverence to the devotion and love the worker had for the spiritual fountain head of the Sikh ideology as was manifested in the surface decorations of the Golden Temple which had been worked upon by generations over the centuries and epitomized the Golden Temple as it stands today. The famous architect Percy Brown[7], after visiting the Golden Temple, exclaimed with awe and reverence that the multifaceted glory of the Golden Temple was able to generate those feelings of religious piety that seemed to emanate through the lifeless marble and glass which took on a life and form all its own as instilled in it by the embellishers.

Development and Innovation of Technique, Material and Equipment: An Analysis

The long tradition of anonymity associated with craftsmen of India makes it very difficult to discover the names of individual embellishers in any of the art forms. Following this characteristic tradition, most of the painters, who painted murals in Amritsar, remain anonymous. Despite this, evidence of several painters having been engaged in embellishing edifices with murals has become available, but enough material for attempting a detailed and accurate study of the painters in question is still wanting.

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[7] Percy Brown- Indian architecture- Hindu Buddhist 1956, D.B. Taraporewala & Sons Co. Pvt. Ltd, Bombay. He made an attempt to view the Sikh painting in its historical context as a part of Indian painting as a whole: "In the nineteenth century, Pahari artists extended the sphere of their activity, and it is noticeable that a considerable number of their pictures … found their way to the large cities of Hindustan. The Sikh court at Lahore and Amritsar, ruled over by the Maharajah Ranjit Singh [1803 – 1839] also gave it some encouragement as there are numerous paintings of Sikh notabilities forthcoming painted in the Kangra *Kalm.* … in the Punjab, at Lahore and Amritsar, the productions of several Sikh painters found favour at the end of the 19th century, there work having a strange mixture of East and West."

The lineage of the most prominent painters, who in addition to other branches of pictorial art also worked as muralists, is to be traced to Kehar Singh. He himself is believed to have worked in the Golden Temple and at the Akal Takht. To his credit goes the creation of a school of *naqqashes* – the pioneering exponents of which were his nephews, Kishan Singh and Bishan Singh, both of whom were wall painters in the *mohra-kashi* technique. Bishan Singh was engaged in the adornment of the Golden Temple for several years. Floral designs were his forte, which, interspersed with birds and animals, were executed with the greatest of perfection and were each a piece de resistance in its own merit.

Even though the descendants of Kishan Singh and Bishan Singh continued their parental occupation, Nihal Singh and Jawahar Singh, sons of Bishan Singh, were experts in the allied arts of decoration including the *mohra-kashi* technique or fresco painting. Their worked upon *gach* and *tukri* embellishments survive to this day in the Golden Temple. Kapur Singh, son of Kishan Singh, grew to be an eminent artist in the late nineteenth century, but his work was confined to paper and there is no evidence of his being employed in painting murals. However, his son, Sardul Singh, took to mural painting and is said to have also done some work on the walls of the Golden Temple.

From amongst the relatives of the family of *naqqashes* originating from Kehar Singh, Mahant Ishar Singh, also a contemporary of the former, adopted the profession of a painter. His father, Bhai Ram Singh, had also been a painter. Most of Mahant Ishar Singh's work, had been on the walls of the Darshani Deorhi the main entrance to the Golden Temple. However, all the previous work has been covered up by marble slabs which were installed to commemorate donations made by devotees. He is known to have painted many of the murals in some Hindu temples of Amritsar as well.

A documented evidence of a family of painters has been highlighted wherein is traced the geneaology of a family of painters from the diary of one Hari Singh[8]. He was renowned as a painter adept in the use of architectural and ornamental lines. However, he merely records their names as Bidhi Chand, followed by Jawanda Mal, Sohan Lal, Bawa Singh, Sada Singh, Deva Singh, Lal Singh, Bishan Singh, Ganda Singh and Hari Singh. There is no descriptive detail of any form regarding the works of these painters and the sites at which they may have worked while painting their murals.

Atma Singh, who worked for some years to renovate the floral designs in the Golden Temple and the murals in the shrine of Baba Atal, belonged to a family of painters. His father Mehtab Singh, born in 1871, was an expert muralist who worked at the *thakurdwara* of Fakir Chand and at Baba Atal. Atma Singh's grandfather, Bhai Jawala Singh, was a talented muralist whose work was concentrated in the *akhara* Bala Nand.

A number of other mural painters from Amritsar are quite renowned. Jai Singh worked in the Golden Temple. Jaimal Singh, born in 1860, was a painter-cum-muralist who worked in Baba Atal. Hukam Singh was another painter who worked along with Jaimal Singh and Mehtab Singh in executing murals in Baba Atal. Rudh Singh, Amir Singh, Ganesh Singh, Gian Singh, Kapur Singh, Puran Singh and Aroor Singh were all known and lived in *Gali Naqqashan* or 'painters' alley', in Amritsar. They were all masters of the art of floral decoration.

Bhai Gian Singh was the last painter in this line of work. He served in the Golden Temple for about 32 years. With his death in 1953, the legacy of the traditional mural painters of Amritsar came virtually to an end.

Surface Decoration as Divine Offering

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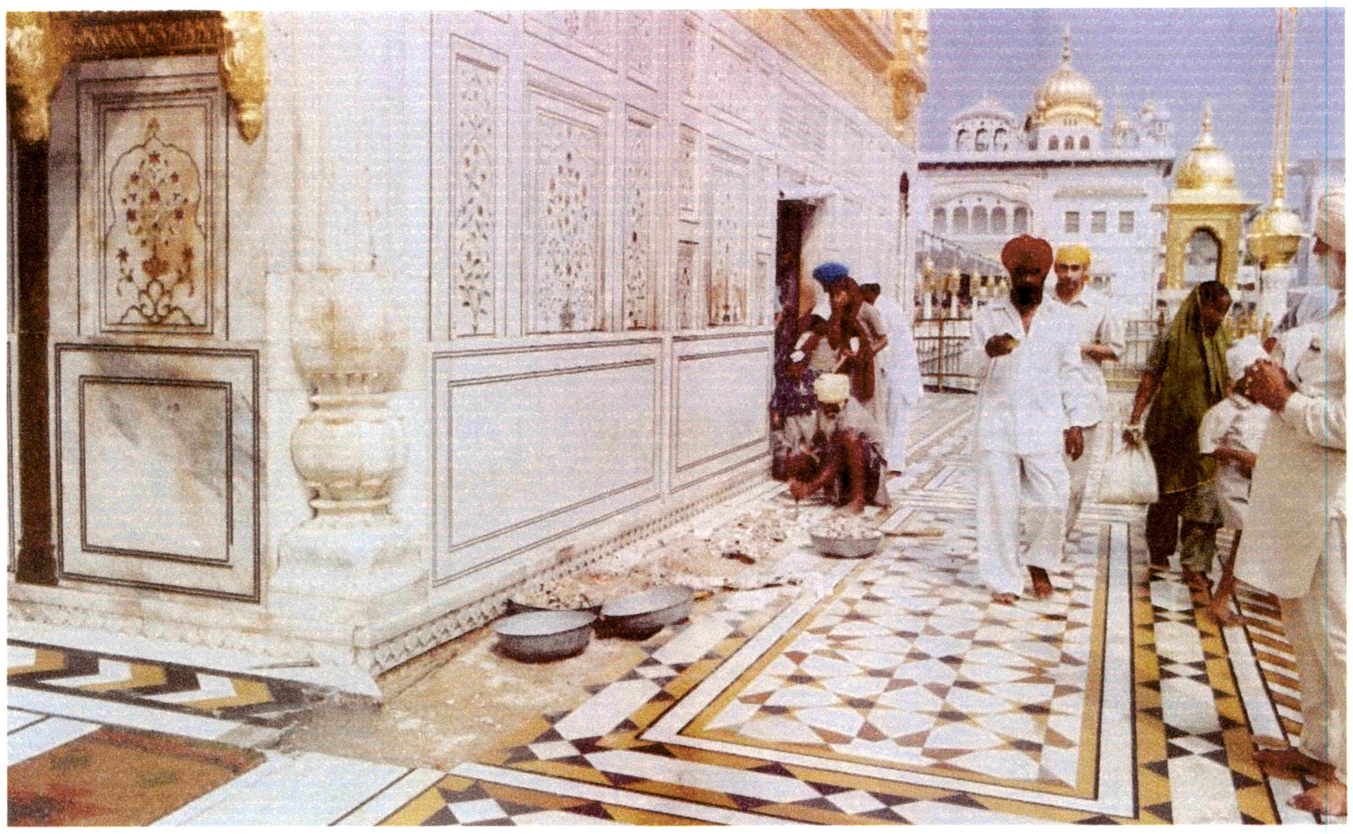
[8] R.P Srivastava, 1983. Punjab Painting, Abhinav Publication, New Delhi.

A note on the pictorial art under the Sikhs is necessary here so as to enable the critics of art to understand the nuances and finesse of the form and manifestation of the art in time and space.

One of the primary needs of man, in any civilization has been for shelter and that too a shelter that has been strengthened through the protection granted by the power of magic and magical symbols. From very early times, the cave the mud-hut, bamboo huts and the rudimentary house, were sought to be guarded from evil manifestations by the strengthening provided by positive powers that mankind evoked from time to time. These dwellings were lived in, subject to the blessings of the Gods and somewhere along the way became veritable shrines that housed positive forces. This principle applied to the greater house needed by a community for housing the sum total of their faith and belief and resulted in the creation of the large edifice which today symbolizes the weft and weave of Sikhism i.e. the Golden Temple.

Thus, the ritualized procedures or *maryada* make for an aura of respect, piety and devotion and even today symbolize the canons of Sikhism while the essence lies encapsulated in the teachings of the Gurus as embodied in the holy Guru Granth Sahib.

It was not strange, therefore, that, when Amritsar grew from a village to a town and then a city- at first, mud-huts, then brick houses, and later *havelis* for the rich were built – inhabitants would either do the ritual paintings on the walls themselves, or get craftsmen to do the floral decorations, and the richer patrons involved skilled artisans to do wall paintings, after they had carved wooden doorways and windows or embossed them with brass, silver or gold. The more primitive drawings and paintings were those in which the women of the households outlined the symbols of nature, fertility and cosmic consciousness. Floral, animal and human forms, painted by the craftsmen, embodied the traditional sense of terrors of existence and the awe at unraveling the mystery of



Renovation and restoration of the Golden Temple goes on alongside with the contribution of workers and artisans poring in from all parts of the globe. The work is conducted in a manner that the devotees are the least inconveniences in their constant worship of the Divine Presence. Rarely if ever do the routine activities of the Golden Temple stop to accommodate this sort of work.



nature. The highly skilled artisans, patronized by the rich, rendered the traditional myths and legends of the gods, saints and heroes.

Most foreign and Western educated critics base their appreciation of Indian art on the notion of the classical art of the great courts of Europe or the fine art of the middle sections. They do not believe that in every part of India wall paintings preceded, or were parallel with, miniature paintings on bark or palm-leaf or even paper. We must then trace the sources of the more subtle and free expressions of the court painters, say of the Pahari areas, to the swiftly executed bold and naïve creations of ordinary men and women. These symbolic drawings were integral to the protection of the house. Indispensable decor for the heightening of everyday life, to be brooded upon in odd moments, till it was recreated before the eyes of the beholder as a reminder of the need for a 'reversal' of one's being.

The Sikh faith, as preached by Guru Nanak, was averse to the worship of idols. Later, however, the stories, fables and myths of Guru Nanak's *udasis* or wandering life became popular among the folk, because his teaching was through his own example. It is also possible that some craftsmen among the lay followers began to illustrate these legends. The primitivistic character of most of the *Janam Sakhis* [stories related to the life and teachings of the Gurus] which have come down from the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century [except for the finely drawn Pahari drawings in the Chandigarh Museum] are evidence of the prevalence of the folk idiom in Sikh art. The Hindu merchants, divines and priests, who built shrines for their own worship, also contributed images of the Hindu pantheon. The surviving decorations of the same period show that the floral designs of the Muslim craftsmen, already visible at the end of the sixteenth century on the walls of the caravanserai of Najm-ud-din, seem to have entered the repertory of artisans employed to carry out the wall paintings in the Harmandir or the Golden Temple.

There may not be much evidence to prove the resemblance of the decorative art of the Mughals and the Sikhs. But it is likely that the taste for opulence in architecture and décor of Shah Jehan's time had become ingrained in the minds of the people of northern India; and even as the Sikhs were resisting the inroads of Mughal authority on their lives they continued to pick up and emulate their example by way of the splendorous court of Agra and Delhi. In this way, the Mughal rhythms, based on geometric proportions, the use of marble for the purity of its feel, the light and shade effects, and the abstract designs were all adopted and adapted from the palatial Mughal structures. The pigeon-houses of Rajasthan, the Bengali village tapering roof for chattris brought by Raja Man Singh, and the synthesis achieved by Sawai Jai Singh in the planned city of Jaipur, all became parts of the growing and refined repertoire' of the craftsmen of northern India.

Culture as 'cultivation of the soil of life', through the builder-worshipper continuum of participation in the traditional communities, was a show case for the highest reaches of artistic skill which were fired with the zeal of the artisan and fed by the liberal donations of devotees and pilgrims alike. Gold, Silver, Copper, Brass, wood, stone, plaster, clay or cloth all were grist to the mill of devotion. Nothing was too good or too dear for the attainment of the highest and holiest in ritualization and preservation of the holy tenets of an order. Thus became possible the ritualistic embossing, drawings and paintings, which could concretize the *Naam* or Name and other holy symbols.

And when, after generations of bitter struggle, the muscular prowess and strategic genius of Maharaja Ranjit Singh brought the various Sikh misls together, he made Amritsar the spiritual capital of this hard won Empire. His largesse made it possible to partonise the accomplished craftsmen from various parts of his own kingdom, and well as the neighboring Rajasthan and Pahari courts. These artisans were commissioned to re-define the folk symbols, images

and legends, into the 'mainstream' that could be comprehended, revered and sustained for centuries by the hill chiefs and their descendants.

If we do not look at the specifics of miniature art as epitomized by those celebrating the love of Krishna and Radha, but accept the wholesomeness and earthy richness of the intimate ritual art, we will find that the talents of the Sikh, Hindu and Muslim craftsmen who worked upon the Golden Temple, were able to infuse the consciousness of the people with this newer, dynamic theology of the ten Gurus, onto certain chosen spaces on the walls of this most holy of Sikh shrines.

Contemporary Repair, Restoration and Maintenance

The Golden Temple management affairs include a special cell for conducting the regular maintenance and repair works required all over the complex premises. This cell has been known as the *Imarti Vibhag* or the Building Maintenance Department. The in-charge of this cell is of the rank of a Junior Engineer who along with a Supervisor oversees the various processes and routine activities. During interviews with some of the staff of this cell it was found that there is no systematic and regularized form of maintenance planned or executed in the Temple complex. Most of the repair is done as and when required. However, for the minor restoration work that may be needed at many of the sites within the sanctum, especially for the peitra dura work there is no on-site arrangement for immediate restoration and repair. It is evident that the peitra dura work at some of the sites needs urgent attention as it has been falling out or has undergone the debilitating effects of weathering due to contact with so many human hands over the days.

The *Imarti Vibhag* is also colloquially referred to as the '*Karkhana*'. Here the researcher met one of the marble workers, S. Kartar Singh who had once been trained in '*Phul Pathar*' on '*Sangmarmar*' or literally inlay work in marble. He

gave the names of three other colleagues, Kirpal Singh, Jeet Singh and Kishan Chand who were working in the *karkhana*. All these marble workers took up the carving and painting of the marble slabs that were set up to commemorate the donations, '*sewa*', or contributions made by devotees. Some of the marble slabs have also been put up in the memory of devout pilgrims.

Kartar Singh also gave some information about Bhaiya Pratap Singh who had been popularly known as *Mistry*. He is said to have been an expert *Karigar* or workman well-versed in techniques of surface ornamentation. He had been instrumental in carrying out a large proportion of the restoration and repair work within the Golden Temple complex upto the eighties.

Other workers on peitra dura were Chattar Singh, who was also known as Tara Singh and Bhaiya Atma Singh. They had been adept at the techniques required for the restoration of various types of surface ornamentation. Bhaiya Atma Singh had two nephews Pritam Singh *Naqqash* and Harbhajan Singh *Naqqash* who were his understudies and continued in the traditional occupation. Upto the recent times Gian Singh, who is more than 85 years of age, has been working on the restoration and repair of the surface decorations in the Golden Temple. He is one of the employees of the *Imarti Vibhag*.

An interview with the Junior Engineer, S. Sukhwinder Singh and the elderly Supervisor, S. Charan Singh, revealed that the *Imarti Vibhag* had been functioning at the Golden Temple since 1925 when the Gurdwara Act had been passed. The Act specified the management and control for the upkeep and maintenance of the Golden Temple and other historical gurdwaras.

When the investigator brought to the notice of the Department that some of the devotees were bringing their own detergents and cleaning instruments like brushes and washcloths etc – and queried as to what were the regulatory steps being taken by the Department? She was told that this is all '*sewa*' of the

sewadars and they brought their own material and did pretty much what their devotion dictated and there was no regulation of the work being done or monitoring of the materials being used. The investigator pointed out that the intentions of the devotee were not in question here but some of the chemicals in common detergents would be liable to discolor, disfigure or even mar the delicate surface decorations if used indiscriminately and without attention to the delicacy of the work.

The *Farash*[9] Department is responsible for the allocation of the '*sewa*' or devotional tasks that involve the cleaning and maintenance of the main sanctum of the Golden Temple premises. In case the *Farash* staff comes across any untoward occurrence in the sanctum or some instance requiring urgent maintenance is reported to them they are responsible for reporting the same to the *Imarti Vibhag*.

The scarcity of experts for carrying on the restoration work of fresco-painting needs no emphasis. The old techniques are not applied even in carrying out the requisite repair work these days. Instead plaster of Paris is used to halt the decaying process. Thus, under this technique, replicas of the original design that is sought to be reproduced are transferred onto the place by the process of perforation. After that colors are filled in at the intended places while the plaster is still wet. Sometimes, a retouching is given to the original painting with the help of oil colors.

Recent and Ongoing Maintenance works

The 'Nishaan Sahib' or the symbol of the Sikh ideology stands outside every gurdwara, within its precincts, drawing the devotee from afar to the house of the Guru. The 'Nishaan Sahib' at the Golden Temple has recently been changed. The earlier one had stood for 43 years according to Baba Nachattar

Singh and Baba Amarjit Singh, two *sevadars* who are overseeing the work. The *seva* is being contributed by Baba Harbans Singh, Bangla Sahib Wale. The shaft and the symbol's metal work have been made of high quality steel, copper and gold. The steel for this had been imported from Japan. The approximate cost for the whole is said to be one crore rupees with the labour itself having been paid around fifty thousand rupees. It is said that the life of this Nishaan Sahib will be about 200 years. The investigator had the opportunity to interview some of the workers and Supervisors who were working on the base of the '*Thada*' or platform of the Nishaan Sahib. The present Nishaan Sahib comprises two long shafts embedded in the large *thada* with the symbols of the *'khanda'* raised between them in a circular shield.

The work was being conducted under the '*Thekedar*', a Rafiq Ahmed Bhaatti, from Macrana, District Nagour in Rajasthan. He had under him the likes of Abdul Karim, Abdul Hakim and Babu who were working on the marble base of the *thada* giving it the requisite shape and finishing touches which were worked in pristine white marble. The cost of the marble was estimated at about Rs 4-5 lac.

The Guru Nanak Nishakam Sewak Jatha from Birmingham has taken on the task of restoration of the interiors of the Golden Temple at the behest of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. They claim that the technique of gilding the interiors of the Golden Temple, being used by them, was much more superior to the one used earlier, during the times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

They felt that the materials and techniques used earlier were by no means as sophisticated as what were now available in the West. They said that there had been no screw technology in use at that time and the copper plates had to be mounted by handmade nails which were anchored in lead and blocks of timber. In contrast the ability of the *jatha* to marshal the latest tools and

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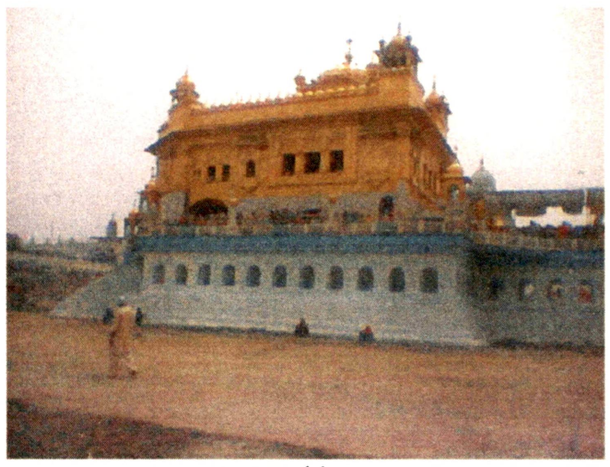
[9] Persian for maintenace.



Kar Seva of the sarovar



Renovation of the Sarovar during the Kar Seva



Research scholar herself during the Kar Seva



View of the Har Ki Pauri staircase during Kar Seva



Kar Sevaks performing seva

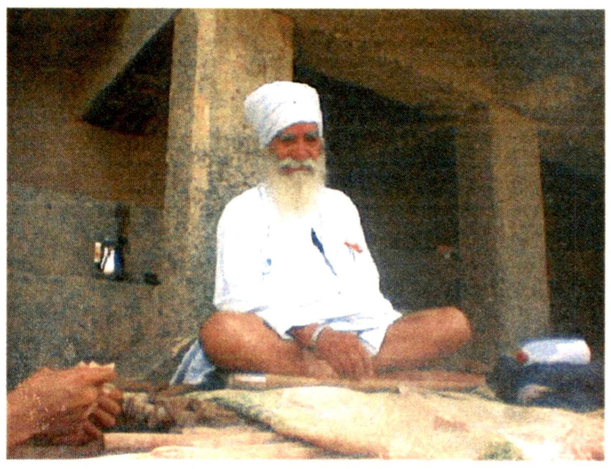


Kar Sevaks in the Sarovar belt



Kar Sevaks being supervised

Recent renovations and restorations at the Golden Temple
April 1, 2004.



