

# **AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SIKH CALENDAR ART**

A THESIS

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Submitted by

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis titled, **AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SIKH CALENDAR ART** embodies the work carried out by Ms. Kavita Singh herself under my supervision and that is worthy of consideration for the award of the Ph.D Degree.

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby affirm that the work presented in this thesis titled, **AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SIKH CALENDAR ART** is exclusively my own and there are no collaborators. It does not contain any work for which any other University/Institution has awarded a degree/diploma.

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## ***Acknowledgements***

*With a sense of deep reverence and humility, I bow my head before the sacred Sri Guru Granth Sahib- the embodiment of divine Gurbani written by Sikh Gurus, Bhagats, Bhats, Saints and Muslim Sufis which inspired me to undertake 'An Analytical Study of Sikh Calendar Art' the subject of my research work for Ph.D thesis. The Sikh Calendar art- the most popular genre of Sikh art is a true tribute to the divine, spiritual and valiant spirit of Sikh religion and is a vivid representation of the egalitarian visual content contained in the Gurbani and Sikh history. The lives and teachings of Ten Sikh Gurus is an unfathomed reservoir of divinity and spiritualism which has the power to liberate the minds and souls of ordinary mortals from the shackles of bigotry, impelled my physical and mental faculties to take up the endeavour of understanding the true tenets, ethos, philosophical and psychological perspectives of Sikh faith and the spirit of Khalsa so faithfully and dedicatedly portrayed in the Sikh calendars. I am indebted to the exemplary heroic acts of countless warriors, martyrs, common men and women who sacrificed their lives in enriching the glorious pages of Sikh history. Their deep dedication and pious living propelled me on a journey to trace the heroic and valiant moments which form the bulk of the subject matter of the mesmerizing calendars of Sikh art. The vibrant Sikh calendars have successfully crystallized the iconic portraiture of the Sikh Gurus who spread the message of universal brotherhood, welfare of the whole mankind, peaceful co-existence, dignity of labour, caring and sharing, equality of genders, humility and truthful living. The teachings of Guru Nanak- the founder of Sikhism are evocatively represented in Sikh calendars which have the capacity to capture the imagination of a vast populace in the motivational aspects of understanding humanistic values. I was deeply moved and inspired*

*by the thematic content of these calendars and the messages these calendars transcend.*

*My involvement during the course of study has transformed my very persona and I have been filled with deep veneration and appreciation for the scholars, writers, preachers and artists who have devoted their lives to the emergence and development of Sikh Calendar art. My heart goes to the first few little known artists who had the wisdom, creativity and ingenuity to spread the messages of Guru Nanak through their simple yet powerful illustrations in the early pothis and who were religiously involved in visually narrating the episodes from Janam Sakhis. They had sown the seeds of a majestic tree which is today laden with fruits and flowers of Sikh ethos and Sikh spiritual ideology. The miniature painters from Rajasthan deserve due admiration as these well versed painters enriched the Sikh Calendar art with fundamentals of classic realism and unparalleled aesthetic charm. In the same vein, I thankfully recognize the contribution and patronage of the Sikh aristocracy and royalty specially Maharaja Ranjit Singh who ruled over the Punjab establishing a Khalsa Raj which encouraged forward-looking policies to invite the extremely talented western painters to the Lahore Durbar who brought with them remarkable new techniques of painting and printing which gave impetus to the adoption of magnificent dimensions of European art in the Sikh art calendars. I truthfully acknowledge the spirit of enterprise of Sikh artists living and working during this era who promptly learnt and adopted the new found techniques and processes of painting and channelise their creative impulses in the portrayal of Sikh themes from the lives of Gurus to the glorious historical events related to Sikh history.*

*I wish to place on record the enthusiasm, curiosity and wisdom of Sir J. Lockwood Kipling, Principal of Mayo School of Art, Lahore (1875-93) and*

*Curator of Central Museum, Lahore who was the first person who devoted his valuable time in understanding the significance of these calendars and thereby demystifying their very essence. Without his involvement with this subject the early remarkable collection of bazaar prints on Sikh themes being sold on the footpaths of Lahore and Amritsar would have vanished into oblivion. He collected all the specimens of these calendars and later these were presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London by his worthy son Rudhyard Kipling.*

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*I dedicate this research work to my respected parents and other members of my family who inculcated in me the value of virtues of humility,*



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## PREFACE

The bright and vibrant calendars of the Sikh Gurus always offer an enigmatic charm and fascination to the viewer and due to a spiritual aura around them the presence of a calendar on the wall of Punjabi household almost becomes an essential decorative element which possesses the capacity to inspire and move the onlooker to be drenched in divinity and piety. Thus a *Sikh Calendar* is not only an ordinary painting but a prolific amalgamation of lofty ideals of Sikhism which often provides a peep into the glorious historical episodes of Sikh history steeped in valour and divinity and this decorative article is in fact a mirror to the plethora of ideological, philosophical and ethical developments of Sikh tenets and a visual treat which portrays the artistic and aesthetical saga of the artists, writers, thinkers, preachers and philosophers. Deeply stung with their mystical charm and evocative stance the analytical study of *Sikh Calendar art* became the topic of my research work. As a plethora of facts pertaining to this captivating genre of *Sikh Calendar art* remained to be unraveled and explored, this most popular form of *Sikh art* is deeply rooted in the very psyche of Sikhism which further prodded me on a sacred endeavour to understand its genesis and its progressive journey to the present day. The whole experience of demystifying the true soul and essence of these calendars has enriched the research work as the elements and conceptual contents of these vibrant Sikh calendars derived their mesmerizing power from an array of factors pertaining to Sikh history, ideology, philosophy, spiritual, divine and ethical perspectives. Simultaneously the study has provided sumptuous revelations about its artistic, aesthetical and creative manifestations and influences. This study has covered the period when after the first appearance of *Janam Sakhis* in 1658 to

the present 21<sup>st</sup> century when this genre is at its pinnacle and enjoys the world-wide popularity as a representative object d'art of Sikh history, art and culture. It was a pilgrimage of sorts to pass through each and every magnificent element of the deep and engrossing study examining the manuscripts, specimens of original Sikh paintings, books and journals on the subject written by scholars and preachers and engaging interactions with artists, printers, scholars and experts to dig deep into the ocean of mystical aspirations behind these mesmerizing objects of art. These sources provided valuable information and knowledge which guided me to onward exploration of the subject. The visits to museums, art galleries, institutions, corporations, banks and other places of interest related to this art form added a new impetus in holding a firm grasp on this appealing subject. A remarkable treasure of the sources have infact offered an unfathomed vision and urgency with which several generations of artists and historians have poured in their valuable mental and physical faculties for the development and popularization of this genre of art which has its admirers in all the continents of the globe. This research work is divided into eight significant chapters which deal with various aspects of *Sikh Calendar art*. The following passages contain chapter-wise summary of the focus of this research work titled, **AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SIKH CALENDAR ART** which revealed numerous valuable and absorbing factors instrumental in the present day popularity of this genre of *Sikh Calendar art*:

#### **Chapter: 1 INTRODUCTION TO SIKH CALENDAR ART**

During the course of research the fundamental and basic introduction and definition was dealt with and efforts were directed towards the condensation and explanation of the very meaning and definition of *Sikh Calendar art*. Having done that the search was pointed towards finding the

genesis of this genre of art. The research work took me on a sojourn to see the fabulous collections and specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* done in myriad stylizations and techniques adopted by the stalwarts of this genre of art and many minute and fascinating factors and elements came to light while analysing them critically in terms of their aesthetic as well as thematic contents portraying the philosophy, ethos and ethics of Sikh religion which is the hallmark of these calendars.

## **Chapter: 2 THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF SIKH CALENDAR ART**

While dealing with the chapter of emergence and development of the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* it was established through sustained study that the study of the emergence and development of *Sikh Calendar art* will not be complete without understanding the development of *Sikh art* which drives creative strength from the early *Janam Sakhi* illustrations. Later on the study was directed towards the critical analysis of frescos which were in vogue during the period and new additions of ornamental designs and motifs were incorporated. The factor that provided a much needed push to this genre of art was the adoption of Sikh themes and episodes from Sikh history by the well versed and articulate miniature painters of Rajasthan who migrated the Punjab hills. The other most enlightening and revealing element which acted as catalyst in the progress of this art was the emergence of European painters in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who brought with them new ideas, techniques, style and processes in painting and printing technology. The valuable contribution of Sikh painters who dedicated their lives in upgradation of this genre of art played a significant role in its popularization and promotion.

### **Chapter: 3 SUBJECT MATTER, PROCESSES, TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS OF SIKH CALENDAR ART**

The third chapter is devoted to the study of subject matter, processes, techniques and materials of *Sikh Calendar art* where strenuous emphasis was laid on the study of these calendars in relation to the subject matter and other significant factors and processes which have resulted in the culmination of providing a new *avatar* to the visual appeal and aesthetic sensibilities to this genre of art.

### **Chapter: 4 SOURCES OF SIKH CALENDAR ART**

The sources of *Sikh Calendar art* are both diverse and numerous as being a popular genre of *Sikh art*, it has been successfully catering to the manifestations of humanism and essence of its content is embedded in the high annals of Sikh history, culture and traditions which proliferate a long saga of valour and sacrifices.

### **Chapter: 5 MAIN FEATURES OF SIKH CALENDAR ART**

To identify the main features of *Sikh Calendar art* due consideration was devoted to highlight the basic features and characteristics employed by the artists in context to their stylisation and use of iconic symbols related to Sikh religion vis-à-vis martial and spiritual aspects. These features amply illustrate the very essence of this art which is embedded in Sikh philosophy and ideology. The main features pertaining to these calendars are benign presence of the sacred scripture Sri Guru Granth Sahib, solo and group portraits of Ten Sikh Gurus in profile and frontal poses, use of the *Ik-Onkar symbol* in many forms, designs and manifestations, presence of a Khalsa symbol (*Khanda Kirpan*), Nishan Sahib, depiction of *Karah Prasad*, depiction of Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar, portrayal of presence of all five Takhts and other historical Gurdwaras related to particular Sikh Gurus, depiction of holy inscription Satnam Waheguru and couplets or verses from Gurbani.

## **Chapter: 6 DESCRIPTIVE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF IMPORTANT SIKH CALENDARS AND THEIR ARTISTS**

In this chapter a sustained effort was made to make a descriptive and critical analysis of important Sikh calendars and their painters revealing the psyche of the artists in the creation behind a particular calendar and the creative and aesthetic mode the painter employed to express the specific thought in pertinent visual manifestations and stylisations using his mastery in the study of the content and transform the thematic essence to the visual form and at the same time the technical aspects which were the hallmarks of a particular artist and why a specific theme is depicted in a manner which transcends from the very life-style and thought-process of a particular artist. It also deals with the artist's interest in Sikh religion and his spiritual aspirations and manifestations. Descriptive visual elements used by the artists have been fully analysed to bring in sharp focus the study of Sikh historical material and books on Sikh philosophical dimensions.

## **Chapter: 7 PSYCHO-ANALYSIS OF THE PROMINENT PAINTERS OF SIKH CALENDAR ART**

The study of various aspects of *Sikh Calendar art* proved to be an overwhelmingly enlightening and a revealing experience and it turned out to be an extremely enriching phenomenon encompassing all shades and hues of Sikh religion, history, philosophy, culture, traditions, social ethics, psychological and political dimensions in an mosaic of multifarious perspectives. While peeling the veneer of visual stylization of these Sikh calendars, there appears underneath a reservoir of unfathomed dedication, artistic synergy and personal moral convictions of the stalwarts of *Sikh Calendar art* who reinforced the foundations of these wonderfully painted enchanting works of *Sikh Popular art* after deep contemplation and reinvention of their true selves.

## **Chapter: 8 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Today these calendars are available globally and command immense popularity. Due to the untiring efforts and monumental contribution of Sikh religious institutions, Gurdwaras, organizations, corporations, banks, museums and art galleries, painters, printers, promoters and scholars of Sikh thought and ideology, these *Sikh art calendars* have emerged as a single most popular mode of *Sikh art* which exudes essence of Sikh religion, history and vibrant culture. As a matter of fact this form of art has attained wide acceptance and is raring to spread its wings in limitless expansion. Due to its ever increasing demand even highbrow connoisseurs of art have started evincing a keen interest in *Sikh Calendar art* as a vivid and serious form of art. It is indeed the most visible genre of *Sikh art* which has crossed national boundaries and found a respectable place in every nook and corner of the globe.

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<b>Plate - 461</b>	<b>A Bride's make-up</b>

**Plate - 462**

**Punjabi Bride**

**Plate - 463**

**Maharaja Ranjit Singh on Elephant**



**P**opular art as the more general term is used to refer to all those art forms of India that have a mass audience and use mechanical reproduction in their creation and distribution.<sup>1</sup> *Calendar art* is a generic name for a style of popular print art.<sup>2</sup> And more literally while referring to *Calendar art* the images that come to mind are the colour prints produced for framing to serve as wall decorations, to artistically rendered illustrations used to grace hanging calendars, almost typically, to polychrome lithographs that depict Gods and Goddesses and enigmatic and charismatic tales from their lives and times.<sup>3</sup> The term *Calendar art* refers primarily to mass-produced colour prints who lent themselves to the expression of national sentiment, envisioning the nation through its landscapes, its bounded territory, its gods and goddesses and sacred sites, its myths and legends, highlighting the lofty ideals of spiritual, saga of valour and pictorial ballads of valiant warriors and heroes.<sup>4</sup> The essence of their mass appeal lies in the themes chosen by the artists which showcases spiritual, religious, literary and historical perspectives. The Indian *Calendar art* revolves around the axis of religious wisdom, piety, mythology, rich cultural traditions and heritage. In fact it is interesting to know that Indian *Calendar art* is none of these separate features alone but an amalgamation of all these elements above.

**Indian *Calendar art* was the product of ‘modernizing’ trends in the fine art in India- the domestication of techniques of oil painting and the mastery of western perspectivism- allied with the dissemination of new technologies of reproduction.**<sup>5</sup> The genre of *Calendar art* received the real

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1 **Inglis, Stephen R;** 1995, *Suitable for Framing: The Work of a Modern Master*, Media and The Transformation of Religion in South Asia, Pennsylvania University Press, Philadelphia, p.53

2 **Uberoi, Patricia;** 2006, *Freedom and Destiny: Gender, Family, and Popular Culture in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.49

3 **Smith, H. Daniel;** 1995, *Impact of “God Posters” on Hindus and their Devotional Traditions*, Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia, Pennsylvania University Press, Philadelphia, p.24

4 **Uberoi, Patricia;** 2006, *Freedom and Destiny: Gender, Family, and Popular Culture in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.11

5 *Ibid*, p.11

push with the advent and arrival of printing machines, techniques and technology which was brought to India by the Europeans.