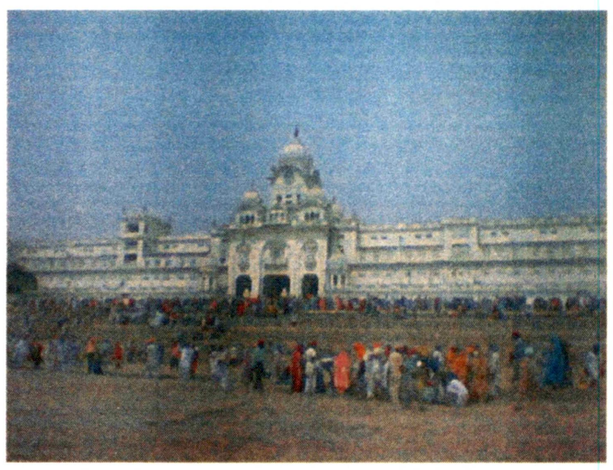
The supervisor of the Kar Seva



The base of the Darshani Deori during the Kar Seva



The treatment plant being installed during the Kar Seva



View of the Clock Tower from the Golden Temple



Base of Har Ki Pauri after being painted



Base of the bridge being renovated

Recent renovations and restorations at the Golden Temple
April 1, 2004.

technology, given the fact that they are located in the U.K., has meant that every technological aid has been made available for the project of repair and restoration of the surface ornamentation of the Golden Temple. The newly gilded plates have not only been screwed on but all the harmful lead has been removed from the site. This resulted in the end product being vastly superior to the earlier version and would be able to withstand the vagaries of the natural elements much more strongly and for a much longer period.

Dr Rajiv Khanna[10], the eminent restoration-conservation expert engaged by the *jatha,* reaffirmed that the volunteers and workers in the *jatha* would resort to restrictive interference and any 'overdose won't be allowed' so that the greatest art monument of the Sikhs should not suffer any further damage.

Greatest '*Sewa*' in Recent Times

The depths of devotion of the Sikh devotee can be fathomed from the zeal and enthusiasm with which he or she plunges into selfless service or '*kar seva*'. In March-April 2004, the Golden Temple Complex was witness to a miraculous rendition of the synchronized '*kar seva*' of lacs of devotees who thronged to the site for desilting of the tank for the installation of the filter which would maintain the purity of the waters of the *amrit sarovar*. So steeped were the devotees in their devotion of the work that they carried away the entire silt deposits in a very short time span [in less than 24 hours the entire tank was silt free].

An NRI had engaged engineers from a foreign country for completion of the task of installation of the filter. The call for *kar seva* was given and before the amazed eyes of the engineers the mammoth task of desilting the entire sarovar was taken care of virtually in a matter of moments. The job which would have taken a considerable amount of time, effort and energy was completed very soon

[10] Varinder Walia, 2003. The Tribune, April 22, 2003 'Ifs and buts of gilding the Golden Temple.

when lacs of devotees converging on the edifice from all parts of the globe merged their efforts. This historical event was covered by the media and showed how deeply the Sikh felt for his Golden Temple – the seat of his spirituality.

This inner craving to excel and give ones best to the Maker was what motivated hundreds of artists, embellishers and craftsmen over the centuries to offer their dexterity to the manifestation of the work of art that ultimately became the embodiment of the piety, devotion and spiritual attainment of a community. Thus it is not merely the fashioning of a piece of artwork but a total submission to the gifts of the Ultimate Being – a perennial offering of love and Divinely blessed Grace that added to the lustre of the gold to the extent that it shines with an iridescence that is unmatched anywhere else in the world. It is probably a reflection of the Divine Golden Light itself that suffuses the very soul of existence.

'Agae sukh merae meeta,
paachae prabh anand keeta'

'His Divine Grace has made the past, present,
future and the hereafter blissful'
[Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Panna 629]

INFLUENCES AND INSPIRATIONS

Textiles
Carpets
Weapons
Jewelry
Miniature Painting Traditions
Calligraphy
Manuscripts



The gilded throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is another fine example of the heights the expertise of gilding had attained during his time

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

CHAPTER 8

The Punjab artistic traditions can be said to be an amalgamation of a number of influences that have embedded their stamp historically and geographically. Beginning from the times of Alexander the Great upto the times of the great Maharaja Ranjit Singh and even much after his times the Punjab cultural scene has seen major and subtle adoptions and adaptations of peculiar cultural and artistic traits. The surface decorations of the Golden Temple bear testimony to the fact that the influences ranging from the distant hilly terrain of Jammu and Kashmir to the arid sand dunes of Rajasthan have been cast and recast in several manifestations.

The motifs and ornamentation that are visible in the contemporaneous plates and surface decorations visible in the Golden Temple take their roots from the artistic renditions of artisans who lived centuries ago. The works of these artists are evident in the Mughal, Kashmiri and Pahari inspirations and influences that comprised the heart and soul of the art traditions of Punjab. Many of the motifs from arts and crafts being manifested around Maharaja Ranjit Singh found translation into the final surface ornamentation of the Golden Temple. The works of art that surrounded him ranged from textiles as seen in the shawls, dresses and tapestries; carpets; weapons and their embellishments; jewellary; miniature paintings; calligraphy and manuscripts which were ornately worked upon to virtually become pieces of art. All these works of art came to be epitomized as Sikh Art.

Sikh Art can be reconstructed from the accounts of the Europeans who visited the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Their descriptions are vivid and talk of the fabulous gifts showered upon the visitors as per the largess of the Maharaja. He seemed to take a personal interest and paid great attention to detail when it came to the creation of a masterpeice. The harmonious coexistence of artisans

of various communities, cultures and religions made it impossible to define a recognizably 'Sikh' art form. This was largely because there were no rigid restrictions where patronage was concerned. According to Susan Stronge, "Ranjit Singh's Golden throne, for example, was made by a Muslim and court artists of all religious denominations worked for patrons equally without regard for their religion. Even commissions of a specifically Sikh nature such as architectural decoration of the Golden Temple at Amritsar or paintings of the 10 Gurus might be given to Muslim or Hindu practitioners as well as to Sikhs. Ranjit Singh's own religious devotion is not in question – far from being the result of negligence, his choices sprang from the quintessential egalitarianism of Sikhism."[1]

The Sikh tenets forbade the worship of idols and therefore all forms of embellishment were confined to the surface decorations as can be seen in the *Gudwaras* and most specifically in the Golden Temple. In the Golden Temple Complex we mostly are treated to renditions of floral patterns. The exterior comes alive with innumerable 'vegetation motifs' and designs consisting of flowers and foliage which have been worked into the delicately networked fibrile creepers and leaves. There are also animal figures like fishes, birds, wild jungle beasts amidst these creepers, leaves and fruits and are interspersed with a very few human figures. This form of embellishment truly states that there is no life without vegetation and there is no vegetation without life. Life is paramount in the Golden Temple and these surface decorations add to making it a living place. The overall effect of the work is further enhanced by the peity and devotion of the worshippers who sit in rapt amazement before the beauty of these embellishments. They focus all their attention upon the Creator of this ethereal beauty. There is a concommitant conveyance of the multifaceted personality of the Supreme Being whose purity and light shines forth from the sprays of many

[1] Susan Stronge, 1999. Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms, V&A Publication, London.

tiny mirrors of the *kach* work done on the inner ceiling of the dome of the Golden Temple. The constant chanting of the verses of the Holy Granth Sahib add to the pulchritude and seems to make the grandeur of the environment even more splendorous.

Similar is the sentiment of the Sikh artisan in all his work whereby he puts in his skills to bring about a work of art that is pure and pristine to the extent that it speaks volumes of his devotion to the work in itself rather than any other pecuniary consideration. During the times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh there was the double incentive for the artisan who set up shop around the city of Amritsar. Not only was he assured of royal patronage but also had the chance to offer his best work to the fountainhead of his faith. Thus, both his motives of existing and paving the path for his journey for the after life seemed to be attained through the absolute exploitation of his own dexterity and the limits to which he could go in offering his best to his Patron and God.

Textiles

Punjab has had a well established tradition of textile production. Many of its towns and cities traded in the fine fabrics including richly embroidered cloth lengths or elaborately and delicately woven silks. These were popular over a wide area. The workers and their workmanship survived largely on the royal patronage of the courts. The finely worked embroidery in the form of *zardozi*, *tilla, badla* and *salma-sitara* work, *dabka* and threadwork, *aari* work, *mukaish* on royal and courtly raiments as well as the dressware of royalty and commoner alike has a place of its own in the significant influence of the craftsmanship on various aspects of the surface decorations of the Golden Temple. Some exquisite pieces are in existence that may well be taken to be samples of the great attention to detail paid by the embellisher on the work at hand.

The court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Lahore left an impression of unrivalled splendour for all those who visited it. It was particularly the lavish use of magnificent, brightly coloured silks, shawls and golden brocade textiles that impressed many of those who have left written accounts [especially among the British administrators and chroniclers]. One British visitor, Major-General W.G. Osborne[2], described the opulent setting of the Maharaja's '*durbar*' on the first meeting he had with Maharaja Ranjit Singh[3]: "The floor was covered with rich shawl carpets, and a gorgeous shawl canopy, embroidered with gold and precious stones, supported on golden pillars, covered three parts of the hall'. The British Commander-in-Chief in India, Sir Henry Fane, also commented upon the splendour of the remarkable scene, 'The dresses and jewels of the Rajah's court were the most superb that can be conceived'. Another version of the court is obtained from the remarks of Emily Eden[4], sister of the Governor-General, Lord Auckland, as she described the court, "It reduces European magnificence to a very low pitch. Even the camp set up when the ruler was on the move was luxuriously furnished with tents and beds of shawl cloth". Fane elaborates upon Maharaja Ranjit Singh's camp thus: "The scarlet *semianas* [awnings] and *kanauts* [qanats or screens] of Runjeet's pavilions looked beautiful from the opposite bank of the river, and when nearer, the illusion was not dispelled; for in addition to all the tents with shawl carpets and ceilings he had at Lahore, he had

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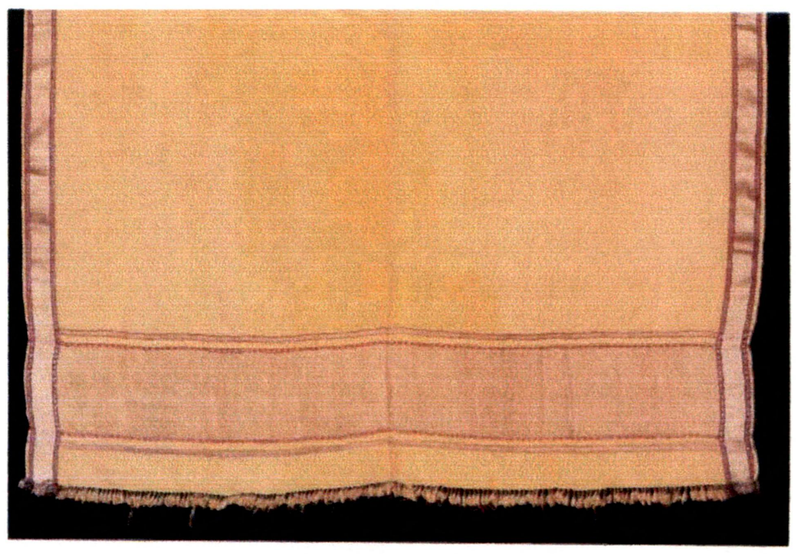
[2] Ibid

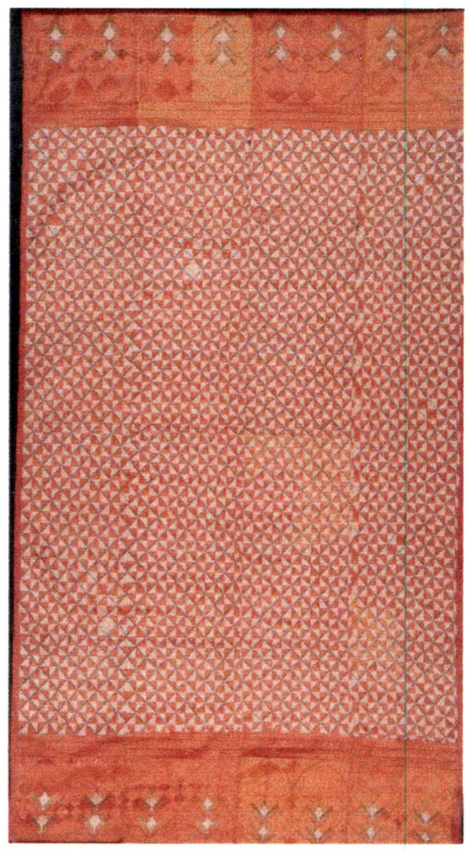
[3] In 1838. "The floor was covered with rich shawl carpets, and a gorgeous shawl canopy, embroidered with gold and precious stones, supported on golden pillars, covered three parts of the hall'. The British Commander-in-Chief in India, Sir Henry Fane, also commented upon the splendour of the remarkable scene, 'The dresses and jewels of the Rajah's court were the most superb that can be conceived'. Another version of the court is obtained from the remarks of Emily Eden[4] sister of the Governor-General, Lord Auckland, as she described the court, "It reduces European magnificence to a very low pitch. Even the camp set up when the ruler was on the move was luxuriously furnished with tents and beds of shawl cloth". Fane elaborates upon Maharaja Ranjit Singh's camp thus: "The scarlet *semianas* [awnings] and *kanauts* [qanats or screens] of Runjeet's pavilions looked beautiful from the opposite bank of the river, and when nearer, the illusion was not dispelled; for in addition to all the tents with shawl carpets and ceilings he had at Lahore, he had several new scarlet tents pitched, and the whole interior lined with Seikhs [Sikhs], in their picturesque and variegated dresses".

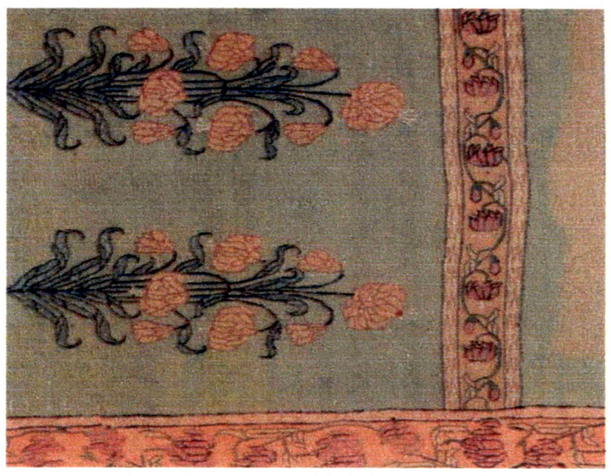
[4] Susan Stronge, 1999. Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms, V&A Publication, London.











Textiles

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

several new scarlet tents pitched, and the whole interior lined with Seikhs [Sikhs], in their picturesque and variegated dresses".

The guardian of the young Dalip Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sir John Login, while writing in 1849, felt that "for camp-equipage, old Runjeet's camp was the very finest and most sumptuous among all the Princes of India". He painted a vivid picture of his twelve-year-old ward's travelling arrangements, especially pertaining to the get-up of his tentage and camp to the extent of being richly impressed himself. "Now when you are told the tents for the little man himself are all lined, some with rich Cashmere shawls, and some with satin embroidered with gold, *semianas*, carpets, *purdahs* [curtains], and floor-cloths to match, and that the tentpoles are encased in gold and silver... you may fancy that we shall look rather smart!"

The Maharaja, in contrast to the splendour of his surroundings, himself habitually dressed relatively simply, usually in a plain robe with only some choice pearls and diamonds for decoration. The striking costumes of his courtiers and bodyguards attracted the attention of many visitors. Emily Eden recorded the many hues and cuts in her sketches. But most informative are her vivid verbal pictures of the troops of the Maharaja: "One troop [of bodyguards] was dressed entirely in yellow satin, with gold scarfs and shawls; but the other half were in that cloth of gold which is called kincob - ... [background] being gold and the patterns scarlet, or purple, or yellow...most of them had a silver or gold tissue drapery, which they bring over their heads and pass round their beards to keep them from the dust..."[5]

Osborne was so impressed by the bodyguards or the 'goorcherras' that he even described their attire as "chain armour and quilted jackets of either a bright yellow, green or scarlet colour". He gives details of certain courtiers like Hira

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[5] Ibid.

Singh and Raja Suchet Singh as wearing "three shawls of lilac, white and scarlet, twisted very round and tight around the edge of his helmet". The dress sense and great attention paid to the overall look a person presented in court and in the presence of the Maharaja has been captured by many a painting and write-up of those times. Many of the nineteenth-century paintings of Sikh *sardars* or chieftains and courtiers by Indian and European artists portray them dressed mainly in close-fitting cotton robes with shawls draped around their shoulders, sometimes tied loosely at the waist, or with a loose-fitting *choga* or outer robe in place of the shawl as an outer garment.

A description of the shawls in such paintings is attempted further on. These shawls are in many tones and hues having borders, paisley sprinkled backgrounds, have plain fields with narrow patterned borders, while others have small, frequently repeated motifs. Then there is also the beautifully worked, subtly coloured shawl that was popular as the *Chanddar or the* 'moon motif shawl'. Probably it was this *chandar* that leant its name to the *Chaddra* or *chaddar* of contemporary times.

It is known that Ranjit Singh maintained a large inventory of textiles. These were used in the court ceremonies of honour and also presented to visiting dignitaries as robes of honour or '*khil' aat'*. The store-rooms or *toshakhana* of the palace in Lahore were packed with such treasures, like "the immense collection of magnificent Cashmere shawls, rooms full of them, laid out on shelves and heaped up in bales-it is not to be described!" As exclaimed by the daughter of Henry Fane who elaborated upon the gifts lavished on her father by the Maharaja. She said they were 'very handsome, consisting of shawls, kincobs, silks, satins, horses with their trappings, a beautiful sword, jewellery, etc., etc.'

Thus, the beautiful fabrics of the Punjab are a mere reflection of the attention to detail that the artisan had become used to giving to the works of art









Textiles

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.







Textiles

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

that required much more than skill in terms of an eye for detail and a devotion to put in the best efforts for the creation of a masterpeice. This was merely a replication of the sincerity and dexterity that went hand in hand in piecing together the beautiful end result as manifested in the Golden Temple. Besides the shawls and khinkhabs, the *phulkari* and the *Chamba rumal* are also very much representations of the Punjab textile industry but as they were more individualistic and had a significant regional flavour, they are beyond the scope of the present study. Needless to say they are definitely a reflection of the self same sentiment of meticulous workmanship to obtain a beautiful end product much like the artisans who worked upon the Golden Temple.

Carpets

In the Eastern part of the world, elevated furniture was not in use and everybody sat or reclined on the floor. The carpet was, thus, a much more intimate object of personal use than in the West. There was, hence, a much closer human relationship between the user and the object in use, whether the carpet be thick and soft, light or coarse or finely textured. The choice was only determined by the stature of the individual, the size of the buyer's purse and also by the local climate or sometimes a specific need on the part of the buyer or one who was giving the commisison of creating the carpet.

Man has always harboured the desire to embellish his person as well as his surroundings with beautiful things from the earliest days. F. H. Andrews[6], writing on Indian carpets and rugs, says: "The influence of the East on all our Western art is not sufficiently recognised...that the early Italian brocades, medieval German fabrics, were copies of Oriental samples, imported from the East. Italian, Flemish, German and other early European painters loved to introduce copies of Oriental tapestry into their frescoes and pictures as objects of

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[6] Kamla Devi Chatopadhya, 1969. Carpets and Floor Coverings of India, DB Taraporewala & Sons Co. Pvt. Ltd, Bombay.

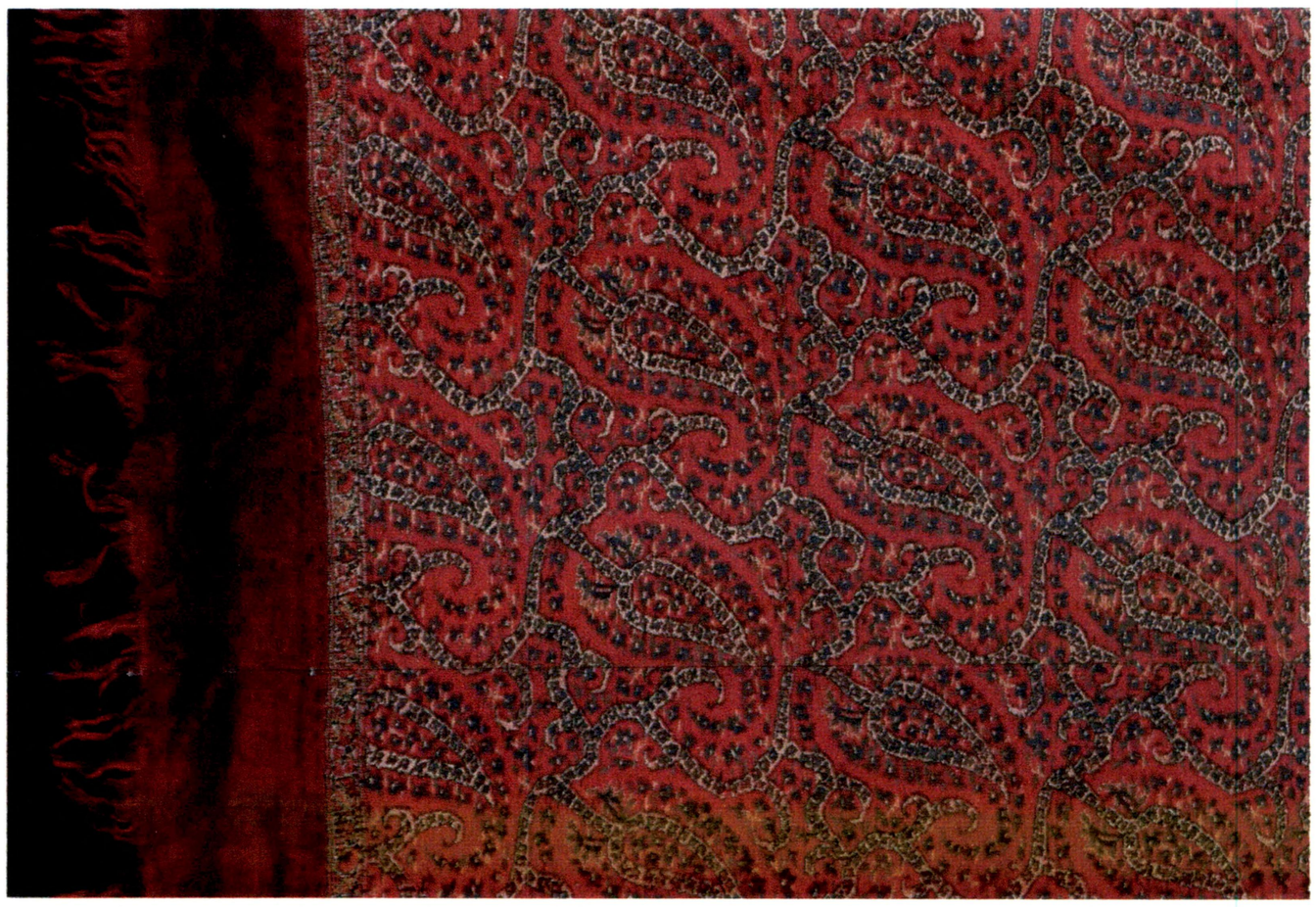
beauty and distinction…In some, the reproductions are so carefully painted that the number of stitches may be counted and good drawings obtained from them…Thus these borrowings were assimilated so thoroughly that one hardly remembers that these influences first came from the East."