Yet a similar definition attached to this genre of art is 'Bazaar Art', as these calendars are sold on festive occasions in small stalls, or pavements or at pilgrimage sites, reaching through such commercial networks into the very remotest parts of the country.<sup>6</sup> By virtue of their mass production and low cost, these calendars have made inroads into the houses of the masses and classes alike by making them the most popular form of decoration and worship. Today we find them in homes, in temples and shrines, in offices and shops, commercial business establishments big or small, on the walls of educational institutions, splashed on walls, fixed in scooters and computers, stuck on machines, displayed on dashboards of swanky cars, lowly auto rickshaws and taxies, neatly slipped into wallets and locket- printed on the jackets of notebooks of school children and so on.

The popularity of calendars have endeared them to be telling artifacts of contemporary Indian popular taste<sup>7</sup>, as they are normally printed in bright colours with profound decorative elements and naïve and eye-catching depiction of religious and moral values, ethics and traditions making them the objects of worship and these calendars are freely used as modes of advertisements for particular business houses.

The reach and thrust of *Calendar art* surpasses limitations impacting religious and the sacred themes to representing commercial and official aspects to vernacular and regional scopes. **The fantastic images range between the direct and appealing to strange and queer expressions which may not be**

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6 **Uberoi, Patricia;** 2006, *Freedom and Destiny: Gender, Family, and Popular Culture in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.50

7 **Smith, H. Daniel;** 1995, 'Impact of "God Posters" on Hindus and their Devotional Traditions', *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, Pennsylvania University Press, Philadelphia, p.24

**born out of reality but as reality is perceived in popular beliefs, symbolism, fantasies and fables by the populace of a particular region. For instance, myths, ballads, folklores and heroic tales always inspired and left an indelible impression on the minds of the people and their depiction in visual forms in the calendars makes them all the more fascinating.** This being the reason, that these calendars are admired by the people and offers them a visual treat and an elated experience to see the characters in myths, folklores etc. come alive in their visual *avatars* along with the other historical backgrounds. The symbolism shown in these colourful calendars for ex: different *vahanas* or vehicles of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and similarly their various incarnations or *avatars* border on fantasia and deep imaginative thoughts. They are instrumental in propelling in the minds of the onlookers deep feelings of spirituality and solemn religious thoughts, which are always dear to human beings. The other symbols depicted in these calendars such as ‘Lotus’, which stands for purity though it grows in mud, is considered the purest flower which is depicted as a seat of many Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Similarly ‘Nandi Bull’ the *vahana* of Lord Shiva is a symbol of virility and strength, ‘Durga on Tiger/Lion’ symbolises power and bravery and multi-armed Gods and Goddesses with many objects in their hands are symbols of different thoughts and powers attributed to a particular deity. The other interesting symbols include the form of a dwarf under the feet of Lord Shiva as ‘Natraja’ symbolises the destruction of ignorance. The pot bellied God Kubera is a symbol of riches and prosperity. The elephant-headed Hindu God Ganesh is revered as the remover of obstacles and is therefore invoked before the commencement of any enterprise or business. His *vahana* is the mouse. The God Shani is taken as the one who rules one of the nine planets in Indian cosmology. He is the Indian equivalent of Saturn known for his uneven temper. His *vahana* is the crow.

Though some minuscule highbrows may maintain that *Calendar art* caters to an untutored taste, conveying whatever the messages or themes through unsubtle means of communication and forms. They further believe that being a staple diet of crudity and unsophisticated forms for the consumers of this popular brand of art caters to generally innate and unrefined populace. This genre of art they claim will die its own death due to the lack of aesthetics and depth in the depiction of such art forms. They also assert that art devoid of sophistication loses its appeal and disappears without trace never to be seen again. The subject of *Popular art* deserves a fresh look as this very concept of *Popular art* in its many myriad manifestations provides valuable evidence of current attitudes and life styles and it presents the glimpses of cultural and religious perspectives of the times bygone. Focussing our attention exclusively on ‘great’ art merely perpetuates a view of history, which exults the elite and ignores the ordinary. *Popular art* is either ordinary or extraordinary.<sup>8</sup> Its interpretation and why it is popular is a matter of investigation with a serious and unbiased mind or thought as it corresponds to the masses as well as classes and their tastes, aspirations desires, beliefs and their day to day history. It is indeed an ode to the anthropological account of a vast population revealing their cultural, artistic and aesthetical acumen.

**The saga of *Calendar art* goes back to the emergence of printing industry, which was established in India at the end of the nineteenth century, was entirely devoted to the production of pictures of Gods, Goddesses and mythological themes.** These mass-produced calendars soon emerged as the most vigorous medium of visual communication of the socially and culturally diverse Indian society. The calendars besides being religious icons

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8 McLeod, W.H; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.1

found its use in advertising goods and services and also in propagation of political and nationalistic ideologies as well.<sup>9</sup>

Though the contribution of the most important picture printing press named Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press (1894) pioneered by the famous Indian painter, Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) who painted the Indian themes in western oil painting technique exclusively for the purpose of printing oleographs is of immense significance. But the important role played by other printing presses and publishers in revolutionalising and popularising the *Calendar art* form commands outstanding attention which were Calcutta Art Studio, bow bazaar street, Calcutta; Chitrashala Steam Press, Poona near Bombay (1878); Hem Chand Bhargava, Chandni chowk, Delhi (1900); S.S.Brijbasi (1927-28); Sivakasi National Litho Press, Tamilnadu(1954); Chor Bagan Art Studio, Calcutta; Lakshmibilas Press, Cawnpore; Kununyalal Lachoomal, Delhi; Anant Shivaji Desai, Bombay; Anandeshwar Press; Arya-Bhushan Press; P.S.Joshi Kalbadevi, Bombay; Rising Art Cottage, Calcutta; Battala Press, Calcutta; Harnarayan & Sons to name a few.

**The main printing techniques in vogue were lithography, chromolithography, letter-press printing, woodcut printing, albumen printing, bromide printing and half-tone printing. The cities of Calcutta, Bombay, Chennai, Patna, Lucknow, Kanpur, Amritsar and Delhi emerged as the major centres of printing of calendars.**

The most popular and admired religious themes which were printed on these calendars pertained to Indian mythology, Hindu Gods and Goddesses and scenes from the epics- Ramayana and Mahabharata. The colourful pictures of Goddess Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) standing on lotus and Goddess Saraswati (Goddess of music and learning) clad in white *sari* seated on a lotus and playing

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<sup>9</sup> Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine; 2003, *Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.1

*veena* are still in vogue besides the pictures of Ram, Lakshmana and Sita, Radha Krishna and gopis, Bal Krishna Leelas and *Raaslilas* of Krishna. Also prominent are the calendars depicting various *avatars* of Vishnu- Narsimha avatar, Matsya avatar, Kurma avatar, Shiva and Parvati, Shiva as Gangadhar, Ganesha, Hanuman as Pavanputra, Goddess Durga on tiger, Goddess Kali, Ardhanarishwar Shiva and Shiva and Parvati with Ganesha and Kartikeya. Some other rare themes depicted in these bright and colourful calendars are Annapurna (Goddess of food), *Samudramanathan* scene, Vishwakarma (God of art and architecture) sitting with his tools and *Shree Sharada Pujan* (Lakshmi, Saraswati and Ganesh).