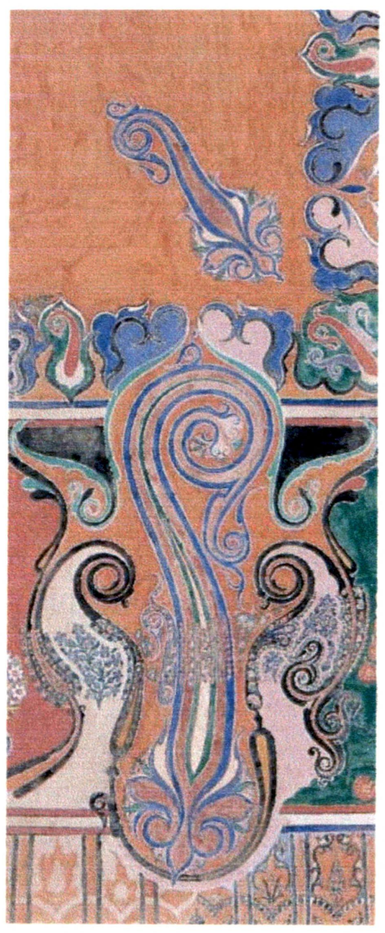
Oriental carpets are said to have had their early beginnings in tents and were actually the invention of the nomadic tribes. In the days when large groups of tribes or *quabilas* as they have been called, kept on the move, tents were the only homes known to these people who bestowed on them all their creative talent and energies, making them objects of glory even as the settled communities did later with their mansions and palaces. This was also true of large troop's movements during wars and seiges which may have lasted for long durations of time. In these tents were kept all the treasures and their walls were hung with their precious weapons. These tents could sometimes be enormous – almost palatial.

To these ancient communities the carpet was an all-purpose article, indispensable in their daily life. It was their floor, bed, pillow, their dining table, their door, partition for their room, their wardrobe and when on travel, their suitcase, it was an article for religious observances and to this purpose designs of ritualistic significance were worked on its surface.

Though the carpet may have had its birth in the tent, the Oriental floor coverings subsequently came to cover a big sweep from the humble tent or hut to the opulent palace. While dynasties have toppled and capitals faced invasions and conquests, resulting in the collapse of carpet factories, the tent dwellers and the village peasants have carried on with their vocation, keeping the precious art of carpet weaving alive.

The recorded history of the Indian pile carpet, however, seems to start in the 16th century when the Moghul Emperor, Akbar, brought some Persian carpet









Textiles

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.







Textiles

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi

weavers from Persia to India, and set up the Royal Workshop in his own palace. He commissioned them to produce carpets equal to those of their own country. This is generally taken as the birth[7] of the Indian pile carpet, even though there is a reference in the East India Company records of a batch of Persian weavers settling in Masulipatam and later moving to Eluru in mid-16th century.

Once the Indian weavers picked up this craft, they soon began to orient these products to the needs of their own environment and the suitability of their settings. A factor which hastened this process of assimilation was the settling down of the Persian artisans among the Indian communities and inter-marrying with the latter and absorbing the traditions of the country. All kinds of carpet-weavers settled down and thrived on a flourishing trade especially in Agra, Fatehpur and Lahore.

These carpets are characterised by their floral designs which are generally presented in rows of flowering plants, each flower type being delineated separately. They are accomodated in the interstices of a trellis as though climbing; or as single flowering plants enclosed within frames or compartments. It is almost as if the stem was being shown as a natural living or organism. In the animal patterns also the figures are seen to be full of life and energy. The presentation of figures is comparable to the pictorial, while with the floral motifs; through a profuse distribution of colours resemble the fantasies of souls reaching out for Divine Grace. These patterns are akin to the surface decorations seen in the Golden Temple and the carpet designs may well be taken to be the inspiration to some extend of the embellishments crafted and portrayed on the walls and marble panels of the edifice itself. This form of designing can be seen as an important and integral part of a carpet even to the colouring. It is this pleasing combination that infuses life into the flat fabric to both excite as well as soothe the user. Carpet designing as the designing of surface decorations calls for a special eye and talent. It is evident that the artisan has to be armed with

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[7] Ibid

rare qualities and skill to be able to give the design a three-dimensional effect so that the design can "stand up" even as the carpet lies inert on the ground or the wall panel stands simply in a single plane.

Among the floral renditions can be seen the Tree of Life, the lotus, the rose, the poppy, the scilla, the tamarisk, the myrtle, the henna, the crocus, the narcissus and various kinds of lilies. The colours were mainly confined to the "Perfect Seven," as the traditional colours then in use were known as. These were red, blue, green, yellow, brown, black and white. A large variety of birds and animals were also included in these designs. The designs also cover a very wide range from medallions and curvy vases to hunting and animal scenes.

These designs are especially remarkable for the boldness of the curving stems and the soft cool harmony of the colours, in which are found a good deal of fine green and deep blue [this is much in evidence among the surface decorations of the Golden Temple as well]. The border consists usually of a broad band separated from the centre and edged on the outer side by one or two very narrow bands.

Each of the motifs has a meaning. A few may be mentioned as examples:

Tree of Life:	Divine powers of Bounty
The Bird of Paradise:	Destiny
Circle:	Eternity
Swastika:	Eternal motion
Pear or Lotus Flower:	Benediction

Carpet Industry in Punjab: at Amritsar, Shrinagar, Kashimir, Palampur and Panipat





Carpets

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

The re-establishment of the carpet industry in the Punjab after its decline in Lahore, obtained a fresh lease on life by the arrival of artisans from Kashmir when Maharaja Ranjit Singh brought Kashmir under his rule. He began building up Amritsar as the main city and encouraged the settlement of these artisans in it. Amritsar proved an encouraging centre as fine wool was easily available from the hills around.

In the mid 19th century the carpet industry got stabilised under Mitchell and Company, so that a steady flow to Western markets could be arranged. For almost five decades, from 1851 to 1906, the carpets of Punjab continued to rule the carpet export market and win distinction and praise in every international exhibition in which they participated, the important ones being the Chicago Exhibition of 1893, the Paris Exhibition of 1900, and the London Exhibitions of 1902, 1903 and 1906. Particular mention is made of a carpet with a silk warp having 700 knots per square inch, made especially for Maharaja Gulab Singh, which won great commendation at the London Exhibition of 1851. By then the English royalty had also begun patronizing these pile carpets and gradually they came to be used in the Buckingham palace and the Windsor palace.

Thus, the carpets are a fine example of the skills of the artisans who settled in Amritsar and may have derived inspiration from the embelishments in the holy edifice or in turn may have contributed their skills to the respresentation of their designs on the walls and panels of the Golden Temple.

Weapons

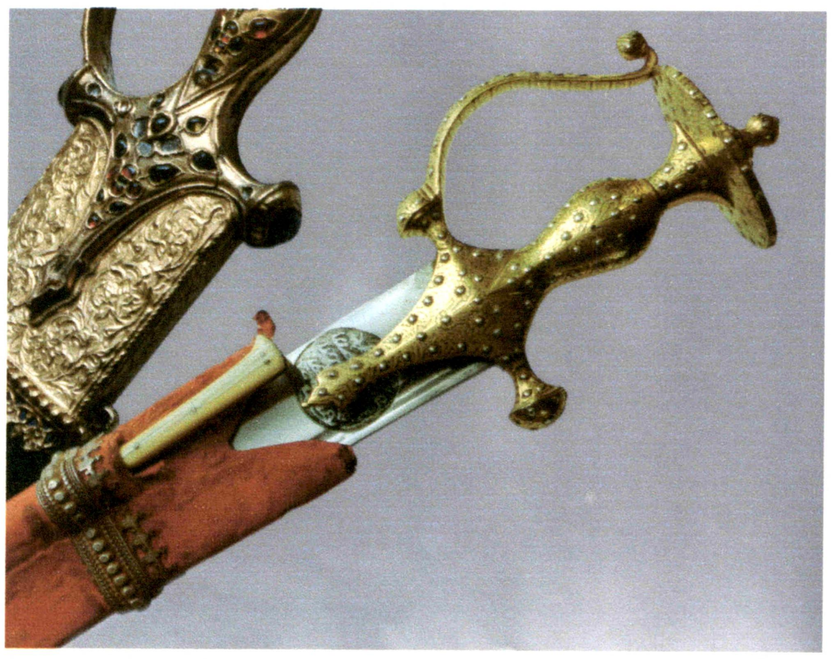
The Sikhs were warrior clans famous for their valour and sharp warfare tactics. Their assault and ambush techniques have been recorded and eulogised in many a chapter of history in India and abroad. One such account was recorded on 27th November 1849 when an anonymous British cavalry officer

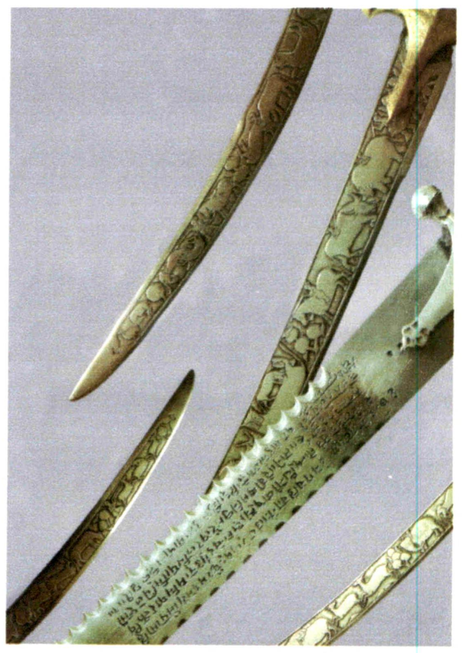
wrote a letter home from the camp at Ramnuggar[8], in central Panjab, describing the desperate nature of a battle in which he had fought just a few days earlier. It was full or praise for the enemy's performance under fire:

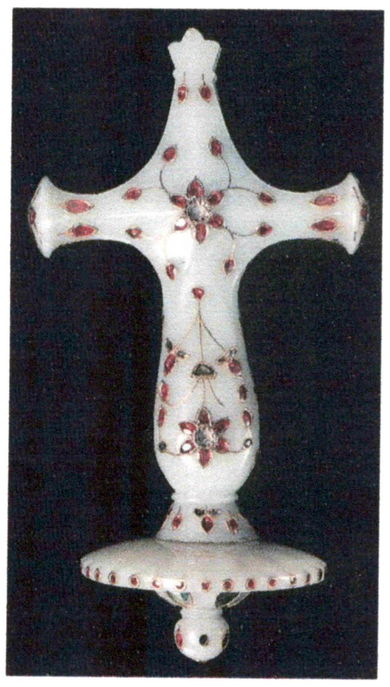
"Nothing could exceed the accuracy of the enemy's fire; their range was beautifully taken for certain points, showing that they must have discovered them previous to our advance; and our artillery officers say they never saw anything finer than the way [their] Horse Artillerty were brought up to the edge of the river, and formed up. No nation could exceed them; in the rapidity of their fire...No men could act more bravely than the Sikhs. They faced us the moment we came on them, firing all the time, and, when we did come on them, some opened out and immediately after closed round us, while others threw themselves on their faces or turned their backs, protected by a shield from the stroke of the Dragoon sabre, and the moment that was given, turned round hamstrung the horse, and shot the rider, while their individual acts of bravery were the admiration of all. Many stood before a charging squadron, and singled out a man, after killing or wounding whom they themselves were cut down immediately; while many, before their blows could take effect, received the point of a sabre, and fell in the act of making a cut..."

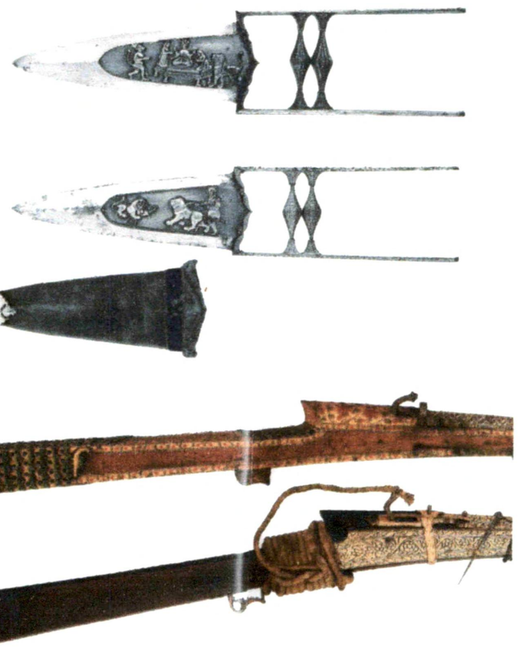
The weapons and armaments of the warrior classes were almost as prized and precious as the jewelry of many a rich lord. Each owner coveted his particular sword or any other specific weapon. Weapons were also bestowed upon trustworthy soldiers who had proven faithful in battle or had made special efforts to protect the boundaries of their leige. Weapons were the chosen gift by which the monarch honoured his guests, members of the royal clans with whom he had relations, his esteemed noblemen and the visitors from foreign lands. Maharaja Ranjit Singh is especially known for the *khillat* or gifts that he showered

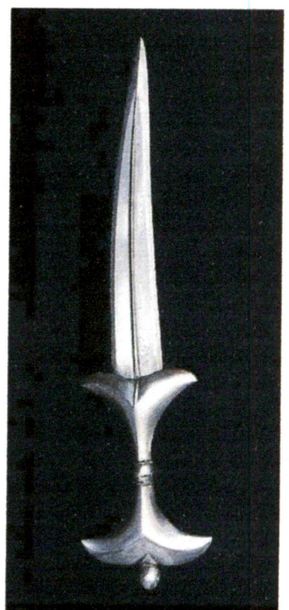
[8] Ian Knight, 1999. 'The Military Sikhs', cited from Susan Stronge's The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms. V & A Publications. London.

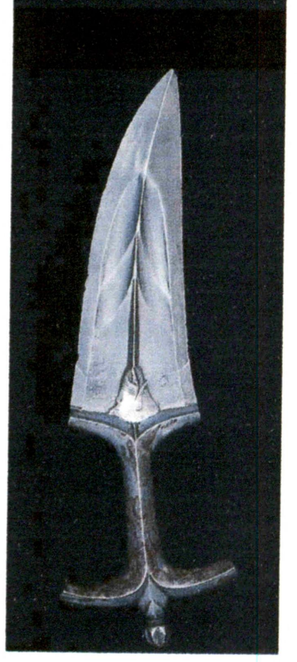


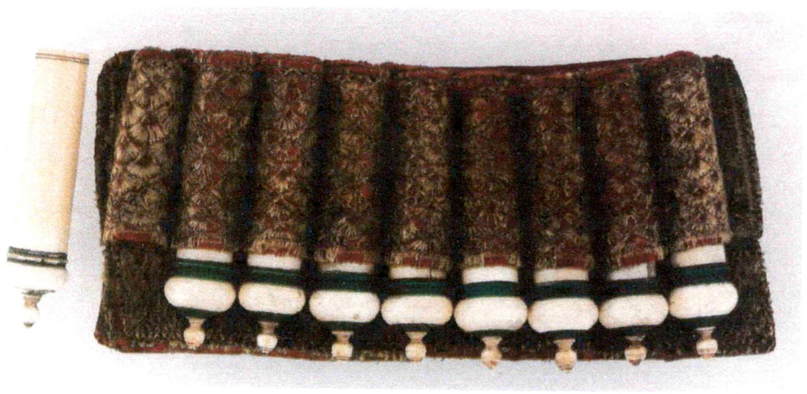












Weapons

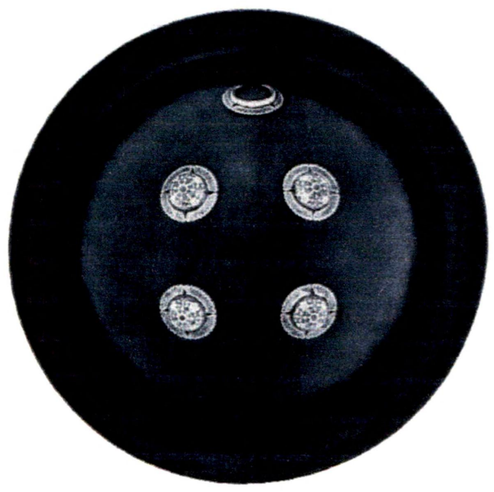
Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi















Weapons and Armour

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

upon his court and royal guests. These gifts have also been documented and praised in many a historical account.

The kingdom of Lahore had emerged as a political reality in the Panjab only under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the first decades of the nineteenth century, but the Sikh faith had acquired a militant edge earlier on in its history. Although Sikhism was essentially a simple and harmonious creed, it appeared heretical to the fanatically Muslim Mughal emperors, who drove the first converts out of central Punjab to take refuge in the inaccessible northern hills. As a reaction against this persecution, Sikhism developed a martial ethos that was enshrined by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, in the seventeenth century. He encouraged adherents to take the suffix of 'Singh' (Lion) to their name and to carry arms at all times. Of the 'five's *Kakkas*', by which they were to demonstrate their faith, four are suggestive of military prowess: *kes*, long, uncut hair, which when wound around the head provided protection against a sword blow; *kachcha*, short, loose trousers that were easier to fight in than long robes; *kara*, a steel bangle symbolising a traditional Punjabi throwing weapon, the sharpened steel quoit; and *kirpan*, a sword. The fifth is the *kangha*, a comb which though not having militant innotations could be needed if the hair was opened in hand to hand combat. The idea was to maintain tidiness and decorum at all times.

At the heart of Ranjit Singh's success was a formidable military machine. Until well into the nineteenth century, the armies maintained by most independent Indian states were essentially medieval in character. They consisted largely of a feudal levy, usually poorly trained and armed with traditional weapons, principally swords and shields, raised from the rural peasantry by landowners. The cavalry element was provided by the landowners themselves if they could supply their own horses and armour and, while dashing and colourful, they were usually hopelessly disorganised. Some states maintained impressive collections of artillery as well as a small core of trained

professional soldiers, usually armed with matchlocks, but on the whole they could not compete with the European forces in terms of discipline and firepower.

Certainly, the traditional elements remained in Ranjit Singh's army even after his demise and the British estimated its strength at 150,000 at the time of Ranjit's death in 1839. These soldiers had a highly developed and individualistic military ethics, based on a finely honed sense of personal courage and honour, and prided themselves on their skill in wielding the lance and sword on horseback. They took to the field in brightly coloured robes and richly decorated armour, riding horses draped with gorgeous quilts. Some of the soldiers had been known to ride about with one or two pairs of swords, a matchlock and three or four pairs of quoits. The quoit[9] is a peculiar arm preferred by these warriors. It is a steel ring ranging from six to nine inches in diameter, and about an inch in breadth. It is very thin and has edges that have been ground to a blade like sharpness.

Most of the weapons that were manufactured and later embellished for the royalty or for being given away as gifts were beautiful specimens of exquisite workmanship in metal, bone and stone. The elaborately carved shields, the beautiful sword hilts and scabbards besides the head of the sword handle were masterpeices of their own kind. The Maharaja was known to get special gifts commissioned for forthcoming visits of the representatives of the British soveriegn and even patronised the unique work of artisans who had developed their skills in a particular field.

Jewelry

The splendour of the Sikh royalty was more through their choice of attire and personal grooming rather than any special physical attributes. Some of the pieces and collections of the royalty in the Sikh world have enjoyed renown in

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[9] Susan Stronge, 1999. The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Publications. London.



Jewelry

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi







Jewelry

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

elite cirles all around the globe. Some of the precious gems and treasures like the Koh-i-noor, the Timur Ruby, and the Golden throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the fabulous emerald collection of the Maharaja of Patiala have been eulogised reverentially by chroniclers down the ages. Many of the treasures have been traced to museums and private collections all over the world. The most valuable ones can be seen at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself was very fond of precious jewels and often bought them off foes who had lost to his might. Some of the stories linked with the possession of these fabulous gems read like man's history of greed and acquisition and his love for self-aggrandizement. On June 1st, 1813 the Koh-i-Noor entered the Sikh treasury after its owner, Shah Shuja relenquished it after much caprice and hesitation. He had earlier sent a brilliant topaz to the Maharaja hoping to fob him off with it. But the Maharaja was not shaken off so easily. He persisted in a strategic seige of Shuja's battlements and when water and supplies became scanty Shuja had to surrender the exquisite diamond which was to be acclaimed as the largest diamond in the world, the 'mountain of light', or the Koh-i-Noor. Ranjit Singh put great store by the treasures of precious gems and jewellary much like the Mughals. Some of the valourous generals of the Maharaja were undettered in their quest for precious stones in all the areas they won over and often contributed large booty to the realms' coffers.

"These permanent reminders of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's patronage suggest a much greater level of innovative artistic activity than is usually acknowledged, and there is evidence to suggest that this was the case throughout the range of the arts"[10]. The workmanship, the sheer value of the material and the visions of splendour that they invoke are enough to bring to mind the glory of the embellishments of the Golden Temple which is the ultimate jewel in the crown of the Divine Presence.

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[10] ibid

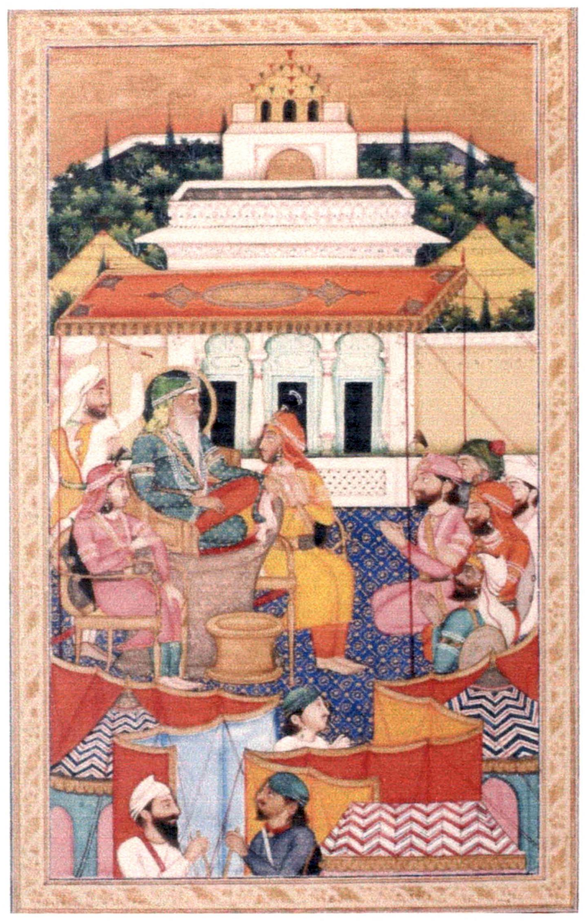
Beside the ornate work in gold and other precious metals with wonderful inlay work in *kundan* and *meenakari* as well as the use of precious uncut and cut gems there was much more work of great beauty that was commissioned and completed during the reign of the Maharaja. Much of this work has a bearing on the work done on the Golden Temple itself. Not much evidence may remain of the actual work in the present edifice but record has it that brasswork, ivory work, woodwork and other decorative artwork was quite elaborately represented.

The craft of ivory carving was adopted in Amritsar mainly to carve lovely combs for dressing the long hair of the Sikh community which had been ordained by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, as one of the five K's of the Khalsa or the pure (The five K's being *Kesh*-hair; *Kangha* – comb, *Kach*-shorts, *Kara*-iron/steel bangle, and the *Kirpan*-sword/dagger).

The master craftsmen of Amritsar who settled in Bazar Mai Sewan and Darshini Deohri began to make models of the Golden Temple, images of Hindu Gods and portraits of the monarch and his nobles during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time. The skill was passed on from father to son through rigorous training of the apprentices in this fine art. The training was all the more intense because attention to detail is important in a carving of the precious material which, if once chipped in the wrong place or damaged in some manner, would render the expensive ivory useless. Ivory handled swords, daggers and knives with elaborately carved hilts are evidence of the skill of these workmen which found its way into the court as items used as royal gifts.

Miniature Painting Traditions

"It is time to reasses painting in the Punjab. Over the years it has aroused some interest, but has had no prominence in the histories of Indian painting, since it hs been regarded as having no clear identity and its qualities are barely



Paintings

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.





Paintings

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

understood. Fixed notions have been formed relating to sources and influences, the amount and range of work done, the levels at which painting was patronized, the taste of the patrons – even the period it covers. Many of these ideas need to be re-thought, for they are too narrow in scope, and some are rooted more in ignorance or prejudice than in fact"[11].

Despite the varying nature of the patronage extended to painting in Punjab there was nevertheless a mixed reaction to the emergence of a specific Punjab or Sikh school of painting. This could be attributed to a great extent to the large variety and diversity of themes treated as the subject of these paintings. There are many misgivings regarding what forms the repertoire of Sikh art. Many a times it has been singled out as the art of portraiture[12].

This does to some lengths define a larger part of the art contributions of the Sikh world but this art form is not confined merely to portraits by any consideration. "There is far more to painting in the Punjab than portraiture, or themes that are easily recognizable as 'Sikh'[12]". The 'Sikh' themes could be enumerated as the idolised portraits of the 10 Gurus, the depictions of the *Janam Sakhis*, the *Udasis* of the founder Guru, Guru Nanak Dev as well as the portrayal of the life, discourses, sacrifices and martyrdom of the Gurus, the Sahibzadas and their followers. These depictions had set norms whereby a particular Guru would be shown with certain specific atttributes e.g Guru Nanak with his two

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[11] W.G Archer. 1966. Paintings of the Sikhs. V&A Museum. London. "Sikh painting is chiefly an art of portraiture. It is concerned with historic characters and we can only grasp its significance by knowing who these were. Not ony must we get their names right but we must have some idea of the part they played in events, what they were like as people and how they were regarded by their own and later times. We must understand why particular persons were chosen for portrayal, what Sikh needs were satisfied by portraiture and why Sikh painting focussed on this type of art. Since the Sikh religion frowned on art, we must explain how Sikh painting began, where painters of the Sikhs came from, what styles they employed and how they were influenced by the Sikh environment. Finally – since Sikh painting is a product of the 19th century we must consider the influence of European artists and the role of the British in Sikh affairs.

[12] Susan Stronge, 1999. Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Publication, London.

disciples Bala and Mardana and Guru Gobind Singh with his white horse and falcon.

To get an understanding of how Sikh painting evolved it is necessary to look at the patronage – in content and volume – the art form attained under the various rulers of the time. In the words of Archer[13] "No one can assess the Sikh attitude to painting without appreciating the character of Ranjit Singh". This was also probably because Maharaja Ranjit Singh as a powerful leader of that time wielded tremendous influence over the entire Sikh people. He was their greatest leader who gave them delivernce from the soveriengity of overlords and many an invasion.

Another reason for the arts to flourish in his reign is the fact that the boundaries of his empire spanned large areas peopled by diverse populations having many cultural traits and distinctive lifestyles. To govern these large tracts Ranjit Singh created an atmosphere of religious tolerance in which Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, French and British were all appointed to high offices. Artists and craftsmen were drawn from these communities and were promoted to work for their patrons on sundry projects without regard to any religious differences. The golden throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh had been made by a Muslim and craftsmen of all religions worked on the Golden Temple. The artists from the Hindu hill kingdoms moved away from their homelands and traditional patrons and sought work and patronage in the Sikh empire. Their styles had a major influence on the work being produced in the Punjab plains. Painters and illuminators from Kashmir tavelled all over the Sikh kingdom in search of adequate patronage for producing exquisite manuscripts with their illustrative abilities.

The degree of interest in painting taken by Ranjit Singh and his successors indicates the fact that the Sikh patronage of painting can be traced

back to the second half of the 18th century. Thus, the range of themes likely to have been covered by painters in the Punjab in the 19th century style is evident from the existing magnitude of work available of this vast collection and bears testimony to the fact that the surfce decorations of the Golden Tempole are perhaps the most sublime.

There is evidence to suggest that, following the fall of the Lahore kingdom and the ensuring confusion, some of the artists decided to move elsewhere- 'we are like sunflowers', the artists of this area often said, 'seeking the warmth of patronage'. Some of the Pahari artists who had worked for Ranjit Singh and his nobles at Lahore returned to their native hills, but Patiala, with its considerable resources, its power intact and an emerging interest in the arts, must have been an obvious destination. An interesting case is that of the painter Deviditta, great-grandson of the celebrated Nainsukh of Guler (c. 1710-1778), who had lived with his family at Basohli in the hills. In the records of the priests at that great centre of pilgrimage, Haridwar, there are several entries relating to Deviditta. In 1856 (vs. 1913), he describes himself as settled in the street of 'Kanhaiya Kapur, in the Machhihatta area' of Lahore; however, in 1866 and again in the following year, he is recorded as having come to Haridwar 'from Patiala', where he must obviously have been working. Another, earlier example of such migration is 'the painter Gohi, brother of Rodu and Bibru [Biba], and son of Hardayal, belonging to the town of Haripur-Guler in the hills' coming on a pilgrimage to Haridwar in 1843 from Patiala, where he was 'in the service of Maharaja Karam Singh'. Nine years later Gohi's brother Biba also came to Haridwar 'from Patiala', where he was 'in the service of Maharaja Narinder Singh'.

Names of other painters from the hills surface later: Ghathu Ram, Saudagar, and Kehru. The pattern emerges. As there was work to be found in Patiala, even discerning patronage painters converged upon Patiala from other areas, especially from Alwar and Jaipur. Their work can be seen in the murals

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[13] W.G Archer, 1966. Paintings of the Sikhs. V&A Museum. London.

still extant in the glittering Sheesh Mahal, begun in 1847 for Maharaja Narinder Singh. Panel after panel on those walls is executed in the recognisable style of Alwar-Jaipur, the painters seeming to carry on in Patiala where they had left off in their native Rajasthani setting. The range of themes, the treatment of individual episodes, the figuration, the line, the colouring, all leave no doubt about this.

Apart from the Pahari and Rajasthani painters, at least one prominent family of Muslim artists, probably originally from Delhi, was active at Patiala. The name of Allah Ditta figures in oral evidence as the head of this family when it migrated. The names of his descendants Basharat Ullah and Muhammad Sharif are better documented, for paintings inscribed with their names have survived, including a fine equestrian study of Guru Gobind Singh, rendered by Muhammad Sharif for Bhai Gurmukh Singh, a member of the state's 'Honourable Council'. This convergence in Patiala of builders and painters, poets and musicians was symbolic of the tolerance of the Sikh rulers for this particular art form.

Calligraphy

Calligraphy is the art of beautiful scriptwork and is a refined or very decorative form of writing a script. Calligraphy has definite styles of writing the language with each style having its determinant principles and norms. The Mughal architecture dotting the country is replete with samples of calligraphy in various Arabic and Persian dialects. The Islamic tenets forbade the worship of idols and even image making in the form of sculptures thus they resorted to inscriptions and passages of holy edicts that were engraved onto the hewn surfaces. It took great skill and precision to get the correct inflections of the script. Even a small mistake could change the entire meaning of a message as the fibrilar Arabic and Persian figures were delicately worked where each curve of the letter denotes a particular sound.





Miniature

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

Besides being used as the main form of surface ornamentation in the various edifices, calligraphy found pride of place in the royal scrolls that were used to send messages from one monarch to another, it was used in the records, the books of accounts of wars, battle booty as well eulogising the feats of valour of the many brave soldiers, generals and overlords. There are innumerable examples of beautiful calligraphic representations in some of the tomes left from centuries bygone.

In the erstwhile Punjab the king, the ministers, the princes and the *sardars,* all used the medium of calligraphy for communication and record. They have left behind notable works of calligraphy not only on paper but also on various other surfaces. The arches of the first floor of the sanctum in the Harmandir Sahib bear testimony to the piety and devotion of the artist. This can be seen in the delicately worked golden lines of the *Japji Sahib pathh* which stands immortalized in '*gach*' work on this surface as it is in the hearts of the devotees.

In Sikhism idol worship and the use of images for propitiation was discouraged. Thus, the surface decorations of the places of worship and most specifically the Golden Temple, were one of the ways of expressing the artists' deep devotion to the Guru. Another form was the use of calligraphy or beautiful handwriting to eulogize the teachings of the Gurus or to draw the attention of the common man to them. Calligraphy was also found in the manuscripts, miniatures, the interiors and especially the arches of monumental pieces of Sikh architecture.

The content of the calligraphy was usually verses and couplets from the Guru Granth Sahib and in some places the entire '*pathh*' was manifested in stone, wood, ivory, marble, 'kach' and 'gach' work and even in gold. The calligraphic piece would often be surrounded by beautiful borders and margins which would segregate them from the main renditions of the surface

ornamentations. The use of calligraphy in manuscripts has been taken to great heights among some of the works of the darbar of Ranjit Singh and his successors. These are samples of their own kind as the script used is Persian, Arabic, Urdu and Gurmukhi.

Manuscripts

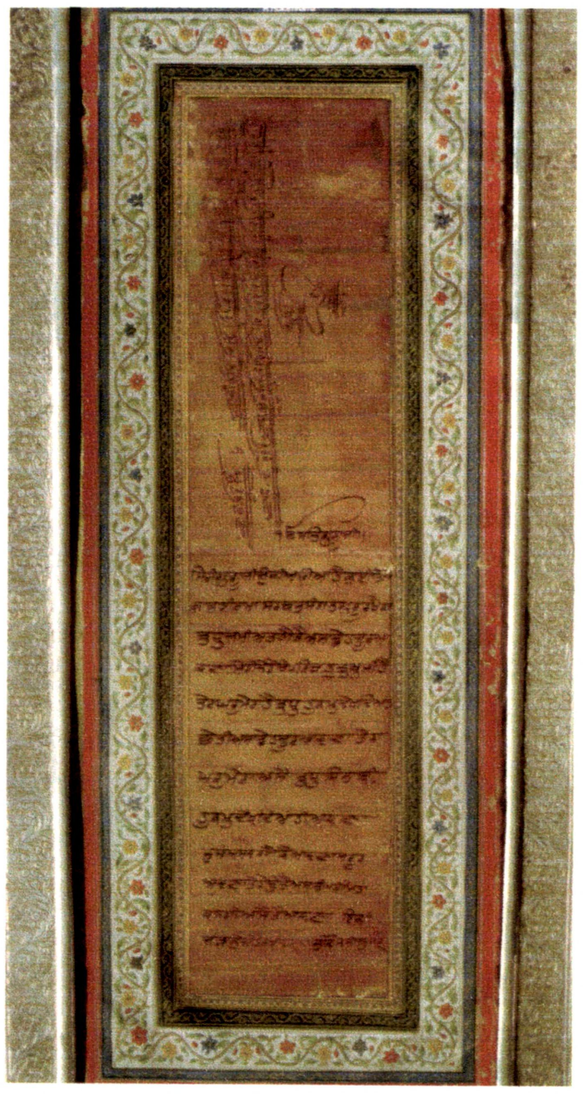
The Adi Granth manuscripts, in their various illustrated and illuminated forms are a window to the Sikh cultural expertise in the art of writing and embellishment of manuscripts. Their disappearance marks a major change in the notions of cultural prestige and attitudes toward the presentation of a record and written document. There has been little research on the geographical, temporal and social distribution of adorned manuscripts and even less on the patrons, scribes, and artists who created them. As future avenues of research expand our knowledge of these vitally important manuscripts will be comprehensive and incisive.

The possession of any manuscript having some connection to the Guru and his teachings is a coveted status cherished by many a Sikh. This is the reason for the pride taken by the Sodhis of Kartarpur and those of Guruharsahai in the display of their *pothis* on certain auspicious days. In Kartarpur, it is called the Kartarpur *bir*. However, the Guruharsahai manuscript is scribed with the status of being a manuscript of Guru Nanak, the founder Guru of Sikhism. This manuscript is said to have been lost in 1970.

A number of illustrated manuscripts[14] of the classical texts, including the Janam Sakhi of Guru Nanak, the Sukhsagar, the Sudama Charit, the Rukmini Mangal, the Mahabharata, the Rasikapriya - were all produced during the times just before and during the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

[14] Kerry Brown, 1999. 'Illustration and Illumination in Sikh Scriptural Manuscripts' by Jeevan Singh Deol in Sikh Art and Literature. Routledge. London.









Manuscripts

Courtesy: Susan Stronge, 1999. Art of the Sikh Kingdoms. V&A Pub.

Sikh art or art forms depicting Sikh themes as also the various works of art which were patronized by Sikh royalty and chieftains can now be amalgamated into a collection of works worth the envy of any other similar collection. It definitely has come a long way from the stage that had provoked from Ananda Coomaraswamy the claim that Sikh painting[15] is "decadent" in comparison to its Mughal and Rajput predecessors. In recent years, the study and research on Sikh painting has been extended to miniature painting and the use of its techniques in murals and the illustration of manuscripts. One of the significant contributions have been the extensive work on the patronage and production of illustrated and illuminated texts in the Kashmiri style, which became popular in Panjab from the late 18th century onwards. Some of the most remarkable pieces are the "bazaar" illustrations carried out under elite patronage. There is the distinctive presence of two broad schools of painting, the Persian model based art form and the agglomerated Indian model based form.

Sikh manuscript illustration largely included the illustrated Janamsakhis of Guru Nanak's life which received royal patonage in the early 19th century. There is a remarkably broad geographical distribution of these illustrated texts depicting Sikh themes or commissioned by Sikh patrons which ranges from central Asia and Afghanistan in the West to Patna in the East and Burhanpur in the South. There is scanty if any available informtion on the origin and development of the manuscript and especially the illustrated manuscript of the Adi Granth. On the basis of little information that was gathered from secondary literature these manuscripts can be differentiated into three types:

[1] Early manuscripts which may have pieces of paper bearing the handwriting of a Guru (*nisans*) on their opening folios,

[2] Manuscripts with illumination or decoration (usually called *minakari* or *belbuta* in Punjabi), and

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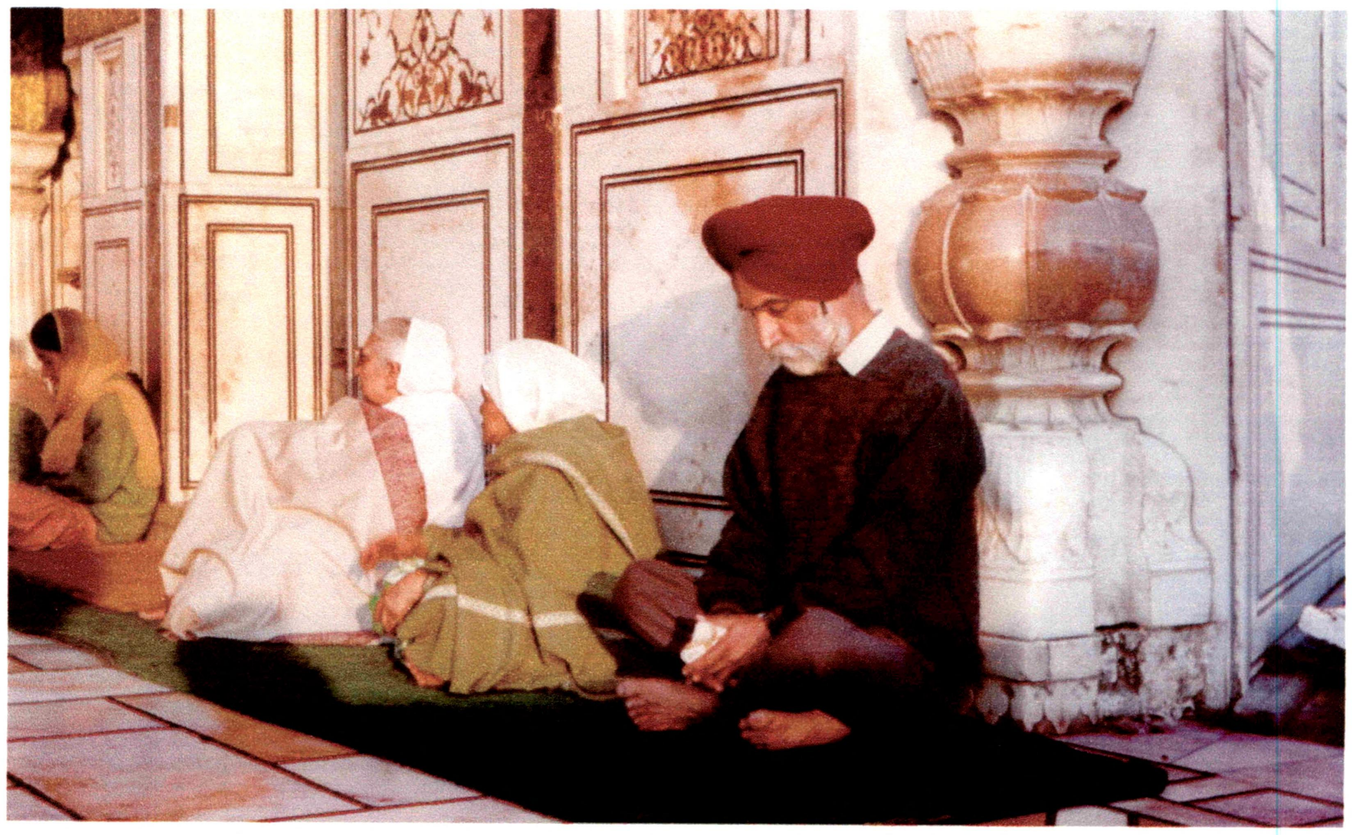
[15]Ibid

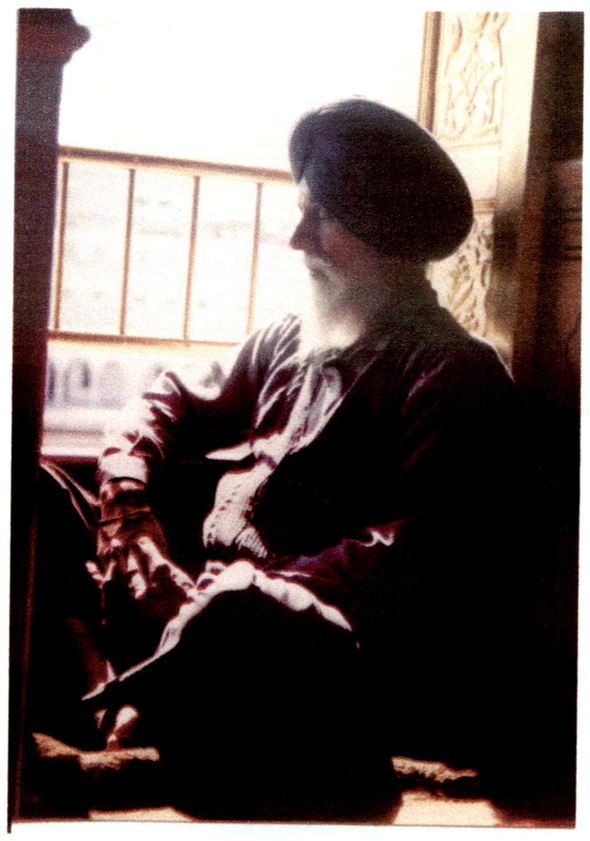
[3] Manuscripts carrying illustrations relevant to the subject.