In the true spirit of patriotism various nationalistic and patriotic themes were attempted and admired by the people depicted in these calendars pertaining to the pre-independence of India. These calendars infused a sense of national pride and yearning for freedom. Prominent among these calendars are Bharatmata with Indian flag (*Tiranga*), Hind Devi (Goddess India) standing with a fierce Lion and martyrs of freedom presenting their heads at her feet, Martyr Khudiram, Shaheed Bhagat Singh with Sukhdev and Rajguru, Mahatma Gandhi, Gandhi with Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose receives a weapon from Durga to be used in the struggle for India's independence with the sword comes the flag of the Indian National Congress and The leaders of the Nation (Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Rabindranath Tagore, Sardar Patel).

***Sikh Calendar art has accomplished the position of being the most admired genre of Sikh Popular art as it has successfully and emphatically captured the imagination of millions of people inhabiting the northern states of India for decades and decades, due to the spiritual and historical content, stylised form, decorative and ornamental appeal one finds these calendars respectfully and prominently displayed on the walls of the religious places, households, shops and other commercial as well as social establishments. The Sikh calendars carrying the images of Sikh Gurus, Saints and Sikh martyrs***

are revered as if they are the embodiment of spiritual and religious empowerment. Episodes treasured in the popular imagination of *Sikh Calendar prints* are legends and manifestations of the religious, spiritual, cultural and traditional values and ethos of the Sikhs. The bright and colourful collection of these absorbing calendars depict scenes from the Sikh history from the Gurus to the Maharaja Ranjit Singh, *Janam Sakhis*, Gurdwara Reform movement, *Baramaha Tukhari*, Sikh themes showing the *dignity of labour* as Guru Nanak Dev drawing milk from the dry bread of Bhai Lalo, a carpenter and blood from the lavish feast of Malik Bhago, a rich and tyrant merchant; equality of women; love of mankind; Bhai Kanahaiya-as forerunner of *Sewa-Panth* offering water and medication to the wounded Sikh and Mughal soldiers alike in the battlefield beyond the distinctions of caste, creed or nationality as a symbol of pure humanism which indeed is the true soul of Red Cross movement today.

In some calendars the themes portray are *Guru ka langar*- where rich and poor are sitting together in rows partaking the same food being served by the Sikh sewadars; *Kar-Sewa*- in which devotees of all faiths participate in the construction and renovation of Gurdwaras; *Amrit Sanchar* ceremony show Guru Gobind Singh baptising the *Panj Pyaras* as Sikhs by offering them *Amrit* prepared by him; Birth of Khalsa- as Guru Gobind Singh standing at his Anandpur Fort with a naked sword in his hand and asking for a head from the congregating crowd; Gurmat Prachar; *Janam-Sakhis* showing the episodes from the life of Guru Nanak Dev, scenes of martyrdom; Sikh-wars; Guru Nanak Dev with Bala and Mardana as his devoted companions on his way to far-flung lands.

Even today the most popular themes in Sikh calendars are the portrait of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh on horseback and falcon perched on his gloved hand. A variety of calendars which highlight the importance of martyrdom and values of valour in Sikhism is also an absorbing subject matter in *Sikh Calendar art* where Shaheed Baba Deep Singh is shown as- the brave

soldier of the Khalsa holding his decapitated head in one hand and the sword soaked in blood in the other engaged in a battle in Amritsar. What stirs the chords of one's heart the most are the calendars depicting the episodes of Muslim oppression and Sikh bravery – the scene of bricking alive of two younger sons (*Chotte Sahibzade*) of Guru Gobind Singh highlights the violence of tyrants over supremely loyal innocents.

Calendars showing the episodes of Guru Nanak Dev's life like Bal Nanak sleeping and being protected from bright sun by a five headed snake; Sacha Sauda- wherein Nanak is shown feeding the poor *sadhus* with the money his father gave him for starting a business; Guru Nanak Dev seated in a grocery shop weighing grains and uttering the words Tera-tera; Mecca Pherna; Self-rotation of *chakki* in a jail; Wali Kandhari at Panja Sahib is shown throwing a boulder and Nanak stopping it with his single hand; Demon Kauda who was a cannibal is shown frying human beings in the large *karaha* (Wok) and Guru Nanak Dev reforming him with his wisdom from performing such demonic acts; Reetha-Meetha an interesting episode in which Baba Nanak turns the bitter and inedible fruit (*reethas*) into a sweet eatable (*reethas*) for Mardana who always pretended to be hungry gained instant response from the masses as these themes depict the lofty, divine and pristine pinnacles of Sikhism.

While studying the emergence and development of *Sikh Calendar Art* it will be pertinent to know **the historical background, development and origin of Sikh art that is Art produced by Sikh artists, created under Sikh patronage, offering a distinctive Sikh style, produced in a territory dominated by Sikhs and highlighting Sikh themes, traditions, culture and religion.**<sup>10</sup> Foremost and most poignant patron of *Sikh art* was revered Maharaja Ranjit Singh whose efforts to promote *Sikh art* and culture are unparalleled. He was instrumental in bringing in fresh air in the form of new painting techniques

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10 McLeod, W.H; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.3



and styles practised by European painters and offering patronage and encouragement to the Sikh painters like Kehar Singh, Kishan Singh and Bishan Singh who were pioneers to adapt these new techniques and who will be remembered for their contribution in converting the Sikh themes into paintings of newly adopted genres.

***Sikh art was born in the incredible illustrations of Janam-Sakhis.***<sup>11</sup>  
*Janam-Sakhis* which are as popular and sacred in the Sikh tradition as are *Puranas* in Brahmanical and *Jatakas* in Buddhist. In *Gurmukhi*, the literal meaning of ‘*Sakhi*’ is supposed to be a ‘story’ but generally speaking *Janam-Sakhis* are the episodes from the life of Guru Nanak Dev.<sup>12</sup>

The *Janam-Sakhis* are Hagiographic accounts of the life of Guru Nanak dev, popular narratives which have enjoyed a considerable popularity throughout the history of the Sikh panth. Each consists of a series of anecdotes, loosely organised in varying chronological patterns and laying particular emphasis on Guru Nanak’s travels within and beyond the Punjab.<sup>13</sup>

The *Janam-Sakhi* illustrations deserve to be recognized as the fountainhead of Sikh artistic endeavour. *Janam-Sakhi* illustrations had a direct impact on the minds of the masses as one would agree that a visual object had a direct impression on to the onlooker than the written word. The content of *Janam-Sakhis* lays greater emphasis on portrayal of Guru Nanak’s personality aspect, philosophic and divine religious messages of love for mankind, universal brotherhood and discarding of unfounded beliefs and superstitions which block the straight-forward and truthful paths impairing the rational human behaviour.

The anecdotes represented in the *Janam-Sakhis* are simple yet graphic. Numerous versions of *Janam-Sakhis* incorporate or dwell upon a hymn, couplets

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11 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.4

12 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.118

13 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.4

or religious quotes of wisdom. The narrative part serves only as their scene setting. Their language is mostly *Punjabi*, script *Gurmukhi* and the diction fiction in prose, imbuing them with exceptional narrative skill as experienced in a storybook. Likewise, *Janam-Sakhis* are found both simple plain manuscibed texts and as also highly illustrated and appealing; serving both the ordinary as well as an affluent Sikh. The *Sikh art*, portrait, frescoes, border illumination decorative designs have its seeds in *Janam-Sakhi* illustrations. In *Sikh art*, *Janam-Sakhi* illustrations are the earliest specimens of emerging Sikh narrative art.<sup>14</sup>

The popularity of *Janam-Sakhis* illustrations later on propelled the tradition of painting murals and frescoes on the walls of religious establishments, monasteries, *dharamshalas*, temples, *havelies* and palaces with paintings depicting the life events of Sikh Gurus and their portraits and those of *Mahants* or priests.<sup>15</sup> Fresco paintings enlarged the scope of *Sikh art* and at the same time became instrumental in spreading the teachings of Sikh Gurus, Sikh way of life and ethos, amongst all sections of the society.