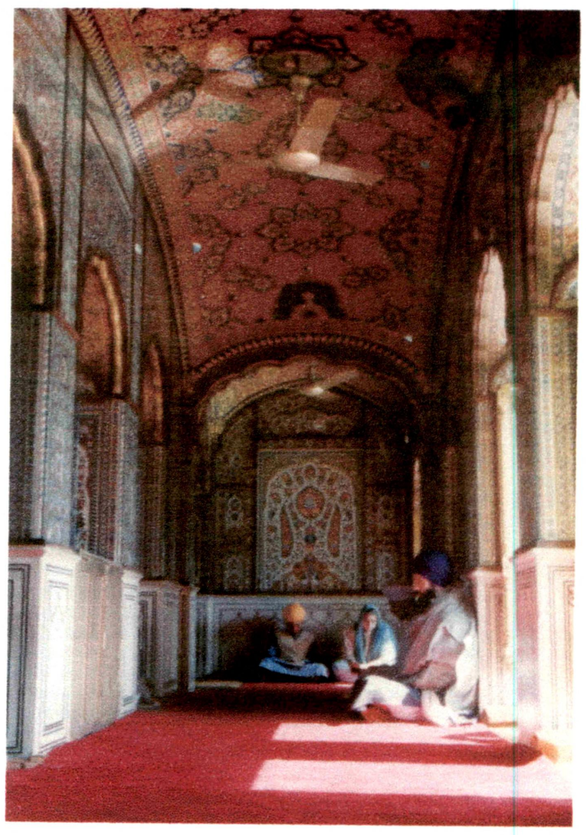
Many of the manuscripts have some form of adornment and illustration at the very beginning. This is especially so in the case of the Japji Sahib, the first composition, found in the Adi Granth. Similarly it is not unusual to find some form of illumination and decoration at the beginning of every collection of compilation and recitations and some can also be seen at the beginning of each *raga* section of a manuscript.

Regarding the occurrence of the *nisans* or literally seal or mark of the Guru, which may be a piece or composition in the hand of the Guru himself, most of these *nisans* occur at the beginning of the text i.e before the *Japji Sahib*, and invariably comprise separate pieces of paper pasted onto a folio of the manuscript. It could be surmised that these *nisans* were probably put into the manuscripts probably as "blessings" and also for increasing to some extent the sanctity of the manuscript themselves. Another reason could have been to cherish the word or mark of the Gurus and to protect it from loss or damage. Such *nisans* were mainly the *mulmantar* or the the invocation that is found at the beginning of the Adi Granth and at the head of most *raga* sections and major compositions in the text. Most of the *nisans* in the existant versions are attributed to the 9th and 10th Gurus, i.e Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. Most manuscripts bearing *nisans* date from the 17th century.

Another technique for adorning the Adi Granth manuscripts was illumination. Besides being used elaborately in Adi Granth manuscripts, illumination was also patronised as a feature of embellishment for other works of the Gurus. It is quite likely that these illuminations may have been a fall back upon the Islamic stylistic traditions and were probably carried out by artists who had prior experience of illuminating Arabic and Persian manuscripts. From this it can be derived that there was patronage of artists trained in the Islamic style in







Devotees sit in meditative contemplation of the magnificence of the Maker
as the beauty of the surface decorations is dwarfed
before their devout worship

Punjab in the 17th century. In the mid-18th century, however, there was a marked idiological shift and the later manuscripts began to adopt and adapt remarkably the shape of the Hinduised versions of the manuscript or *pothi*. This was characterisd by a wider range of decorative forms and motifs derived fom the Kashmiri style. This style of production flourished till the end of the 19th century.

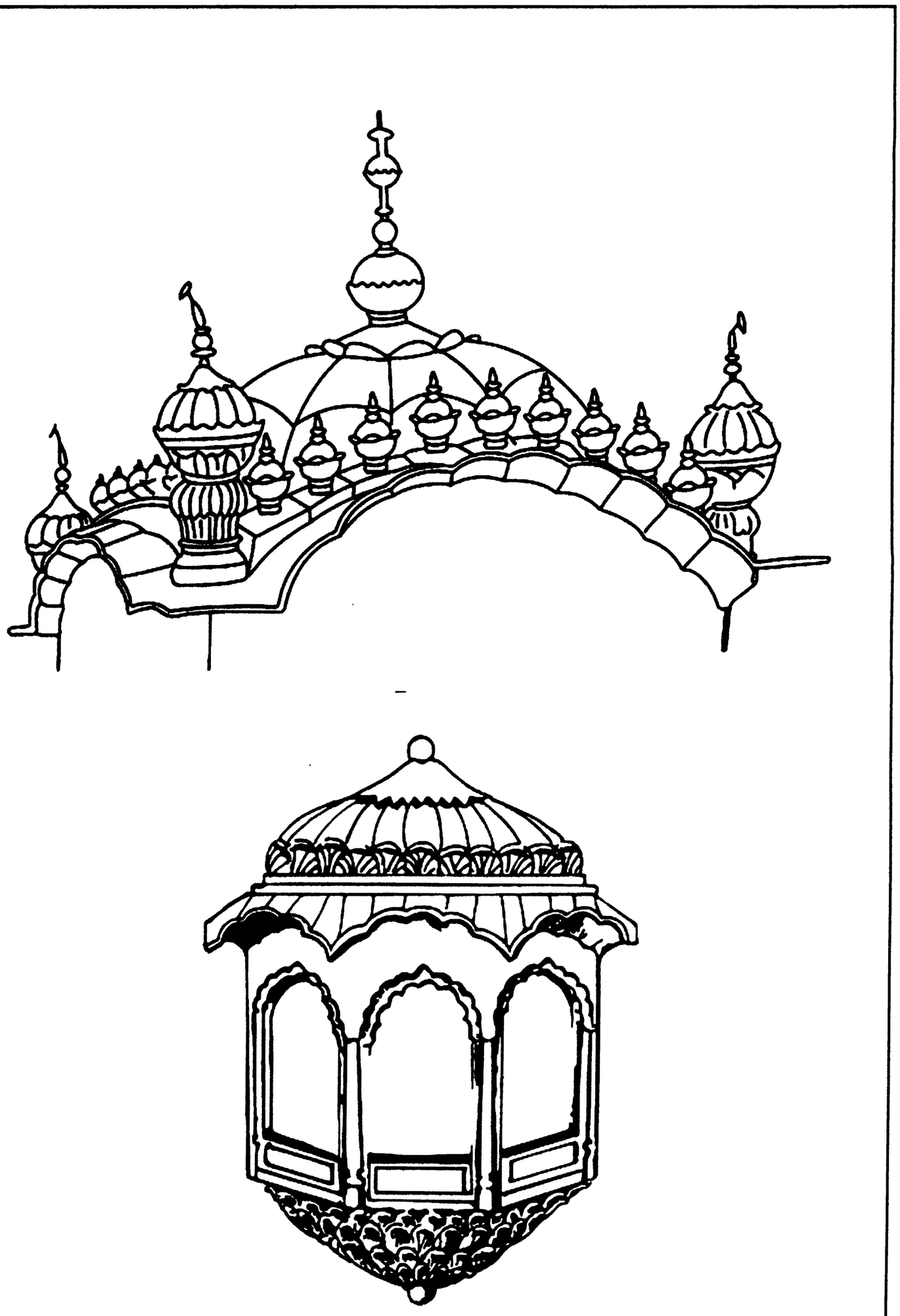
The practice of decorating the margins of Adi Granth volumes has, nevertheless, continued and can be found in many of the modern printed editions, where some form of illustration is found at the beginning only. The remianing part of the manuscript is devoid of all illustration and adornment. This veering away from embellishment of any form is probably a resultant of consecutive socio- cultural shifts. The chief among them was the high volume demand at a low cost which made illumination and illustration veritably cost prohibitive.

Thus, the influences that were finally translated into the final shape of the surface decorations, as apparent in the Golden Temple today, can be visualized in the various arts and artifacts of the times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He seems to have commandeered his artisans to put the soul of their art and ingenuity [no matter what material they may have had expertise upon] into the delicate intricacies visible in the surface decorations of the Holy Shrine. This precedent of the elaborate working of the surface decorations seems to have taken root during Mahara Ranjit Singh's time and then gone to to be transmuted into subsequent Sikh shrines in the region, in other parts of the country and gradually in various places in the world.

'Gur parsadae vekh tu,
Harmandir terae naal'

'With the Grace of the Guru the Harmandir shall always stand by you
[whenever you look at the Gurdwara]'
(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Panna 1346)

GOLDEN TEMPLE : A ROLE MODEL FOR SUBSEQUENT DECORATION OF SIKH SHRINES (GURDWARAS)



Dome and Balconied window from the Golden Temple

Courtesy : Walking with The Gurus Historical Gurdwaras of Punjab

CHAPTER 9

Gurdwara as a symbol of the Sikh Identity

When the tenth Guru gave unto the Sikh his title of *Khalsa* [the Pure] and five distinctive characteristics of *Kesh* [hair], *Kangha* [comb*], Kirpan* [sword], *Kacha* [underwear] and *Kara* [iron / steel bangle] he created a unique identity for the Sikh that embodied the significant features of the faith. The Sikh in today's.' world stands for a robust way of life, a hardy, steadfast, hardworking nature and an adventuresome spirit. Their sense of service to God and country as well as the strong work ethics besides the piety and benevolence earmarked by the '*daswandh*' [contribution of a tenth of one's earnings to the Gurdwara] makes the Sikhs a powerful entity that has taken root in the most hostile of climes turning them into havens by sheer dint of their hard work. So emboldened are they by their faith that wherever stands the Sikh there stands the gurdwara – a house of devotion and counsel, of soothing the mind and healing the heart. The Gurdwara also is a meeting place for the congregation or *sangat* that assembles to celebrate the unity in devotion. People gather here to seek clarity to the many confusions and contradictions that life inflicts. These solutions were found in the essence of the teachings of the Gurus as represented in the Guru Granth Sahib which is central to every Gurdwara. Thus, the Gurdwara is as much the Sikh as is the Sikh the Gurdwara.

"The gurdwara emerged as a new edifice on India's religious landscape in the seventeenth century. Ever since then this indestructible symbol of the Sikh faith has stirred intense and indefinable feelings in millions of Sikhs everywhere. These feelings range from a yearning for the comforting peace of its sacred precincts and the ever abiding fragrance of marigolds and rose petals, to a longing to hear recitations from the Guru Granth Sahib, and the *shabads* rendered in the robust and resonant voices of the *ragis.* There is also the urge to savour the *karah parsad* once again – the sacramental food blessed by the Lord

and given to all who visit a gurdwara. Each of these experiences are so elevating as to bring tears to many eyes"[1].

What the Golden Temple is to the Sikh

It is called *sachkhand* or the 'realm of truth'. Everything in the complex of the Harmandir Sahib gives rise to feelings of superior aesthetic grace and spiritual bliss. The glimmering sight of the Harmandir Sahib banishes from within one the baser instincts of *kaam, krodh, lobh, moh* and *ahankar* [lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego]. The sanctified waters of the *sarovar* have been blessed by the Gurus and divine saints alike. This holy tank known as 'Amrit Sarovar' is the pool of nectar in every sense of the phrase for the devout pilgrims who take a holy dip in it.

Ever since 1721, the Golden Temple complex has been the epicenter of the Sikh world, its history, politics and theophany. There have been, however, chapters in its history that have been smeared with the bloodshed of devotees attempting to safeguard their identity.

Since it is the fountain head of Sikh philosophy, the Golden Temple has influenced other sites of Sikhism in terms religious significance, architectural style and also to an extent the surface decorations. Some of the chief places of pilgrimage that have emerged as the sites of the Sikh theology are presented in this chapter. But before going into the influence of the Golden Temple on other gurdwaras it is necessary to cast a look at the similarities of sites and their significance as attached to various theosophical heads.

All important Sikh shrines have an imposing visual impact on the senses. This is because of the fact that the domes or the entrances of these shrines and

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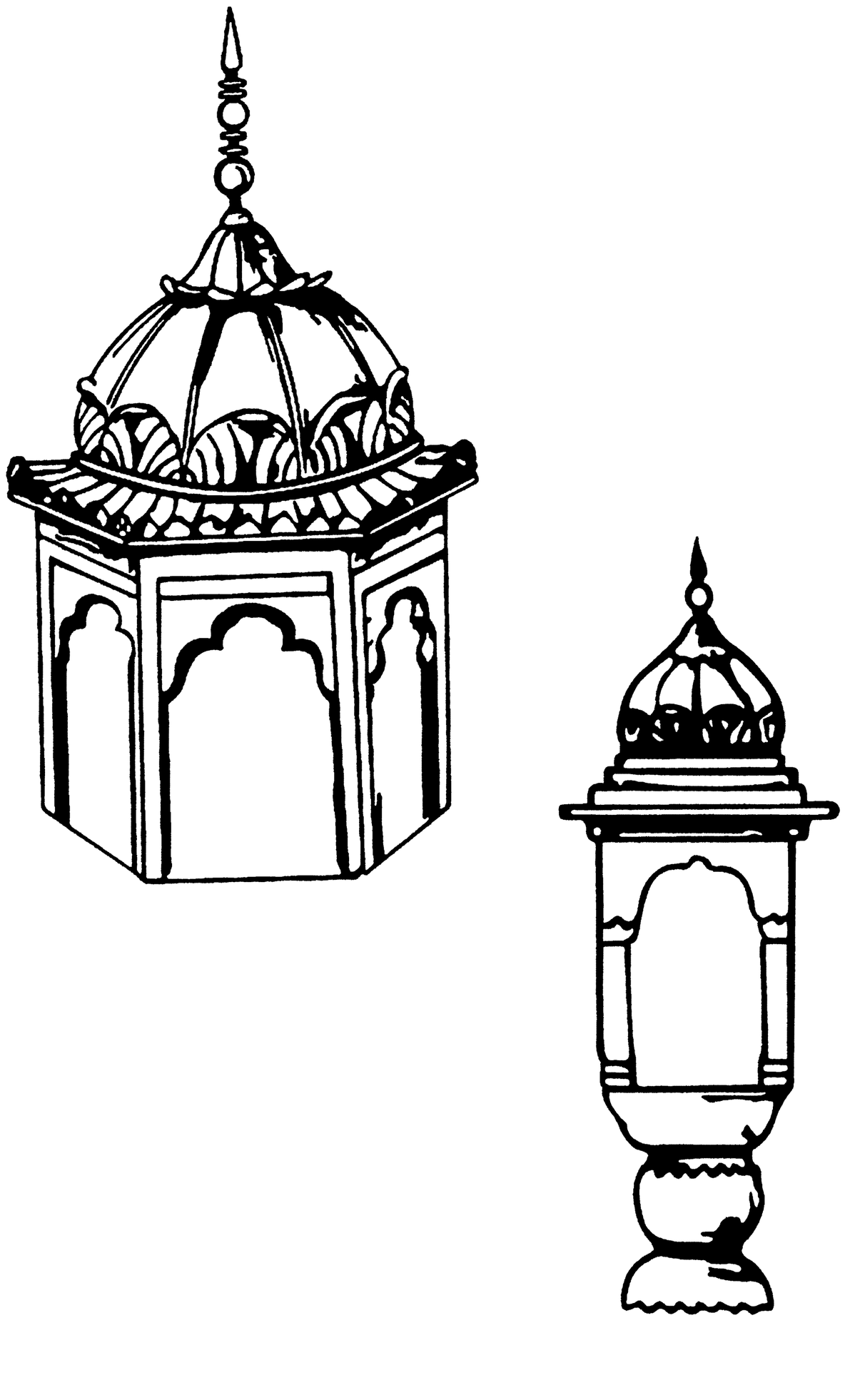
[1] Patwant Singh, 1992. Gurdwaras in India and Around the World. Himalayan Books, New Delhi.



Chattris or Kiosks from The Golden Temple

Courtesy : Waking with The Gurus Historical Gurdwaras of Punjab

even their infrastructural layout are of different types and forms but in effect maintain the simplicity of form that is essential to the outline of almost every gurdwara built after the Golden Temple in as much that the Golden Temple is in effect the role model along the lines of which the other gurdwaras flow.

Some of the essential features of the gurdwara as exemplified by the Golden Temple are as follows:

1. The installation or '*sthapana*' of the Guru Granth Sahib in the sancto sanctorum of the place of worship breathed in it the holy atmosphere that made the Gurdwara the 'house of the Guru'.

2. The *Nishan Sahib* or the flagmast that is a beacon for the Sikh to the house of the Guru. It is often a tall post mounted by the 'Nishan' or sign which is the characteristic *'khanda'*. The flagmast is usually clothed in saffron.

3. The characteristic dome which has undergone many an evolution in shape, style and construction depending upon the materials available, geographical location and unshaken faith of the devotees.

4. The *Parkarma* or the circumabulatory path around the gurdwara is a salient aspect that has been featured in into gurdwara.

5. The *Sarovar* or water body is another essential feature that has been a more or less constant with many a gurdwara constructed after the Golden Temple Complex.

6. The '*jot*' or eternal light and

7. The aesthetic surface decorations that mark the devout fervor of the devotees to make the house of worship a place of pristine beauty.

8. The dispensing of '*karha parshad*' or '*degh*' at the gurdwara is another essential feature where the devotees pay obeisance and partake of the sweet preparation.

9. '*Langar*' or the practice of cooking in a community kitchen and sitting down to eat collectively bereft of all segregation and communal discriminations of caste, creed and religion. This was one of the main tenets of the gurdwara.

10. Upto four entry points leading into the main sanctum. These are generally in the four cardinal directions.

In some instances the gurdwaras that were constructed subsequent to the Golden Temple have been demarcated as such because of the presence of most or all of the above characteristics. Their distinctive architecture, placement of significant features and emphasis on beautification or surface ornamentation is evident in many of the finest examples of Gurdwaras the world over.

Sikh settlers anywhere first of all set up their house of worship and after devotedly embellishing it set up shop nearby for their own prosperity and that of the community. The gurdwaras discussed below have religious as well as aesthetic appeal as they were constructed making use of the best features available to the population in terms of locale, material used, artists and artisan skills, time devoted and the climatic and geographical conditions. These houses of worship were beacons that invited the weary traveler to a haven of succour, piety and devotion. They were the symbols of hope, aspiration and the countless blessings showered upon a people who were and still are steeped in their traditions, roots and continue to practice the tenets laid down by the Gurus.





Takht Sri Patna Sahib, Patna, Bihar

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi

Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur [Punjab, India]: It is located on a gradient higher than its surroundings. The pristine white architecture of the Gurdwara popularly known as Anandpur Sahib has a commanding view of the rustic landscape around as it stands proximal to the Sutlej. The Gurdwara marks the place of the raising of the Khalsa or the 'Pure' by the 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh about 300 years ago. The '*shastra*' or weapons used by the Guru are on display at the Gurdwara.

The cuppolas and kiosks atop the roofing of the gurdwara are much in similarity to those of the Golden temple Complex. The inner sanctum is as much supplemented by arched corridors both in and around the premises. The significant feature of the Gurdwara being crowned by a central dome is another characteristic. The four *chattris* on the four corners and the central dome bear resemblance to the Golden Temple.

Gurdwara Sachkhand Sri Hazur Abchalnagar Sahib, Nanded [Maharashtra, India]: This gurdwara was constructed to mark the site where Guru Gobind Singh was stabbed to death in 1708. It stands on the banks of the Godavari river in Nanded, Maharashtra. This gurdwara represents the fourth Takht or 'throne' of the Sikh faith. It is also the place that marks the baptism of Madho Das, a mystic, by Guru Gobind Singh who styled him Banda Singh Bahadur or the 'Brave Man'.

Built in Maharashtra the Gurdwara is another rare example of the surface decorations that are a significant characteristic of the Harmandir. The marble walls, like in the Golden Temple, are embellished with peitra dura work, carving and embossed gold work. The geometric and floral patterns on the marble flooring are another feature that are remarkably similar to the marble work observed in the Golden Temple. The ceiling and some parts of the wall of the inner sanctum are also intricately worked upon with *kach* and *gach* work in the

hues of the Harmandir. Ornate archways and cornices are another characteristic of this form of art work that has been done as a part of the surface embellishments of the Gurdwara. It is almost as if the workers carried within themselves the images of the Golden Temple and worked upon them to attain the brilliance and exquisite workmanship observed in the Harmandir itself.

Takht Sri Patna Sahib, [Bihar, India]: This Gurdwara stands at the site where the 10th Guru, Guru Gobind singh was born on December 22nd 1666. As Guru Tegh Bahadur, who traveled extensively, spent the monsoon season of 1666 at Patna where he left his wife and went on to go to Dacca. It was at Dacca that he received the news of the birth of his only son, Guru Gobind Singh.

The Gurdwara's bleached white exterior is surmounted by domes and *chattris* that rise above arched balconies at the various levels of the multi-storeyed edifice. The windows and the awnings or *'chajjaz'* are in the typical Rajasthani and Mughal amalgamated style of architecture as seen in the Golden Temple complex. The basic lattice work parapet is an innovative Muslim addition to the structure which is another feature taken from the Harmandir Sahib.

Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Saboo, [Punjab, India]: It is situated between the railway line and the national highway in Bhatinda and lies three kilometres East of the city centre. It is dedicated to Guru Tegh Bahadur, who halted here briefly on his way from Amritsar to Walla in 1664. The double storey structure bears resemblance to the Golden Temple in the construction of its domes and *chattris* ornate with lotus motif. The arched '*baradari*' or corridors are another distinctive feature as are the trellis work ramparts.

Gurdwara Nadha Sahib, [Haryana, India]: Standing on the banks of the Ghaggar river, amidst the mud hillocks, the tall and stately gurdwara commemorates the visit of Guru Gobind Singh who had stopped on the banks of the Ghaggar. Here the Guru's army was well looked after by one Naddu Shah



Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Saboo, Punjab, India

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi



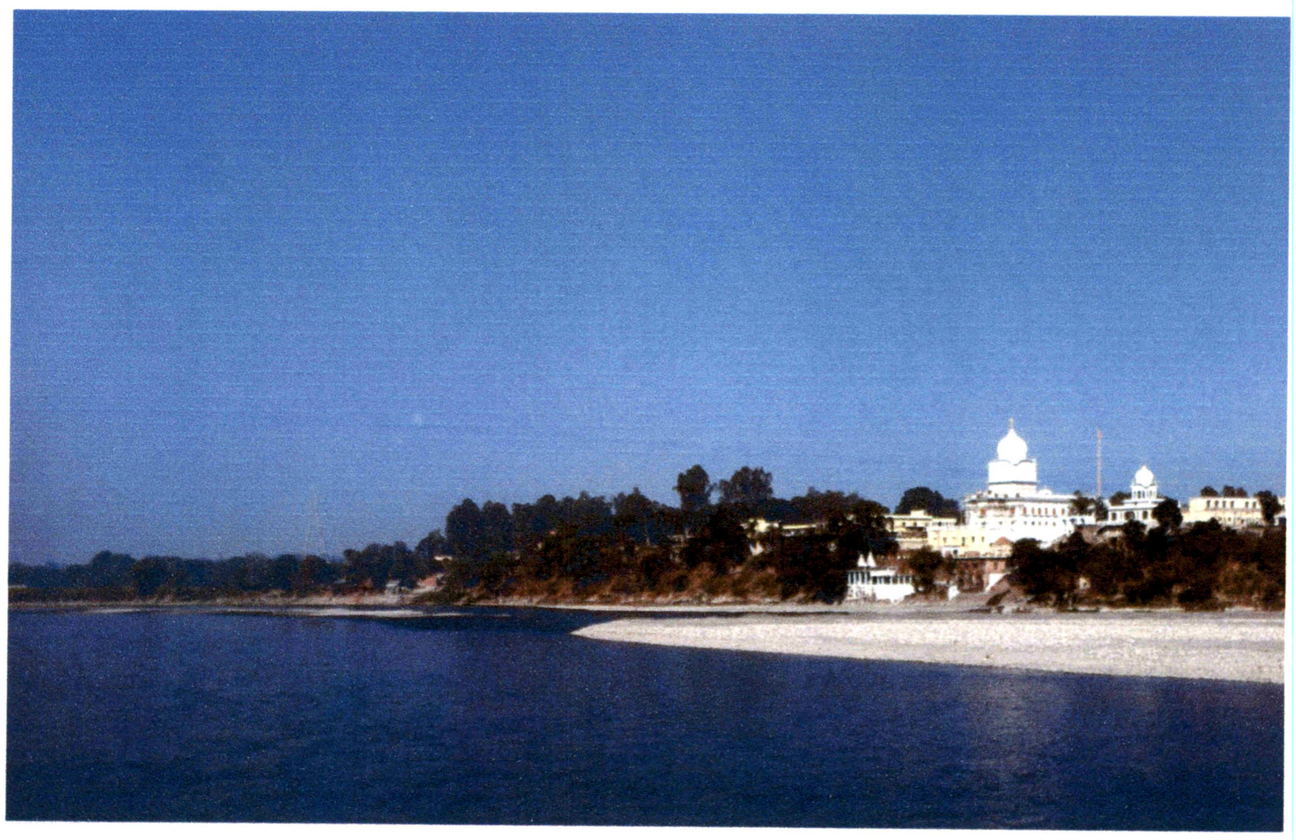
Gurdwara Sri Chamkaur Sahib, Roopnagar, Punjab

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi



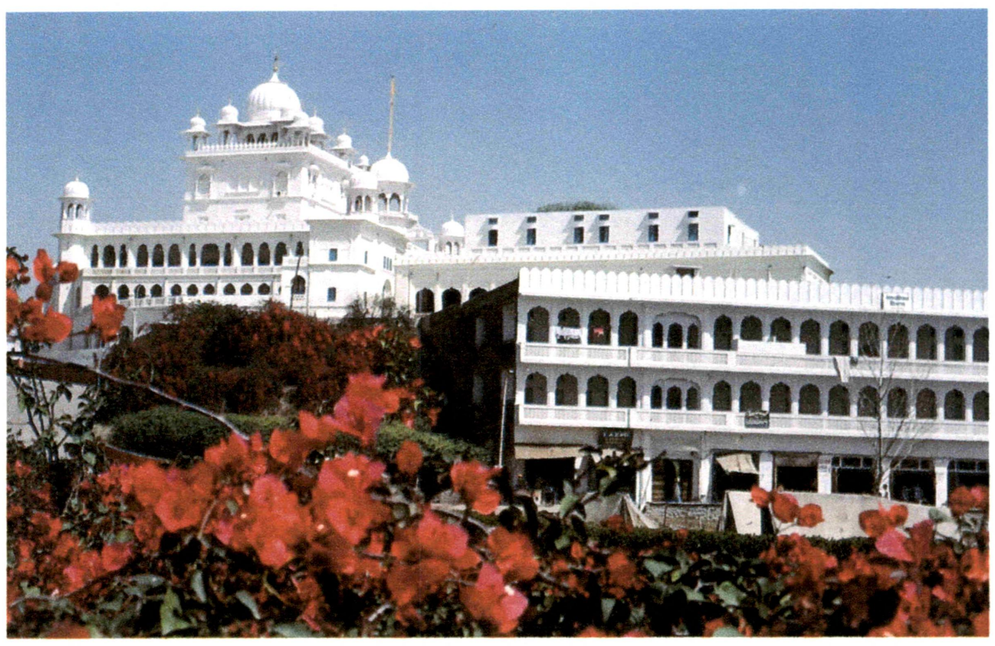
Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib, Sirhind, Punjab

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi



Gurdwara Paonta Sahib, Himachal Pradesh

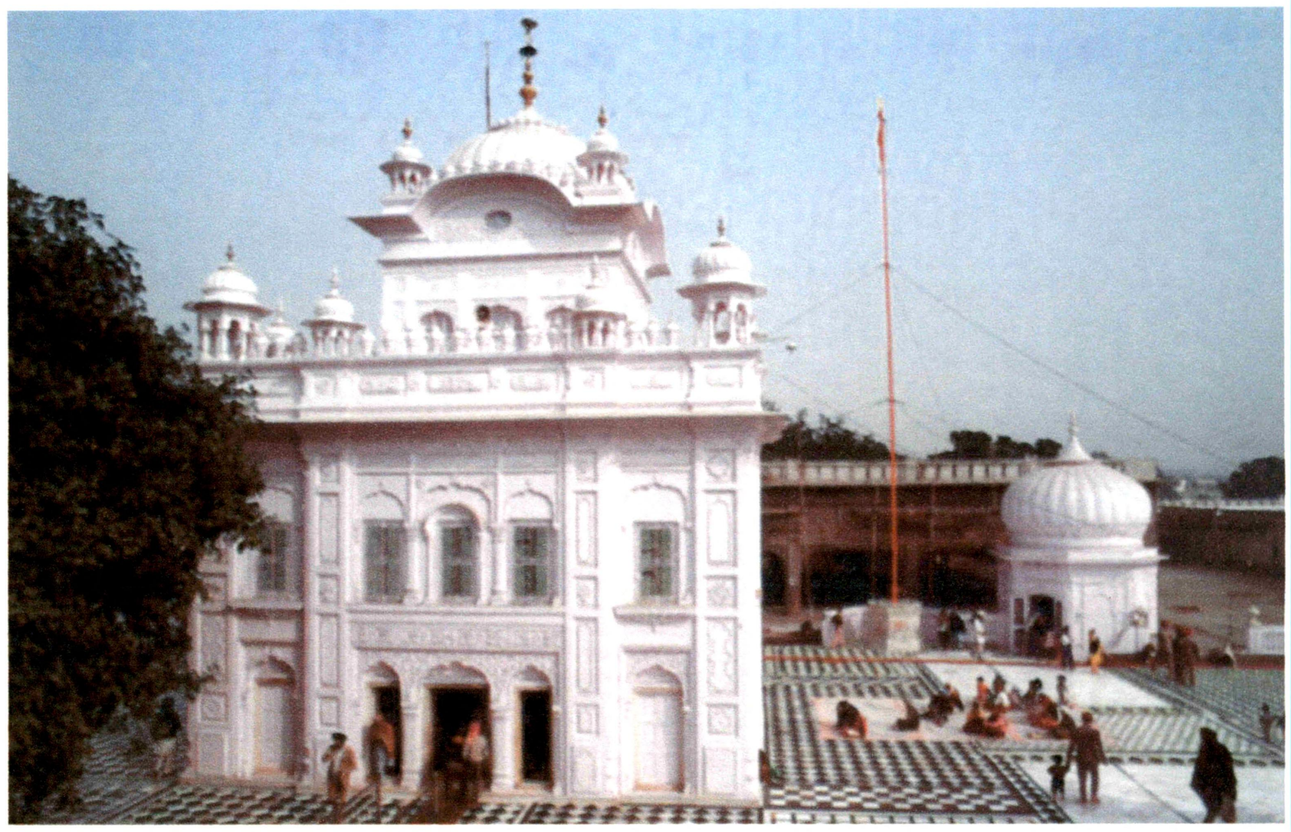
Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi





Takhat Sri Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib, Punjab

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi



Goindwal Sahib, Kapurthala, Punjab

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi

who was blessed by the Guru who said that the place would be sanctified and the memory of Naddu Shah live on forever.

The domes surmounting the gurdwara are akin to those of the Golden Temple while the extensive marble work and other surface embellishments that are coming up presently hold the promise of similar refinement.

Chamkaur Sahib, [Punjab, India]: Standing aloft a raised part of the small settlement, the Gurdwara rises above the grove of tall trees. The raised plinth was probably because of the strife the Sikhs had to experience at the hands of the ruling classes and the local hill chieftains. On December 7th 1705 a bitter battle was fought between the hill rajas and the army of the Guru at Chamkaur Sahib.

Like the Golden Temple this Gurdwara, Chamkaur Sahib, has four entry points with one of them rising up with a dual level marble staircase. The other two entrances are sloping routes that were probably used for horses in the olden days. The towers, domes and chattris as well as the parapets are similar in style to the Golden Temple.

Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib, [Punjab, India]: This gurdwara is dedicated to the younger two of the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh who sacrificed their lives for their faith. They were savagely put to death when they were bricked in and finally beheaded. The wall where the young boys had been bricked in stands to this day and it is over this that the Gurdwara has been constructed. The wall is in the '*bhora*' or basement.

The marbled flooring and walls are similar to the work in the Golden temple while the gilded domes rising above the edifice are also reminiscent of the work done in the Golden Temple.

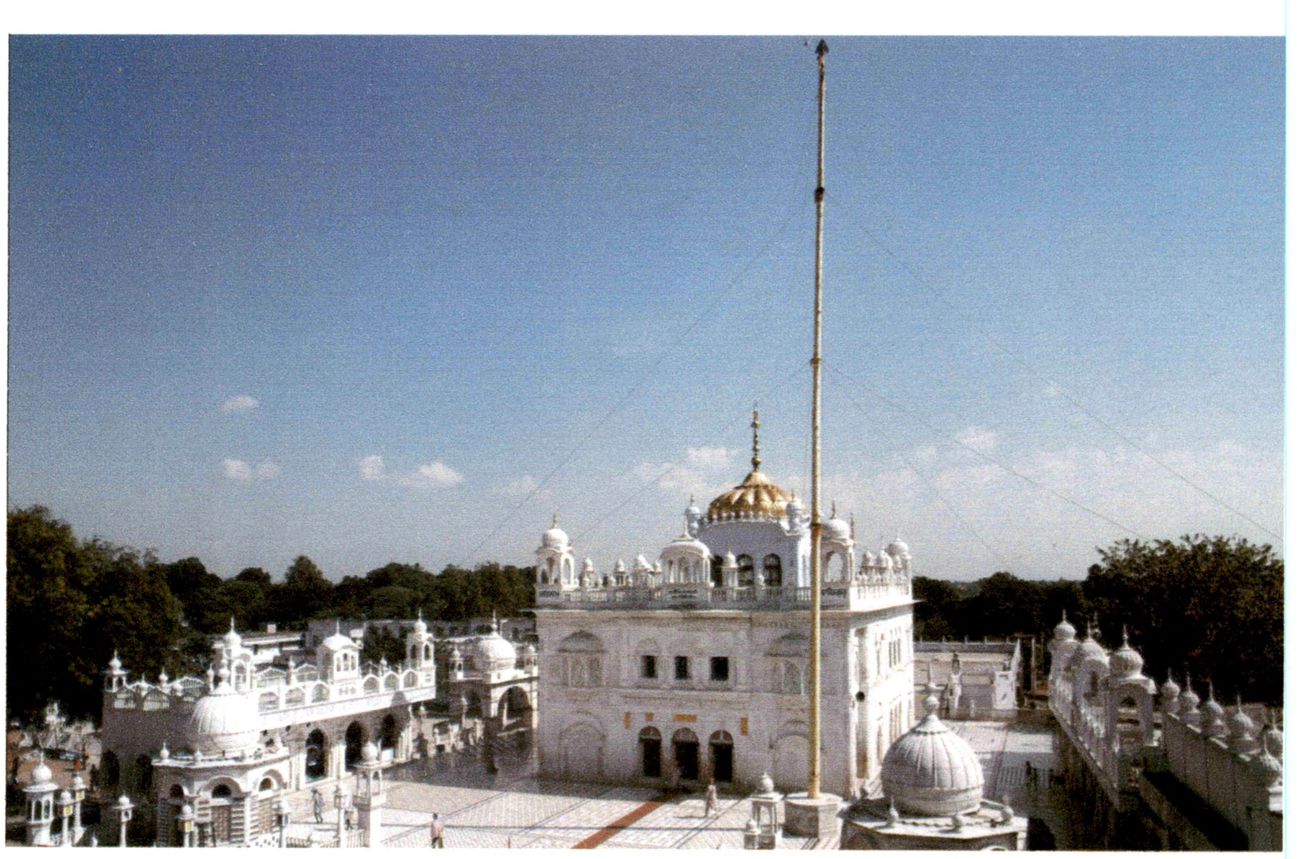
Goindwal Sahib, [Punjab, India]: Situated in the small township of Kapurthala the Gurdwara Goindwal Sahib has an impressive black and white checkered forecourt bearing similarity to the geometrical patterns in marble rendered on the *Parkarma* in the Golden Temple. The domes of the edifice are raised on the pattern of the Harmandir Sahib. The dome raised over the *baoli sahib* is guilded with gold. The *baoli* goes deep down to reach the *amrit kund.*

The golden canopy over the Guru Granth Sahib is a magnificent example of its kind. The embellishments are observed in the intricate and beautiful embossing on the golden surface of this canopy.

Paonta Sahib, [Himachal Pradesh, India]: The name '*paonta*' is derived from the word *'pav'* meaning ' a foot'. It alludes to the hoofprints of the horse of Guru Gobind Singh who had enjoyed the environs at the bank of the river Yamuna during a hunt. The Guru had selected the site for training his men in reading, writing and hunting. The gurdwara stands on the banks of the river Yamuna and lies virtually half way between Dehradun in Uttranchal and Nahan in Himachal Pradesh.

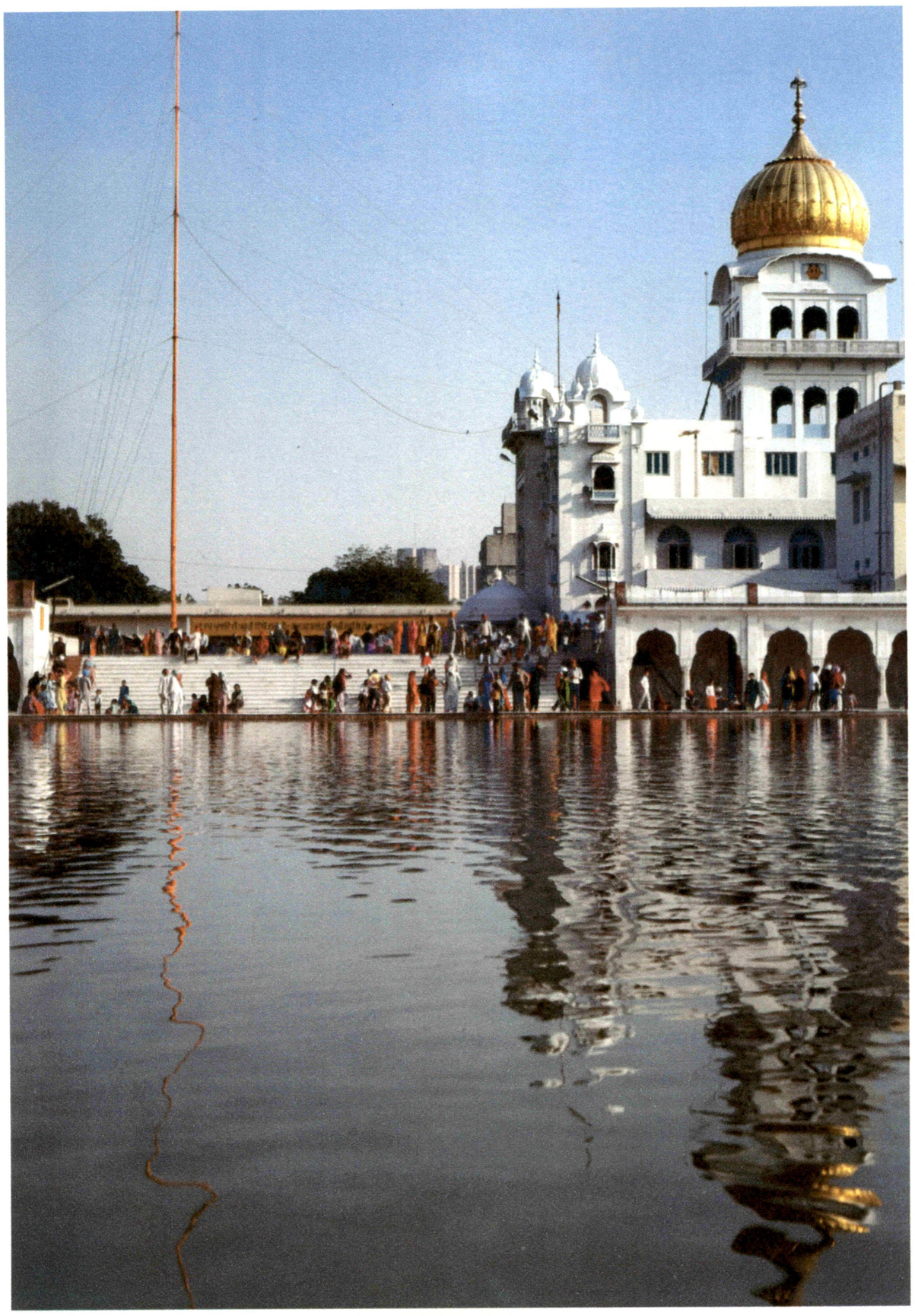
The sprawling complex is surmounted by the towering dome that stands alone. Its very height and majesty serve as a proud yet sagacious reminder of the glory of the Guru and his Sikh. The presence of the Yamuna acts as a holy tank for the peaceful and tranquil presence of the Gurdwara Paonta Sahib. Arched galleries surround the inner sanctum much similar to those of the Golden Temple.





Gurdwara Sach Khand Sri Hazur Abchalnagar Sahib, Nanded, Maharashtra

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi



Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, Delhi

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi

Dukhniwaran Sahib,Patiala [Punjab, India]: The gurdwara is in one of the busiest sections of the town. The *sarovar* is placed to one side of the gurdwara and has a deep religious significance. In recent times the gurdwara has undergone total renovation and has come up as a dominant edifice in the area.

The surface ornamentation observed in the Golden temple has been endeavored to be replicated here. It includes mirror work, marble work, enamel work and gold work in myriad variations on the many surfaces. It is evident that the Golden Temple has been a role model for this gurdwara.

Gurdwara Sahib Bindrakh , [Punjab, India]: A simple village gurdwara which has been constructed keeping in mind the spirit of the fountainhead itself, i.e. the Harmandir Sahib. The pattern of construction of the main edifice is similar while the pristine white domes and *chattris* surmounting the gurdwara are similar to that of the Golden Temple though not guilded.

The interiors of the gurdwara are very rich and ornate and at once the pilgrim is transported to reflect upon the interiors of the Golden Temple with its surface ornamentation in many hues and forms. Although the materials and method used are dissimilar the idea of ornamentation and the spirit infused in the task of embellishment is similar in its devout simplicity and aspiration.

Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, [N. Delhi, India]: The territory around the Gurdwara was renowned as Jaisinghpura because the *bangla* or *bungalow* of Raja Jai Singh was located there. It was the camping ground of the Jaipur armies as Raja Jai Singh and his son Ram Singh were based there. True to the Rajput traditions of keeping one's word and living for honour alone. When the young Guru Har Krishan was summoned by Aurangzeb the Raja offered to protect the Guru and gave his word to the Sikhs when he insisted that the Guru reside with him. It is to commemorate this memory that Gurdwara Bangla Sahib came into existence.

Despite being greatly influenced by the urban impact of the National Capital Territory as it is located virtually in the heart of the city, the gurdwara has the chief characteristics of architecture that bind it undeniably to the primary structural premises of the Golden Temple. The golden dome complemented by *chattris* and kiosks enclosed within a lattice work balcony surmount the modern building which in turn seeks its reflection in the *sarovar* much like the Harmandir Sahib. The arched corridors also maintain points of similarity with the role model to a large extent. Of late the renovation and restorations carried out highlight the deep devotion of the devotees in carrying out *seva* to embellish the highest seat of their faith.

Gurdwara Panja Sahib, [Pakistan]: It is located in Hasan Abdal in Attock district of Pakistan. The story goes that during the visit of Guru Nanak to Hasan Abdal he sat down to preach at the foot of a hill on top of which lived a Muslim saint, Baba Wali Qandhari. By changing the course of the waters flowing from a spring Guru Nanak incurred the wrath of this saint who rolled down a huge boulder down the same hill to annihilate the Guru. Legend has it that the first Guru stopped the speeding boulder with his hand. The imprint of the Guru's hand or *'panja'* is left indelibly in the rock ever since. The devout take great stock by the legend and the Gurdwara constructed there along with the pool, which were built after their annexation by Ranjit Singh's General, Hari Singh Nalwa, of this trans-Indus territory. A two storey building was built here having surface embellishments in the form of frescoes. Around 1928 the building was enlarged and another level added while the tank was also worked upon. Further buildings were added to the complex for the pilgrims who thronged to the site.

As the work may have been commissioned under the minions of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, it can be surmised that intrinsic similarities between the Harmandir and the Punja Sahib would appear. This is all the more evident in the architectural similarities of the dome, the kiosks, the *chattris* and the windows .What is most similar is that the sanctum stands in the tank and is surrounded by







Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Pakistan

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi

water on three sides. A bridge connects the main entrance with the outside. A distinctive feature is the ornate gateway at the beginning of the bridge. The arched gallery and the geometrically patterned *Parkarma* are also the specific features that are akin to the Golden Temple.

Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib, [Pakistan]: Maharaja Ranjit Singh commissioned the construction of a gurdwara on an impressive scale at the site to commemorate the birthplace of the first Guru, Guru Nanak Div in Sheikhupura district of Pakistan. Guru Nanak was born at Nankana Sahib, also known as Talwandi Rai Bhoe on April 15th,1469. Nankana Sahib is located South West of Lahore. In the beginning of the nineteenth century it became a part of Ranjit Singh's empire. Since those times the Gurdwara was worked upon in several phases till October 1959 when the Pakistan Government carried out repairs and renovation to further strengthen the edifice. The Gurdwara bears a distinctively Muslim character in its architecture. There is no central dome but the embellishments on the domes surmounting the two towers are similarly embellished with the lotus effect like those of the Harmandir. The latticework on the ramparts is similar though the scalloping is at variance.