**With the passage of time, artists adopted and improved mural and fresco painting techniques and enriched the *Sikh art* with addition of number of artistic, ornamental and stylised elements in the form of floral patterns, geometrical margins and elaborate depiction of flora and fauna. There was special emphasis on bright colours and fascinating stylised portraits of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh, the first and the last Sikh Gurus.**

The art of painting frescoes and murals is a well-established art tradition in India since ancient times. The tradition of frescoes or murals based religious constructions/shrines started diminishing with the invasion of Islamic invaders

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14 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.118-119

15 *Ibid*, p.132

who were not in favour of preserving and projecting non-Islamic religious structures. Obviously during the Sikh Guru's lifetime the indigenous mural art tradition in Punjab has hardly any scope to grow save what of it crawled in some less significant far-off sectarian buildings mostly the *Thakurdwaras* of *Bairagis*.<sup>16</sup>

The eighteenth century *Sikh art* thus remained dominated by portraiture as its forms, Mughal as its style and *Sikh art* as its central theme. The onset of nineteenth century saw the incorporation of some of the elements of European art such as the use of light and shade and dimensional effects in *Sikh art*. This saw an emergence of some accomplishments and mastery in technical aspects of portraying the specific personality facets in a portrait adopted from European art. Now besides painting the portraits of Sikh Gurus, Sikh artists showed a keen interest in painting the portraits of a common Sikh, a labourer, a goldsmith, a weaver, a carpenter, a farmer and even a potter engaged in his vocation. This enriched the dimension and scope of *Sikh art* of portraiture. The entire character of the *Sikh art*- its vision, theme, style, area, effects, motifs and symbols found a new patronage during the nineteenth century. But *Sikh art* did not fail in preserving its earlier professional angle and sectarian direction but had developed besides secular and amateur aspects.<sup>17</sup> With the passage of time, themes which were popular and dominant in *Sikh art* earlier such as religious themes, lives of the Sikh gurus, martyrs etc remained popular and found sustained patronage and expansion during the period that followed.

A remarkable new thematic transformation where emphasis started shifting and focussing on the portrayal of the common man and depiction of his day-to-day life where artists freely discovered themselves and were delighted

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16 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.130-131

17 *Ibid*, p.138-139

with their new creations, newly found techniques and adoption of new styles, materials with a wider vision.

Another aspect which gained credence is a new imagery evolved entirely out of the personal experience, vision and imagination of a particular artist who was not confined to illustrating texts or legends or translating into lines and colours mere conventions, creeds or traditions. With a new consciousness and self-discovery, the artist was feeling free to give a creative vent to his imagination or to its own concept of things around him. The emergence of secular type amateurism in fact revolutionised the *Sikh art* to a great extent where the winds of changes started blowing bringing in new aspects of aestheticism and creativity which influenced the content matter of Sikh artistic endeavour.<sup>18</sup>

After a prolonged period of turmoil and struggle Maharaja Ranjit Singh was able to establish a reign of peace and stability in the Punjab hills. The result was a fruitful and much needed Sikh patronage to the *Pahari* art. In the Lahore court, the most preferred form of painting became portraiture or paintings of group of nobles and generals. Under the auspices of valuable Sikh patronage *Pahari* painters eagerly adopted Sikh themes and this gave a new dimension in stylisation and depiction of Sikh ethos their works. During this reign of tranquillity and prosperity, this was an ideal period when painters from hills of Punjab and Rajasthan preferred to migrate to Lahore court.<sup>19</sup>

Though initially Maharaja Ranjit Singh was reluctant to get his portraits painted but the art of portraiture flourished with the passage of time and a number of professional and amateur artists have left some remarkable and superb portraits of the Maharaja, his family, soldiers and the sketches of people. These

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18 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.139

19 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.9-11

fine specimens are found in memoirs, travelogues and contemporary accounts of the *Lahore Durbar*.<sup>20</sup>

Emily Eden, August Schoefft, Baron Hugel, Captain Goldingham, William Carpenter, C.S. Hardinge, the German painter Van Orlich, G.T.Vigne, W.G.Osborne, Russian prince-Alexis Soltykoff are the notable European visitors who visited the Lahore court.

The European painters visited the Lahore court for various reasons such as some came to seek their fortunes and others landed in *Lahore Durbar* for the sake of curiosity and to see the Maharaja of this empire and yet others were lured by the attraction of romantic East.<sup>21</sup> The presence of numerous accomplished artists from Europe has left us with a fine body of paintings in oils, sketches, engravings, lithographs, etchings, woodcuts, pen portraits, water-colours, line drawings and miniature on porcelain that can be classified as *Sikh art* that is by, for and or about Sikhs.

What attracted these artists the most was the splendour of the Sikh court of Ranjit Singh, its treasures and its handsome Sikh warriors, architecture natural environs of Lahore court scenes, portraits of famous personages of Ranjit Singh's court- Maharaja's sons Sher Singh, Kharak Singh, Nau Nihal Singh, portraits of famous ministers- Fakir Nuruddin and generals like Sham Singh Attariwala, portraits of foreigners- Allard, Ventura, Vo'n Cortland and Honibeger. There are numerous authentic and elaborately painted portraits of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh showing him sitting on a chair with one leg pulled up and the other on a foot-rest and his left hand finger pointing. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's palace and *Shalimar* Gardens were the favourite subjects for the lithographs at that time. The beauty of Lahore environs, robustness and handsome facial cuts of the

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20 **Singh, Manmohan;** 1977, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court: Painters and the Painted*, Marg Publications, Bombay, p.109

21 **Aijazuddin, F.S;** 1979, *Sikh Portraits by European Artists*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p.13

people and the prosperity of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign inspired many great works of art.<sup>22</sup>

**The Sikh painters appreciated the newly introduced techniques brought in by European painters such as elements of realism, border perspectives, foreshortening, unconventional approach, elaborate backgrounds, group painting, oil painting instead of vegetable or mineral colours, minuteness of detail, precision, tone, tints and highlighting, intricate representation of jewellery, costumes, weaponry, furniture and drapery, broad strokes of the knife and an added imagery to enhance a work of art.** The beauty of landscape has been captured very vividly and lyrically adding an aesthetic charm to the otherwise dull picture. All these embellishments and achievements characterized this later phase of Lahore art. And the city of Lahore emerged as one of the earliest centres of modern art anywhere in this part of India.<sup>23</sup>

With the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849 a marked diversion in *Sikh art* was observed. The artists now had to cater to the distinctively different taste and preferences of the British patrons. Earlier these artists earned a comparatively comfortable living but with the introduction of the Printing Press and with lithographic techniques which provided the first opportunity for mass production, they had to equip themselves with the coming commercial onslaught.<sup>24</sup>

**The *Sikh art* under the dominant presence of the British saw three main changes- firstly, a different format for Portraiture, secondly, a demand for stronger sense of perspective in the paintings and thirdly the adaptation of water-colour and sketching.** This extension was in response to the solely

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22 **Singh, Manmohan;** 1977, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court: Painters and the Painted*, Marg Publications, Bombay, p.109

23 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.146

24 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.16

elite British preferences and tastes and was encouraged by the Mayo School of Art established in Lahore in 1875. As the Europeans in India had a fascination to record interesting people or scenes in the form of sketches and water-colours to acquaint their relatives and friends back home.<sup>25</sup> Sikh artists did not lag behind in pursuance of this new found style of art and fully indulge in adjusting to the new techniques, subject matters and styles.