The entire effect of the edifice is to give the impression of a fortress. Even the colour of the Gurdwara walls is different from other gurdwaras. Another typical feature is the ornately carved marble *palki* in which is placed the holy scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib.

Gurdwara Baba Nanak, [Baghdad, Iraq]: The gurdwara was founded by Mohammad Pasha Arnaoot. He was the follower of Pir Bahlol and founded the gurdwara to commemorate the visit of Guru Nanak to the Pir in 927 A.H. [1520-21A.D]. Till 1989 regular '*Diwan*' or congregation and '*langar*' or community kitchen used to be held at the gurdwara but the practice was changed then to have only Diwans on every Friday.

The dome of the gurdwara is its only distinctive feature which bears any resemblance to the role model in the sense that it rises above the roof under which the Guru Granth Sahib is placed. Taking into consideration the geographical location and the construction of the common buildings in the region it is indeed remarkable that the effort should have been made to raise the dome in itself. The rest of the gurdwara complex conforms to the common architecture of the area with flat geometrical shapes and thick walls to ward off the vagaries of the weather. The construction is also very basic with simple baked bricks and mud/clay based plaster. The small windows are another characteristic of the area.

Gur Sikh Sabha, Scarborough, Ontario [Toronto, Canada]: The gurdwara was completed around 1991. It represents a wonderful combination of the modern juxtaposed with the traditional. The plain brick walls and flat roof are surmounted with a central dome built on the lines of the Golden Temple. The four kiosks placed at the cardinal points hold lamps. The arches above the windows are reminiscent of the desire of the devotee to embellish even in materials that may not be conducive to being moulded or used traditionally.

Gur Sikh Temple, Mission, [British Columbia, Canada]: It is a modern structure that is surmounted with onion shaped domes where one dome is the main one and the others are the ancillary domes. The arched corridor effect has been attempted which lends an ethereal beauty to the structure. The arches tend



Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib, Pakistan

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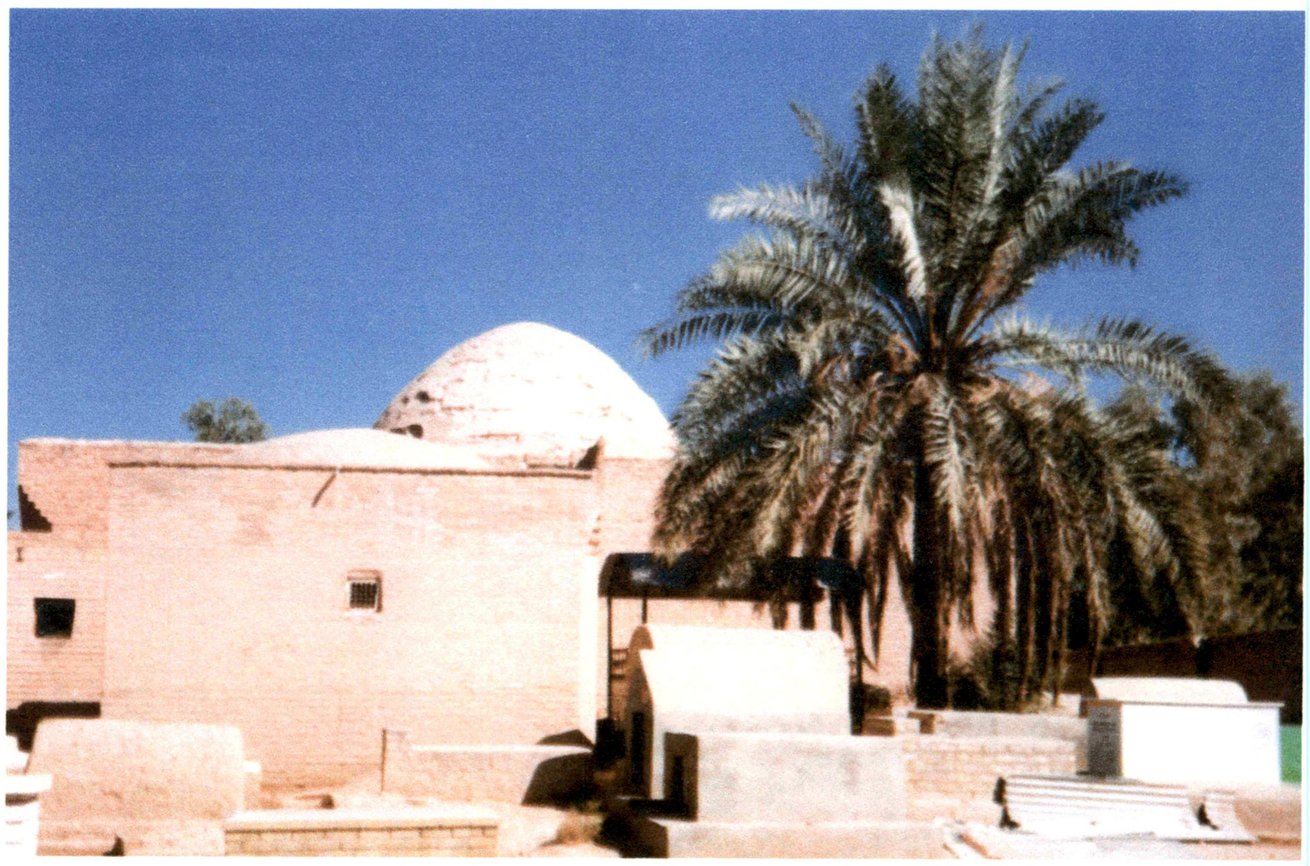


Gurdwara Baba Nanak, Baghdad, Iraq

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi

to bend the light in such a manner that the play of the shades of lighting gives a beautiful effect. The impact of the darkened windows of the upper storey seen against the backdrop of the lighted lower levels provides an impact enough to inspire the devotees to greater heights of piety and devotion.

Ontario, Khalsa Darbar, [Toronto, Canada]: Built as a modern structure, the gurdwara bears resemblance to the role model of Harmandir in having the domes, if somewhat flattened and pinnacled with thin needle like spires, which bear a guilded look. The turret like kiosks on which are mounted the smaller domes also bear marks of ornamentation that are a characteristic feature of the desire of the devotee to embellish as in the Golden Temple.

Sikh Temple, Ross Street, [Vancouver, Canada]: The edifice is an example of embellishment done on the gurdwara according to the Harmandir. The roof in itself is a classic portrayal with its angularly placed hexagonal roofing levels set in a pyramidal shape. The highlight of the structure is the exquisite dome fashioned from pipes that stands tall over the centre as a feat of excellence in itself. Despite its simplistic design and silhouette the gurdwara is unmistakably a representation after the role model.

Akali Singh Gurdwara, Vancouver, [Canada]: Located in Vancouver, the Gurdwara is an example of the Sikh devotees ability to replicate his ideal – the Harmandir Sahib – through some characteristic features like the golden dome, the embellishment above and below the periphery of the dome itself and the highly ornate entrance. The geometric pattern of construction lends a severity akin to the landscape that merges into the entire structure which is surmounted with five domes. The domes in themselves are almost golden orbs fitted onto fluted turrets of concrete and capped by the spire which is topped by the *khanda sahib*. The expanse of the stairway leading up to the arched hemispherical coloured glass window above the main doorway is complemented by two smaller subsidiary windows on either side. These make for a glorious break in the grey-

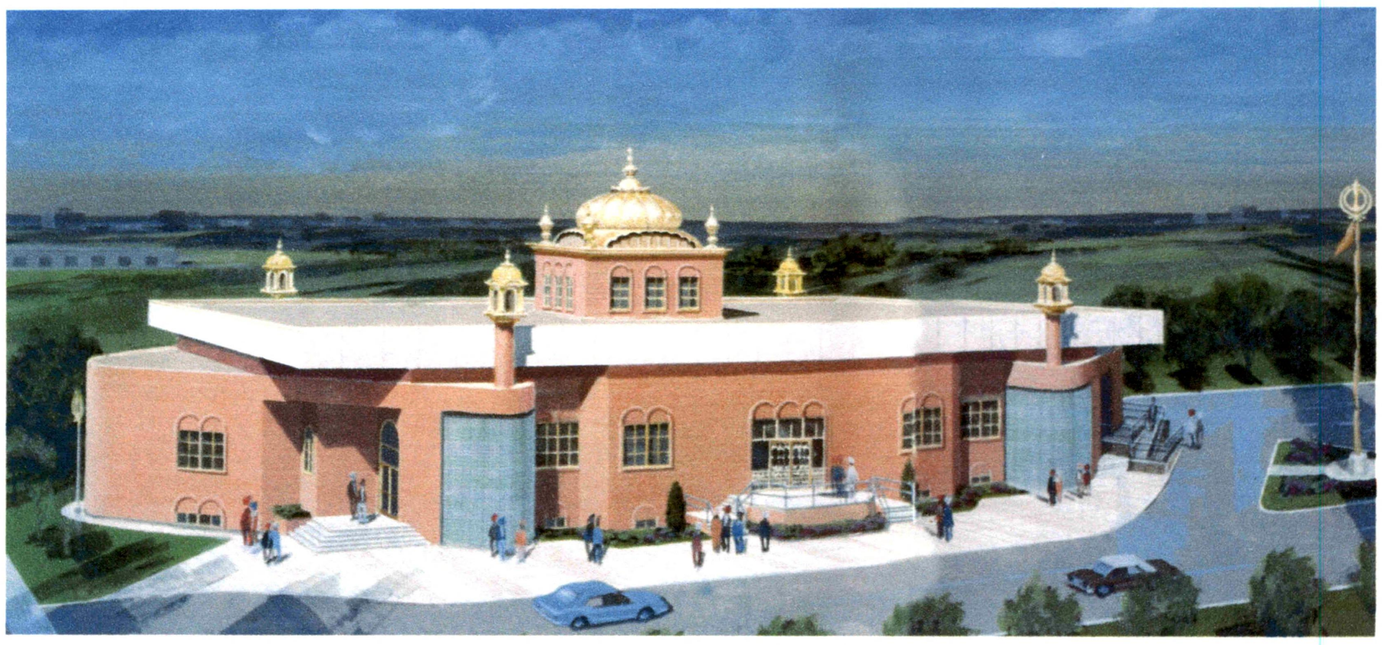
walled expanse of the building. The interiors are in keeping with the Harmandir with a beautiful canopy above the Guru Granth Sahib. However, it veers from the main design in the form of the golden *palki* which houses the holy scripture.

Nanak Sar Gursikh Temple, Richmond, [Vancouver, Canada]: From afar the Gurdwara lives up to its role model in the sense that there is ample embellishment done on the surfaces to the extent that one look at the exteriors of the edifice transports one to the lush and verdant terrain of Punjab. The presence of the whitewashed building against the blue sky brings to mind the various gurdwaras dotting the Punjab landscape.

The interiors of the gurdwara are reminiscent of the highly ornate surfaces of the Golden Temple. In form and fashion they resemble the surface decorations of the Harmandir even to the delicate vegetable motifs. The entire effect is of ornamentation on the walls, the canopy, the areas around the holy scripture and in its immediate vicinity.

Hacienda Guru Ram Das Gurdwara, [Espanola, New Mexico]: The earlier building of the gurdwara had been founded in the early 70s, however, it was only in 1990 that the new edifice came into existence. The remarkable feature of the gurdwara is its massive golden dome that surmounts the bleached concrete walls of the building. The vaulted roof is overhung with a simple yet beautiful canopy. The wooden rafters add a touch of the rustic local influence to the gurdwara. The elaborate *khanda,* symbol of the Sikhs forms the backdrop to the *beed* which has been covered in a simple yet beautifully worked *phulkari.* The white walls of the building have no windows. Reminiscent of the frescoes of the Golden Temple Complex, the opposite wall of this Mexican gurdwara has a large painting depicting the lives of the gurus.

Guru Ram Das Gurdwara, [Los Angeles, USA]: The need for embellishment by the devotee is visible in the workmanship of this edifice. The large decorative



Gur Sikh Sabha, Scarborough, Ontario Toronto, Canada

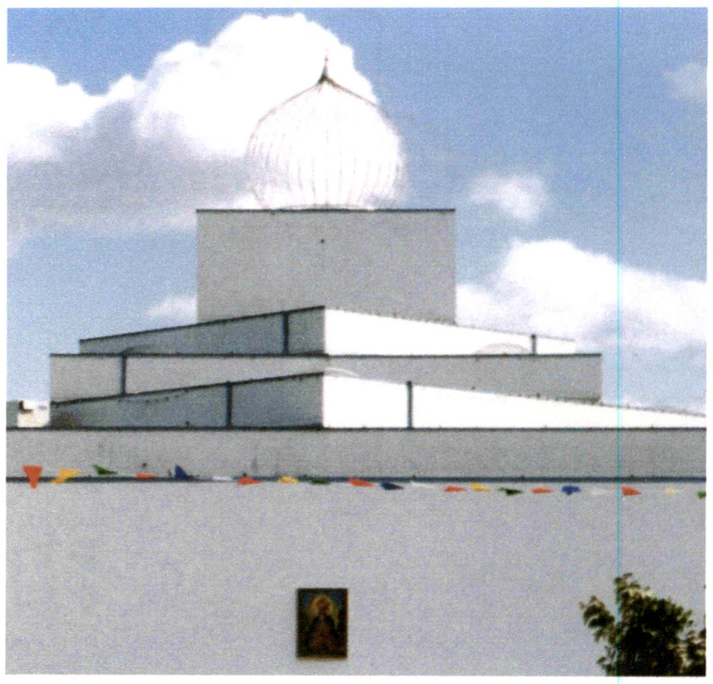
Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi



Ontario Khalsa Darbar, Toronto, Canada

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi





Sikh Temple, Ross Street, Vancouver, Canada
Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in
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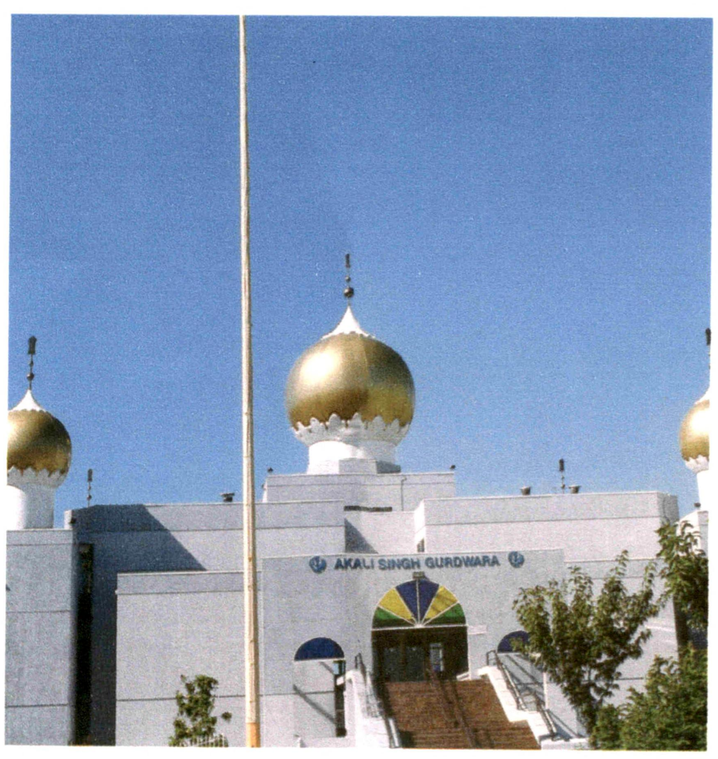


Akali Singh Gurdwara,
Vancouver, Canada
Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and
around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi







Nanak Sar Gursikh Temple, Richmond, Vancouver, Canada

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi

door in the shape of the symbolic *khanda* is inviting for the devout who from afar can be beckoned into the house of worship to seek succour from their worldly cares. The building is surmounted with a coloured awning that is in the shape of a pinnacled arch. It stands at the entrance door. The golden domes of this gurdwara are fluted along their tapering shape and rise up into the *khanda*. Some paintings depicting the gurus and their lives adorn the interior and exterior walls of the edifice.

Sikh Dharama, Massachusetts, [Millis, USA]: The softly painted exterior of the gurdwara has a sloped roof. The entrance is marked with the ornate *khanda* while a glimpse inside would show the similarities of this far away gurdwara with the Harmandir in having elaborately decorative geometric flooring patterns in marble and other stone work. This is also the case of the bases of the rounded pillars inside the gurdwara which are geometrically placed in gray or white marble. The wrought metal *palki* is another feature of the embellishments visible in the gurdwara while the simple coverings of the Guru Granth Sahib are rich in content and yet humble in their offering.

Sikh Temple of Yuba City, [Yuba, USA]: The scalloped arches and the dome over the porch or the main entrance as well as the blue and white walls of the beautiful gurdwara are a further proof of the Harmandir being a role model for the workmanship of the subsequent gurdwaras. So far away from the Golden Temple yet this edifice bears all similarity in its form and content. Despite the landscape the gurdwara rises out as an ethereally beautiful building and is ample evidence of the devout passion of the Sikh to embellish and add to the beauty of his house of worship. The balance of the blue and white paint all over the temple both inside and outside, especially even the dome, gives a very pleasant effect overall. The paintings of the Gurus adorn the walls, the resplendent canopy that is raised above the Holy Scripture which is placed in a *palki* having a pristine white and gold dome as well.

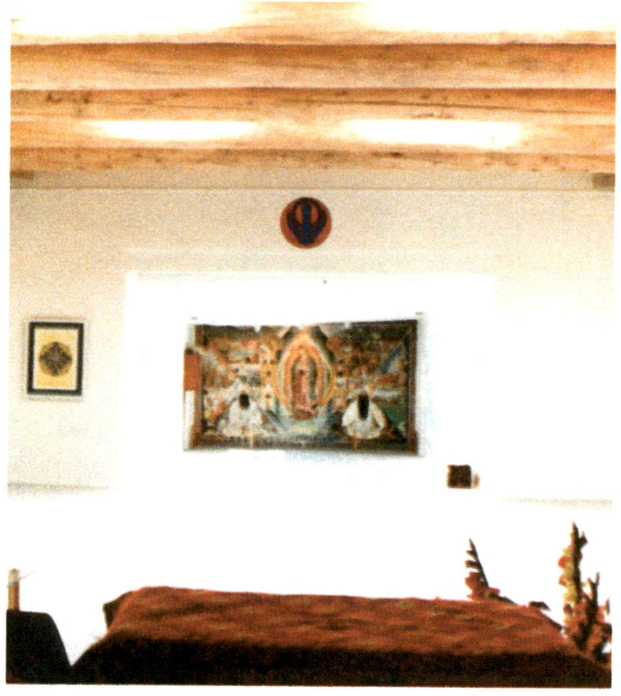
Conclusion

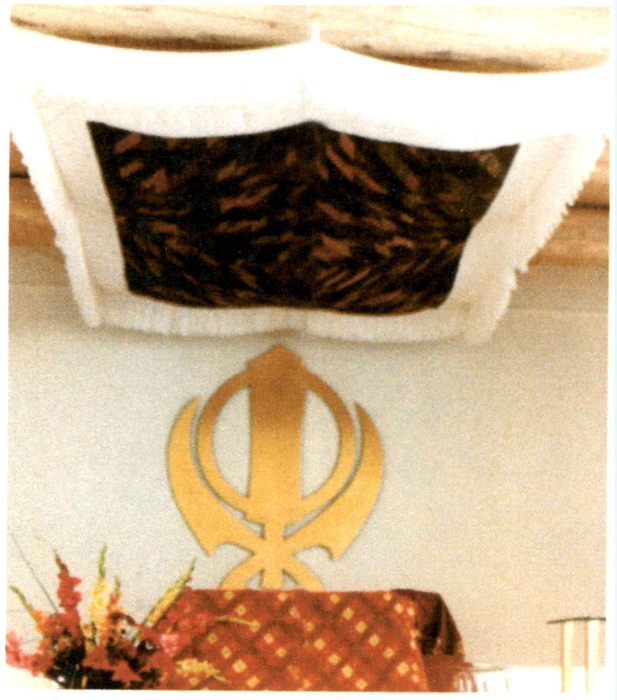
The desire to embellish a place of worship stems for the devotees' innermost feelings of love and piety for his faith. The Harmandir Sahib has been emulated through the centuries in various regions of the world. To understand the motivation for the replication of this model requires and in depth purview of the basic tenets of Sikhism and the innermost sentiments of the devotee. This can be glimpsed as under:

Men behind the tasks of embellishment*:* The rich ornamentation on the various surfaces of the Golden Temple complex is a source of great pride and joy for the entire Sikh community who have over the years given their best to beautify and embellish the edifice. Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave impetus to the tradition with his donation of five lac rupees as a grant towards the gilding of the temple in 1803. Workmen from all walks of life and from various disciplines of the art of embellishment flocked to the *Karkhaneh* established in the vicinity of the Golden Temple and since then the work of the beautification of the Golden Temple has been going on from generation to generation. Even today members of the Sikh community and other devotees give freely of their earnings to maintain the pristine glory and sanctity of the Harmandir. Be it on Indian soil or elsewhere, wherever there is a devotee there stands the unmistakable symbol of the faith, the '*Nishan Sahib'* and in its shadow a *gurdwara*. The embellishments of the *gurdwaras* have been varied and multiple depending upon the *sangat* at a particular location and the support they enjoy among their brethren in India.