**Deviating from the typical flat colour technique of Sikh painting, the first Sikh painter who adopted western realistic style in favour of light and shade was Kehar Singh who flourished at Lahore and Kapurthala.** We see a glimpse of last century's life of Punjab in his paintings of carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, potters, masons, dyers, beggars, women baking *chappatis*, jugglers, *Sadhus*, *Nihangs* and so on and so forth.<sup>26</sup> Another contemporary of Kehar Singh was Kapur Singh who worked in oil and water-colours and specialised in portraiture. Kapur Singh became a court painter of Kapurthala who was initially assigned the job of fanning the European artists engaged by Kapurthala court. He learnt western techniques of painting through observation. Puran Singh was yet another prominent artist who excelled in painting portrait of Sikh Gurus in oils.<sup>27</sup> The contribution of two nephews of Kehar Singh- Kishan Singh and Bishan Singh,<sup>28</sup> was instrumental in further strengthening the Sikh style of painting. As they admired, adopted and practised the elements they learnt from their European contemporaries.

The introduction of technical expertise enabled wider circulation of *Sikh Popular art* which was the blend of British and native traditions. In the late nineteenth century, the Printing Press became an instrument of popularising *Sikh art* and played a significant role in mass production and distribution of fine

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25 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.17

26 **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Sikh Painting, Roopalekha*, Vol. 39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.29

27 **Aryan, K.C;** 1971, *Some Punjabi Artists, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.36

28 **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Sikh Painting, Roopalekha*, Vol. 39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.30

specimens of *Sikh popular art* which were earlier available only to elite classes but with this technological revolution in printing the superb and fantastic works of art reached the masses who could afford to spend a nominal amount of money, this awakened a new resurgence of Sikh consciousness and developed into a new stream of publishers, printers, journalists, authors and painters/illustrators. The most preferred technology adopted by the printers was lithography and woodcuts.<sup>29</sup>

The contribution of J.Lockwood Kipling, principal of the Mayo School of Art in *Lahore* (1875-93) and also curator of the Central Museum is earnestly recognised here for the pioneer work in collecting, protecting and preserving an album containing 196 prints, paintings and drawings in pen and pencil together with 37 loose pages of paintings, calligraphic drawings and outline pen drawings which were produced during this period at Lahore and sold in the bazaars and religious fairs of North India. This set is in the permanent collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London. These *Popular Sikh art* prints were printed by Bhai Gujjar Singh proprietor of the Faiz Printing Press near Akal Bunga in Amritsar. Their editions touched a couple of thousand marks. J.Lockwood Kipling chose the representative specimens of these prints selecting from amongst a number of series on the same subject.<sup>30</sup>

**The modern *bazaar prints/calendar prints* emphasised on depiction of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh mainly and in some *Sikh calendars* Guru Ram Das has been shown** because of their connection with Golden Temple. The series of Adi Granth *Bhagats* did not find much prominence in these popular *Sikh calendars*.<sup>31</sup>

**During the first half of the twentieth century the *Sikh Calendar art* witnessed an apparent barrenness/recession due to mainly two reasons. The**

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29     **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.17-18

30     Ibid, p.20-21

31     Ibid, p.23



first being the general disapproval with which members of the Singh Sabha movement regarded *Popular Pictorial art*. Calligraphy and Gurdwara designs were not opposed but imaginative painting and drawing depicting the Sikh religious themes was not well received by the members of the Singh Sabha movement. Photographs were preferred as they projected actual pictures of people, places and events. The members of the Singh Sabha movement feared that these colourful calendars of Sikh Gurus may make them iconic figures whereas no actual portraiture was available of a particular Sikh Guru.<sup>32</sup>

Although the hostility of reformist leaders evidently slowed the output of *Popular Sikh art*, it did not stop it. Another reason for the slow down of *Sikh Calendar art* could be the belief that some thought it was not worth preserving and there were very few examples of this art left in the market. But the *Sikh calendar art* did not vanish altogether and painters kept on creating scenes of Sikh history, culture, traditions and ethos in their own distinctive styles and manners and these painters had their own followers and disciples who remained engaged in carrying forward the art of *Sikh calendars* stylised by their forefathers who were also their teachers or *Ustads* generations remained engaged in this profession.

After India gained independence from the British in 1947, there were two distinctive developments in *Sikh Calendar art*. One is the appearance of a group of Sikh artists who genuinely chose to paint Sikh traditions in their own imaginative style modes and the other factor is the circulation of mass printed calendars on Sikh themes. Addition of adding soul and character to the painting in individualistic style of a particular painter was appreciated by the supportive and sophisticated admirers. The effort satisfied the urge to relate to spiritualism

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32 McLeod, W.H; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.28

in these *Sikh Calendar art* prints. This style is the new *avatar* of the Sikh psyche and traditions as represented in the earlier traditional iconography. Some of the artists attempted painting the events of Sikh history in new techniques of painting in oil on canvas etc. Sobha Singh being the forerunner of this new artistic endeavour.<sup>33</sup>

Other important artists whose contribution is of considerable significance in the enrichment of the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* are G.S.Sohan Singh, S.G.Thakur Singh, Bodh Raj, Trilok Singh Chitrakar, Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh, Gurdit Singh, Amolak Singh, Devender Singh, Mehar Singh, Jarnail Singh and many others.

Analytical and critical observation reveals that the themes which are still popular and which have been painted again and again by a number of artists are the ones, which glorify spiritualism, divinity, sacrifice, martyrdom, valour, selfless service to mankind and oneness of humanity. These themes have been very powerfully and artistically narrated through eye-catching and fantastically impressive compositions, which have the capacity to mesmerise and anchor the attention of a viewer. Guru Nanak in many facets have been beautifully painted in new imagery and realism such as in a painting titled '*Eko Simro Nanaka*' by Sobha Singh as Guru Nanak has been shown rising from turquoise blue waves of a river, clad in pale robes raising one finger towards the heavens and there is a divine glow on his face with eyes half closed with spiritual intoxication and ecstasy. This is a large picture which is in permanent collection of Chandigarh Museum. Replicas of this masterpiece have been attempted by many painters and they are available in calendar form. Another remarkable calendar which is a bit surrealistic in approach and style has been done by artist Jaswant Singh<sup>34</sup> wherein the artist has painted one foot of Guru Nanak symbolically touching the earth and

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33 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.30

34 **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Portraits of Guru Nanak by contemporary artists, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.5

the other foot is receding in the distance. The rocks and canyon in the background have been skilfully painted with remarkable sense of perspective and realism. Though the artist has not depicted the full body or face of Baba Nanak but one can easily make out from his foot wearing wooden clogs, the appearance of a rosary and some part of his robes above the knees that this is a painting of Baba Nanak-the traveller. These paintings are a departure from the accepted iconography.<sup>35</sup>