Comparisons of the domes in various geographical locations – guilded and non- guilded*:* The main dome of the Golden Temple is a synthesis of details and ornamentation which can safely be said to be the role model for other Sikh shrines as most of them have derived their inspiration and character from it. From the flatish to the conical, from the bulbous and even the wire frame

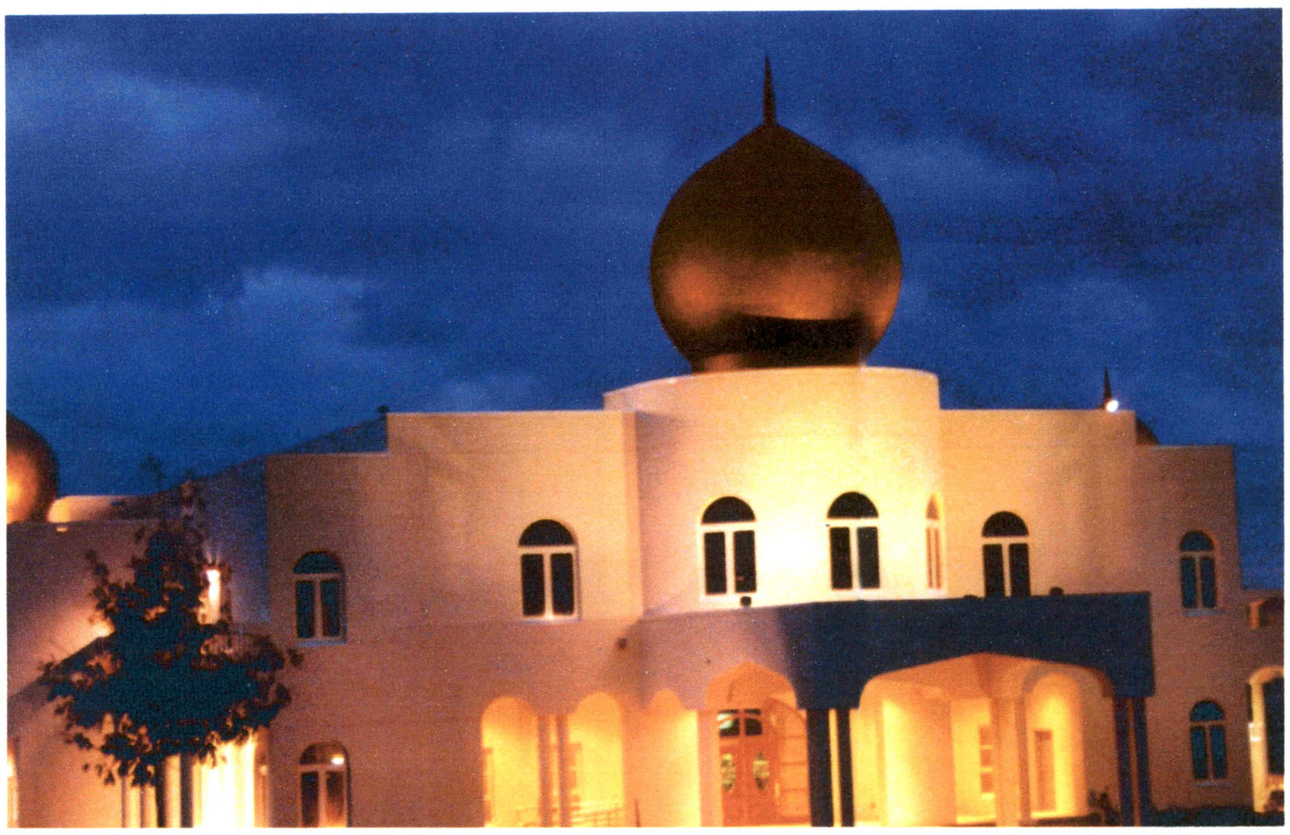






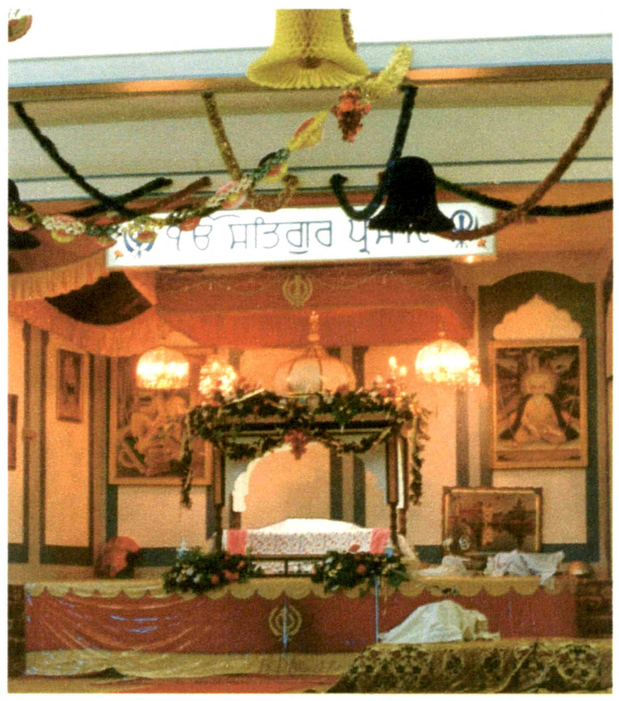
Hacienda Guru Ram Das Gurdwara, Espanola, New Mexico

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi



Gursikh Temple Mission, British Columbia, Canada
Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi





Sikh Temple of Yuba City, Yuba, USA
Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi

structures experimented with in various gurdwaras in India and abroad, it is imperative to assert that the golden ramparts of the Harmandir are what fired the imagination of devotees all over the world to fashion and frame the domes and structures surmounting the gurdwaras of the Sikhs all over the world.

A distinctive architectural feature of most gurdwaras in India and abroad is the balconied window a culmination of the traditional Mughal and Rajasthani styles of architectural ornamentation. There are several kinds of projected windows and balconies some of which are noted in the Golden Temple and later replicated in *gurdwaras* elsewhere. The three-dimensional out-jutting window balconies are characterized by providing ample surface for decoration that is visible in the Golden Temple as well as in other gurdwaras. In the Golden temple these window balconies are worked over in embossed gold and the play of light and shade on their surface is enhanced by the excellence of the relief work or *mohrakashi*.

Apart from the main domes are the kiosks or *chattris*. There are several types of kiosks with the most common one being the square chamber crowned with a domical structure. These chambers usually have walls with a number of entrances often with an arched upper portion. These structures have been copied and replicated in many a gurdwara in Punjab, in India and some of the major countries of the world. These structures are reminiscent of the Mughal and Rajput traditional influences especially in the arches and the sloping stone awnings.

Availability of methods and materials – making best use of the skills and natural elements*:* Even though the best efforts were made to follow the lines laid down in the architecture and surface decorations of the gurdwaras it is interesting to observe the variations of the other edifices that have been coming up in Indian and other lands subsequent to the construction of the Golden Temple. Depending upon the materials available the gurdwaras have been

made of wood, stone, mud and bricks. The chief lines of construction have also been taken from the surrounding locale. The distinctive features of the ornamentation in these gurdwaras are also local in their content inasmuch that the effect considered especially beautiful is utilised to the optimum. Be it the typical colours of the landscape or the form and outline of the edifice itself the gurdwaras built in different lands are very much a part of the indigenous landscape. For example the pagoda creeps into the structure in eastern sites and the cathedral effect is heightened in some of the gurdwaras having stained glass windows, huge flower vases and candles juxtaposed with muted colours of the draperies, tapestries and floor coverings; the windowless building in sand blown Bagdad and the wild jungle surroundings of the one in Kenya as also the hacienda of Mexico – all live upto the basic tenets of the Golden Temple's spiritual perfection in spirit. Yet they are adept at retaining within their souls the essence and form of the Golden Temple as has been carried there by the faithful Sikh.

Placement of the water body proximal to the gurdwara in various locations:

Most places of pilgrimage have been since ages situated on the banks of rivers or close to some water body. Many a times miraculous properties have been attributed to the waters some are characterized as having a healing effect on skin ailments while others have been blessed by the presence of some holy personage. *Sarovar* [lake], *kund* [pond], *baoli* [underground well], *khu* [well] and *chasma* [springs] are all features of the water body that is close to or proximal to a holy place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs. Almost all the gurdwaras have a prominent water body in the form of one of the above. A distinctive aspect of the water is its acceptance as '*amrit*' or nectar. What began with the first *Amrit sarovar* of the Golden Temple complex and gave the city its name was to become a practise for subsequent gurdwaras which were either located on the banks of rivers like the Yamuna, Ravi, Beas, Satluj, Ghaggar and the Ganga or had significant ponds, wells or springs for the weary and sick pilgrim to seek divine solace, succour, cures and treatment at these various sites. Thus, the





Sikh Dharma Massachusetts, Millis, USA

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi







Guru Ram Das Gurdawara,
LA, USA

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in
India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi



Sri Guru Singh Sabha, UK

Courtesy : Patwant Singh. 1992 Gurdwaras in India and around the world. Himalaya Books, New Delhi

presence of a prominent water source is a significant feature of most gurdwaras in the world.

The gurdwaras that were constructed consequent to the Golden Temple complex share many a point of commonality with the premiere institution. This is almost as if the blueprint of the gurdwara was carried within the minds eye of the devout Sikh and wherever he settled down he initiated the creation of his house of worship on the lines of the Harmandir. While the chief lines of construction may be different and may, many a times, be akin to the local scenario at a particular place but the essence of the building, its exteriors and interiors, its surface decorations and embellishments, can be derived to be mostly an essential fall back upon the basic lines of the Golden Temple itself.

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GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

Aari	-	Typically fine thread work embroidery
Ahankar	-	Conceit
Akal Bunga	-	Pavilion of immortality, the place of the 6th Guru, Guru Hargobind at Amritsar, opposite to the entrance of the Golden Temple.
Akal Takht	-	The throne of the Almighty; the highest seat of authority in the religious hierarchy and political matters of the Sikhs
Akhara	-	A religious establishment, particularly of the missionary sects of the Sikhs such as Udasis and Nirmalas
Amavas	-	New moon.
Amrit	-	Nectar
Amrit kund	-	Pond of nectar
Amrit sarovar	-	Pool of nectar
Ardas	-	Supplicatory petition to God, Sikh mode of worship
Ashram	-	Abode, residence of religious men; hermitage
Asthal jantus	-	Earthly creatures
Ath Sath Tirth	-	The 68 places of pilgrimage

Badla	-	Silver, gold thin threadwork
Baisakhi	-	1st day of Baisakh which is the 2nd month of the solar year of the Hindus beginning generally on the 12th or 13th of April
Bani	-	Preaching of the Gurus
Bankari.	-	Fine strip prepared from marble
Barkat	-	Prosperity
Baulis	-	Water sources or wells with stairs descending to the level of the water
Bhaktas	-	Devotees and saints
Bhakti cult.	-	The doctrine of worship of God through loving adoration [13th century]
Bhands/bhatt vahis	-	Bards and geneologists. They sing in praise of persons and are handsomely rewarded.
Bhora	-	Basement
Brahmins	-	The first and foremost in Hindu caste hierarchy
Bunga	-	A rest house, place of dwelling, a store house. Mansions erected by the Sikh Sardars around the Harmandir for the defence of the temple and the occasional stay of the sardars, visitors and the pilgrims.
Burj	-	Turret and towers of a fort
Chaddra	-	Large shawl, mantle

Chanddar	-	Shawl with the ‘moon’ motif
Chajjaz	-	Balconies
Chamba rumal	-	A typical form of embroidery specially popular in the hill kingdom of Chamba.
Channani,	-	A canopy
Charankamal	-	Lotus feet
Chasma	-	Spring
Chateras	-	Metal chasers
Chhatri the	-	Literally umbrella or Mughal style of architecture of entrance gate of an air-house
Chittrai	-	Derived from ‘chitre’ or painting – the act of painting
Chowr Sahib	-	The fly whisk made out of the tail of a yak, used as a mark of respect for royal or holy persons or scriptures.
Dabka	-	Raised or relief embroidery work
Dal Khalsa	-	The united army of the ‘Khalsa’
Darbar Sahib	-	Divine court, synonym for the Harmandir, or Golden Temple
Darshani Deorhi	-	Name of the threshold leading to pass the bridge to the Golden Temple at Amritsar
Daswand	-	One-tenth income given as religious contribution by devotees

Degh	-	The large dish for 'karah parshad' given as ritual offering
Dehin	-	A kind of fresco painting of the Sikh school of painting; a medium of expression of the imaginative study of the artist's own creation of the idealized forms
Dharmarth	-	For religious purposes
Dharamshala	-	An inn or rest house for pilgrims and travellers
Diwali	-	Festival of lights celebrated by the Hindus and Sikhs in the lunar month of Kartik
Diwan	-	Congregation
Dukh Bhanjani beri	-	A 'ber' tree which is designated 'the healer of pain'. Epithet of God, the name of an ancillary shrine in the precincts of the Golden Temple.
Durbar	-	Court or royal audience
Dwara	-	Doors
Gach	-	Cement, mortar made with lime; plaster; a limestone
Gachhi	-	Fuller's earth
Gaz	-	A yard measure
Gharwanj	-	A decorative device involving knotted grapples between animals, balanced by a similar style of floral patterns with strong drawing.
Goorcherras	-	Horse mounted

Granthi	-	Priest
Gurbani	-	Devotional poetry, teachings of Gurus and Bhaktas recorded in the Adi Granth.
Gurmukhi	-	The Punjabi script
Gurpurabs	-	Observance of the special event related to the birth and death of the Gurus.
Guru bilas tradition	-	Literally Guru's pleasure or conversation
Guru gaddi	-	Succession to the spiritual throne of the Sikhs
Guru Granth Sahib	-	The sacred scripture of the Sikhs which is installed in all the gurdwaras. Embodiment of the living Guru it is the focus of all ceremonial and ritual occasions.
Gurudwara	-	Guru's abode; also Sikh temple of worship
Har-ki-pauri	-	Steps leading down to the sarovar on the side opposite to the Darshani Deorhi
Harmandir	-	The temple of the God, the central Sikh shrine in Amritsar commonly known as the Golden Temple. It is also called the Darbar Sahib.
Havelis	-	Old mansion
Hukumnamas	-	Epistle, letter, order or the Guru, a decree
Huramchi	-	A sort of clay, a shade of red
Idi	-	Gift given on the day of Id
Imarti Vibhag	-	Maintenance Department

Jagir	-	Bestowing of land or land revenue or a fixed sum of money for services rendered or to be rendered for the maintenance of an establishment of officers and servants.
Jal-jivas	-	Water creatures
Jama-kharch	-	Records of official receipts and accounts
Janam patris	-	Horoscope
Janam Sakhi	-	Literally birth stories. The term used to refer to the traditional narratives recounting stories of the life of Guru Nanak.
Japji Sahib	-	Opening portion of the Adi Granth
Jaratkari	-	Pietra dura or stone inlay work
Jatha	-	A band, a group of volunteers
Jats	-	An agrarian community with strong military traditions dominant in rural Punjab
Jiva	-	The living human being
Kaar Seva	-	Divine service as a humble offering to God
Kabutar	-	Pigeon motif
Kachh	-	Crocodile motif
Kachcha	-	Short drawers
Kakkas	-	The five 'ks' or external symbols of the Khalsa worn by both men and women.

Kalsa	-	A water-pot
Kama	-	Lust
Kanautan	-	Also qanats, screens
Kangha	-	A comb
Kara	-	A steel bangle
Karah parsad	-	Sacramental food dispensed in the Gurdwaras
Karkhana	-	Workshop/ factory
Karkhanehi-i-Sang-i marmar	-	Workshops for working on marble
Karigar	-	Artisan
Katta	-	A small scimitar
Kayanat	-	Creation
Kes	-	Long, uncut cephalic and facial hair
Khalsa	-	The pure, the Master's own
Khanda	-	Emblem of Sikhism
Khatris	-	Business community
Khil' aat	-	Robe of honour, often accompanied by jewellary

Khu	-	Well
Kincob	-	Rich brocade like fabric
Kirpan	-	A sword.
Kirtan	-	Devotional music, the singing of songs in praise of God generally by a group and generally to the accompaniment of musical instruments; also singing of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib.
Kishta & ritha	-	Natural cleaning agents like soap nut
Kotwal	-	A police officer in charge of a 'kotwali' or 'thana' or police station
Krodh	-	Anger
Kund	-	Pond, underground well
Kundan	-	Inlay of mercury or glass in gold work
Langar	-	Community kitchen attached to every gurdwara from which food is served to all regardless of caste or creed
Lobh	-	Greed
Machh	-	Fishes motif
Mahant	-	Chief, superior of a monastry or other religious institution, manager and head of a religious centre.
Mahima	-	Glorification
Manji	-	Literally a cot. Holding a rank or authority.

Marwari	-	A trading caste
Maryada	-	Ritualized honour
Masands	-	The Guru's agents
Maya	-	Illusion
Meenakari	-	Inlay or etching of colours on gold or silver surface
Mehrabs and dats	-	Arches
Misls	-	Sikh confederacies or Sikh military bands of the 18th century; also used for the troupes or territory of the Sikh sardars.
Mistry	-	Mason
Moh	-	Attachment
Mohrakashi	-	Fresco painting
Mor	-	Peacock motif
Mukaish	-	Gold or thread wire work seen as dots on the finished product.
Mulmantar	-	The opening verse of the Japji Sahib
Musawirs	-	Technical expert in the art of fresco painting
Naam	-	The holy name of God
Naqqashes	-	An artiste with expertise in the art of fresco painting

Naqquashi	-	Fresco painting
Neel	-	Indigo
Nehla	-	Small wooden shovel for fresco painting
Nihangs	-	One who owns nothing and is free from anxiety and care. A Sikh of the Akali class
Nikahnamah	-	Record of Muslim weddings
Nisans	-	Mark of the Gurus either in their hand, a token, a standard or a sign.
Nishan Sahib	-	The tall standard or flag visible from afar in every gurdwara.
Nirgun	-	Without qualities/ attributes, formless, unconditioned the belief in a God to be without form or incarnation; the absolute God
Padmasan	-	The lotus posture of yoga
Pahari	-	pertaining to the erstwhile hill kingdoms
Palki	-	Palanquin
Panthic	-	Pertaining to the Sikh Panth or religion
Parkarma	-	Circumambulatory path around the holy edifice
Pathh	-	Prayers
Patharghara	-	Stone dresser

Pattha	-	A decorative border design used around the ‘dehin’
Patti	-	Another implement used in frescoes
Pav	-	Foot or feet.
Pora.	-	Lime plaster used in the fresco painting
Pothi	-	A religious book, a volume
Potli	-	A cloth poultice
Pucca	-	Permanent
Puran Guru Sikh	-	A complete devotee or follower of Sikhism
Puranmashi	-	Full moon.
Purdahs	-	Curtain or veil
Phulkari	-	Typically Punjabi embroidery on cotton. Worked with floss silk in definite geometric patterns
Quabilas	-	Tribe, sect, Community
Ragis	-	Singers of hymns in praise of God, performing divine kirtan in the gurdwaras.
Ramayan	-	One of the two main Hindu epics
Rathas	-	The chariot like vehicles for transporting the Gods [their idols]

Sachcha Padshah	-	The True Sovereign
Sachkand	-	Divine abode of Truth
Salma-sitara	-	Sequin work
Sankrant	-	First day of the month according to the Bikrami month
Sangat	-	Religious congregation
Sang-i-sabz	-	Shaded green stone
Samadhs	-	A memorial raised on the place of cremation
Sarbarah	-	Manager
Sarbat Khalsa	-	Assemblies of the *misldars* and *jathedars*, the whole Sikh community, the entire Khalsa
Sardar	-	Chieftain, headman, leader of a *misl*, term is now c commonly used as title of address for all Sikh men.
Sargun	-	Embellished with all the good qualities, attributes, usually as an 'avtar'
Sarovar	-	Pool / pond
Semianas	-	Awnings
Sewa	-	Dedicated community service
Sewadars	-	Volunteers / helpers / gurdwara attendants
Shabads	-	Verses of the Gurbani

Shastra	-	Weapons
Shisham	-	[Dalbergia sisoo] Wood used for decorative woodwork
Silpa	-	Sculptor
Simran	-	Meditation upon and recitation of God's name, a rosary.
Siropa	-	Robe of honour
Sthapana	-	Installation
Sufi	-	A class of Muslim seers, saints, mystics
Surang dwaries	-	Aqueducts
Takhts	-	Throne or seat of royal or spiritual authority
Thada	-	Raised platform
Thekedar	-	Contractor
Tilla	-	Gold thread work embroidery
Tirthas	-	Places of pilgrimage
Toshakhana	-	Treasury or store-rooms having objects of value
Tukri	-	Small piece or a portion; an art of fresco painting, a specimen of coloured cut-stone work in gach and its setting alongwith pieces of silvered glass.

Udasis	-	Lengthy journey or a long tour undertaken by Guru Nanak
Vaishnava	-	Related to Vishnu the Hindu God
Varaan	-	Stories of valour
Vatti	-	A piece of granite stone.
Waraks	-	Thin sheets of foil
Zamindars	-	Landowner
Zardozi	-	Persian gold embroidery technique. Worked in gold or silver threads and often embellished with sequins
Zenenas	-	Innermost compartments of a dwelling or the areas secluded for the ladies or women

PRIMARY & OTHER DATA SOURCES

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   The holy religious text of Sikhism

2. The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms
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3. Exhibition on Sikh Heritage,
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   Anandpur Sahib, Punjab, India

4. Golden Temple: Past and Present'
   Guru Nanak Dev University Publication, Amritsar

5. References from the Chandigarh Museum and Art Gallery,
   Chandigarh, India

6. References from the Central Sikh Museum,
   Golden Temple, Amritsar

7. References from the Information Office,
   Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab

8. References from the Sikh Reference and Research Library,
   Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab

LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

1. Dr Deborah Swallow,
   Chief of the South-East Asian Wing,
   Victoria & Albert Museum,
   London, U.K

2. Madanjeet Kaur
   Author of: 'Golden Temple: Past and Present',
   Guru Nanak Dev University Publication, Amritsar

3. Susan Stronge,
   Editor of: 'Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms'
   South-East Asian Wing,
   Victoria & Albert Museum,
   London, U.K

4. Divya Patel.
   South-East Asian Wing,
   Victoria & Albert Museum,
   London, U.K

5. S. N.P Singh,
   Assistant Information Officer,
   Golden Temple, Amritsar

6. Bhai Suchcha Singh,
   Conducted Supervision of 'Kaar Sewa' held for the renovation of the Sarovar at the Golden Temple in April 2004.
   Golden Temple, Amritsar

7. Harbhajan Singh 'Naqqash',
   Artisan, Craftsperson, Restoration worker at the Golden Temple Amritsar

8. Gurdeep Singh,
   Manufacturer of Tiles,
   Volunteer at the Ongoing restoration work at the Golden Temple, Amritsar

9. S. P Danish,
   Son of S.G.S Sohan Singh, Photographer belonging to a Naqqash family

10. Surinder Singh,
    Son of S.G.S Sohan Singh, Photographer belonging to a Naqqash family

11. Sewaks and restoration workers of the Nishkaam Sewa Jatha,
    Birmingham, U.K



Susan Stronge,
Curator, 'Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms' :
South East Asian Wing of
Victoria & Albert Museum, London



Deborrah Swallow
Chief, South East Asian Wing,
Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK



The beauty of the large and small mirrors embedded into the *gach* work
is a masterpiece presentation unique to the world of Sikh art

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