**The legendary painter Sobha Singh who is widely acclaimed as ‘saint artist of the people’.**<sup>36</sup> After a long stint of working in Punjab and elsewhere he finally settled in the peaceful surroundings of Andretta in the Kangra valley, near Palampur, Himachal Pradesh and the house where he used to live and work has been converted into a small but significant museum by his family.<sup>37</sup>

He often remarked that ‘*Art was his religion and his aim is to give form to the formless*’.<sup>38</sup> He created a new intensity by delving deep into the spirit of the subject he chose to paint. He created a series of his portrait of Guru Nanak Dev titled ‘My meditations on Guru Nanak’ in which he represented his own vision of Guru Nanak Dev. His portraits of the Sikh Gurus, *avatars*, saints and immortal lovers- ‘*Sohni Mahiwal*’ shall endure the test of time.<sup>39</sup>

The most popular individual portrait of Baba Nanak painted by Sobha Singh which we find in every home is a fine example of a shift in traditional iconography. This artistic endeavour of the artist can be categorised under imaginative portraiture. Another remarkable work by Sobha Singh is a portrait of

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35 **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Portraits of Guru Nanak by contemporary artists, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.5

36 **Kapoor, Dr. B.L.;** 1987, *Grow More Good*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.55-56

37 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.3-4

38 **Singh, Dr. Kulwant;** 1987, *Sobha Singh’s philosophy of Art*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.79

39 **Vaidya, K.L.;** 1987, *Sardar Sobha Singh: An Artist in Kangra Valley*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.34

Guru Gobind Singh as a symbol of upright brave and valiant soldier oozing with synergy of courage and confidence- a true saint and a mystic scholar at that too. The calendar shows a solidification of Sikh patriotism and nationalism. These two most popular portraits of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh by Sobha Singh have set a benchmark in *Sikh Calendar art* and he had become a living legend.

**G.S.Sohan Singh**, one of the pioneers of *Sikh Calendar art* who had his own remarkably ornamental individualistic style where the richness of detail, elaborate composition and vibrant colour scheme are the hallmark of his masterpieces. He learnt painting from his father Gian Singh *Naqqash* who was an exponent of the art of *Naqqashi* (fresco painting). His father devoted his entire life decorating the walls of Sri Harmandir Sahib.<sup>40</sup> An enigmatic painting by G.S.Sohan Singh which was a great commercial success in *Sikh Calendar art* is titled '*Sarp Chhaya*' depicting an episode from the *Janam-Sakhi* of Guru Nanak Dev in which a cobra is shown shading Bal Nanak from the harsh sunlight and Rai Bular and other villagers watching amazingly at this unusual phenomena.

Though G.S Sohan Singh was a prolific painter and attempted variety of themes besides painting episodes from Sikh history, Sikh war scenes and many portraits of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and other Sikh warriors yet a pleasing picture which captured the imagination of masses is the painting of 'Bal Gobind' this is a rare picture which immediately strikes a cord between a mother and child and is an epitome of innocence and affection. One of the masterpieces of *Sikh Calendar art*, which has a rare aesthetic value, artistic excellence, and novelty of subject matter is an enchanting work by G.S.Sohan Singh in which the artist has displayed superb sense of diagonal composition, fluidity and a great sense of balance. The theme of this calendar is a scene from the tale that after the

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40 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.24

cremation of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded he saved two maratha chiefs Bala rao and Rustam rao from the fort of Sitara in Puna. In yet another specimen of masterly painting of *Sikh Calendar art* by this artist, which speaks volumes of his artistic calibre, is a painting of Guru Gobind Singh standing in the posture of a heroic leader urging and inspiring his Sikh warriors to fight for justice and live with dignity and freedom.

The artist whose contribution towards carrying forward the mantle of *Sikh Calendar art* or *Sikh Popular art* is of immense significance was S.G.Thakur Singh who was born in Amritsar and preferred art to engineering as his career. His talent was nurtured by a Muslim painter Mohammad Alam and Thakur Singh accompanied him to Bombay and Calcutta where his artistic genius matured and he produced remarkable body of *Sikh Calendar art*.<sup>41</sup>

Though he had a preference for painting historical sites, monuments, landscapes and portraits of common people in a rare realistic style and form in oil on canvas. He painted Sri Harmandir Sahib in myriad moods, seasons and hues capturing the eternal beauty, which exudes spiritual spell and ethereal solace. His skilful strokes and an eye for detail presents harmonious exuberance combined with external beauty and a rustic charm. The notable pictures which were popular and were converted into calendars are the scenes from the kullu valley, its people and the magnificent landscapes of ranges of mountains and shepherd boys with their lambs and goats. He had a fancy for painting ladies performing daily chores of life with soft and mellow contours and postures. The well-known paintings which are in permanent collection of Chandigarh Museum are titled 'The Morning Dip' and 'After the Bath'. His works have enduring qualities and establish immediate repo between the public which is the uniqueness of his artistic endeavour.

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41 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.30

The stalwart who made alive the Sikh history of Punjab and whose contribution deserves to be acknowledged and appreciated is artist Kirpal Singh who is perhaps the most exhibited artist in Punjab and the most popular and prolific painter. His powerful works depicting the scenes from Sikh history are displayed in museums, institutions, Gurdwaras and other public places in India and abroad wherever *Punjabis* have settled. His paintings of gutsy and robust ferocious looking Sikh warriors mounted on galloping horses flaunting spears and flashing swords attract and cast a spell on the onlooker. His celebrated works which have carved a niche in every Sikh's mind is the brutal killing of martyrs of Sikh faith- upright bold and brave people without a trace of fear on their faces have been shown being gruesomely slaughtered by the official Mughal slaughterers (*jallads*). He has successfully depicted scenes of cruelty which were unleashed on the Sikhs but the result evokes sentiment of heroism (*Veer Rasa*) in the beholder.

In one of his heart-rending important paintings, he painted Sikh mothers forced by the Mughal oppressors to wreath themselves with the mangled limbs of their minced children but never let their faith be shaken up. In another moving painting the Sikhs are shown being hounded and killed in pursuance of sadistic glee. The most poignant painting describes the brutal swearing of the limbs of Bhai Mati Dass and culminating into sawing his body into pieces in front of the very eyes of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Bhai Mati Dass was a man of strong faith and determination. Humane ideals of Sikhism are depicted in the painting titled 'Bhai Kanhaiya: forerunner of Red Cross' serving drinking water to the wounded Turks soldiers along with the Sikh soldiers irrespective of the fact of caste, creed and religion.

**Amolak Singh** renowned artist who was born in Amritsar had the rare honour of working under the guidance of great artist Sardar Sobha Singh at Andretta (Himachal Pradesh). He had created more than four hundred paintings

on Sikh themes. He worked as an artist from 1970 to 1974 in Bollywood and was appointed curator of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), Central Sikh Museum in the Harmandir Sahib complex, Amritsar. After the Operation Blue Star he was assigned the duty of renovating the Sikh Central Museum. His paintings are in permanent collection of Punjab and Sind bank, PNB finance, Bank of Punjab, Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar, Baba Baghel Singh Museum, Delhi, Bhai Mati Dass Museum, Chandni Chowk, Delhi and other Sikh institutions and private collections.<sup>42</sup>

The valuable contribution of Amolak Singh in portraying Sikh history with his brush is of utmost significance. Most of his paintings have been converted into calendars by the above mentioned patrons of *Sikh art* and a large audience appreciates and admires his artistic genius due to the fact the paintings are very appealing and bring alive the ethos of Sikhism through rich and versatile narration as he had a keen sense of composition and was master of using harmonious colours with an eye for detail.

In a painting by Amolak Singh titled ‘Curing a leper’ Guru Nanak Dev is shown visiting a suffering leper during his first *udasi* and asking him to permit to spend a night in his cottage. The leper was amazed and filled with joy. He said “*even an animal would not think to come near him due to his leprosy*”. A mere glimpse of Guru Nanak dev cured him of the dreaded disease. The leper profusely thanked him and bowed before Guru Nanak remarking that this is an act of a man of god who with his compassion and love for the mankind had cured him.<sup>43</sup> Amolak Singh being a true disciple of Sobha Singh had mastered the art of realism and had a profound understanding of composition.

In another masterly work which is a rarely attempted theme Amolak Singh has painted the scene from ‘The compilation of Guru Granth Sahib’. In

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42 **Walia, Varinder**; October 16, 2006, *Artist Amolak Singh dies in sleep*, The Tribune

43 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.16

this painting Guru Arjan Dev and Bhai Gurdas are shown engaged in the compilation of Guru Granth Sahib. In yet one of the rare Sikh themes from the Sikh history the artist has narrated the episode of ‘The invincible Guru’- Guru Hargobind Singh wherein foes of the Guru hatched a conspiracy to hire a snake charmer to kill the young Guru Hargobind. The snake charmer was bribed by the conspirators to let loose a poisonous snake. But the great guru overpowered the snake. Amolak Singh deserves all the praise for attempting rare themes from Sikh history in a realistic and expressive manner.

**Trilok Singh Chitrakar**’s rich contribution towards painting of *Sikh art* is no less valuable. He was fondly called ‘*Chitrakar*’ means an artist and he attached this word with his name. Trilok Singh was born at Sardar Gurdit Singh’s home in Jartuli district, Ludhiana. He took keen interest in painting from his very early childhood as his father migrated to Assam where Trilok Singh accompanied him and while living there he studied *Assamese, Bangla, Hindi* and *English* languages. He invested his time in painting and studying and interacting with local artists, which widened his vision as an artist.<sup>44</sup>

Trilok Singh chitrakar added a new chapter to Sikh painting with his dramatic stance, mysticism and a fair amount of surrealism while narrating accounts from the Sikh history based on the couplet- ‘*dharm chalawan sant ubaran dusht saban ke mool uparan*’. This dream-like work shows Guru Gobind Singh with sword in hand descending from the skies and the divine light from the darkness guides his way. From amongst many other masterpieces done by this artist the painting which captures the soul of the theme powerfully and vividly depicts the ‘brave and sacred duty performed by Bhai Jaita’ who after the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur respectfully carried the holy head of Guru Tegh Bahadur to Punjab.

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44 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.65



**Artist Gurdit Singh** had the honour to be appointed as the Curator of the Central Sikh Museum, Sri Harmandir Sahib complex, Amritsar. His organising abilities and keen interest in Sikh history and culture were evident in the pioneering work he has done in selection and display of remarkable masterpieces of Sikh history in this museum. He was a simple and saintly man but was bestowed with unfathomed talent and a very keen sense of visualising paintings from the Sikh history, which deserve appreciation and acclaim from the connoisseurs of art and the masses. Realism and classical handling of the subject is evident from each of his works, which have been done painstakingly and skilfully. Each painting appeals to the eye because of the harmonious and rich colour scheme, superb handling of posture and division of space in a given frame.

Basic ethos of Sikhism that is love for all mankind and universal brotherhood are the favourite themes of Gurdit Singh's works and in this context the 'Portrait of Sain Mian Mir' (1550-1635A.D.) holds great significance as this saint who was born at *Sistan* and who belong to lineage of Caliph *Umar* was requested by Guru Arjan Dev to lay the foundation of holiest of the Sikh shrine. Mian Mir was also a great devotee of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Hargobind Singh.<sup>45</sup> This master painter has paid tribute to the first preacher of Sikh tradition 'Bhai Gurdas' (1543-1637A.D.) who assisted Guru Arjan Dev in the compilation of Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>46</sup>

The versatile and prolific talented artist of *Sikh Calendar art* who devoted his entire life to the cause of painting Sikh history is **Bodhraj**. He was engaged in production of countless paintings and colourful illustrations for the publications, calendars and magazines, which are brought out by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee publication bureau. He has done a large body

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45 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.118

46 *Ibid*, p.119

of work but has never compromised on quality of work and attempted variety of themes from Sikh history. His compositions are par excellence and life-like inhabited by characters right from the time period of a particular theme. Flora and Fauna and sense of perspective in landscapes and buildings are very meticulously attempted in his flawless paintings. His dextrous control over the brush can easily be witnessed and his intense mastery in choosing the colour palette is profound. The novelty of his work lies besides painting countless pictures of the Sikh Gurus he painted the *Bhagats* and Saints like ‘Sant Kabir’, ‘Swami Ramanand’, ‘Bhagat Namdev’, ‘Bhagat Ravidas’, ‘Baba Sheikh Farid’, ‘Baba Buddha’ to name a few whose literary contributions are enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib. The other remotely attempted themes such as ‘Bibi Rajni- a devoted wife of a leper’, ‘Healing touch of Guru Harkishan Sahib’, ‘The Guru’s word is the panacea of All Ills’, ‘Guru Hargobind blessing Mata Sulakhani’, ‘Installation ceremony of Guru Granth Sahib’ at Sri Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar are some of the popular paintings which have been converted into calendars and are admired and preserved by people.

In the lineage of Sikh painters who have painted portraits of Guru Nanak Dev in their own individualistic styles, one such painter who have painted Guru Nanak’s portrait keeping in mind the essence of his preachings and the ethos of Sikhism is famous artist Jaswant Singh who migrated from western Punjab, now in Pakistan and established himself in Delhi after the partition. He excels in surrealistic and lyrical depiction of the essence of ‘*Ragamala*’ and other religious subjects. His works are in permanent collection of Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh. Keeping in mind his talent for painting large panels eminent patron and connoisseur of art in Punjab-Dr. M.S.Randhawa assigned him to paint large murals for Museum of Natural History, Chandigarh. A quiet and simple man, Jaswant Singh has created very appealing and moving paintings of Guru Nanak Dev’s philosophy that is simplicity, oneness of humanity and

tolerance of all religions. In one of his paintings titled 'Mystic ecstasy of Guru Nanak' Nanak has been shown as a sage wearing a cap which was commonly worn by *fakirs* and *yogis* who travelled far and wide in search of truth. This portrait of Nanak is a unique departure from the traditional iconography depicted in calendars of *Sikh art*. 'Guru Nanak-the Pilgrim' remains his most popular painting which has been converted into calendars.

**Artist Mehar Singh** carried forward the tradition of Sikh painting to new realms and was instrumental in producing fine works of Sikh history which speak volumes of his creative acumen and dexterity. The characteristics of his work are classical realism, clarity of thought and profoundness of composition. Being a true disciple of artist Sobha Singh he imbibed in him some of the precious elements of his master's works. Portraits attempted by him are full of precision and life-like. In some of his paintings richness of colours reigns supreme while painting group figures of Sikh royalties. An eye for detail for the costumes and the jewellery is magnificent and mesmerising. His great love for drawing shows in his masterpieces and present close glimpses of rich works by European painters in Sikh courts. He is also a great commercial success and his paintings are in collection of universities, museums, academies and art galleries. He is an established Portrait painter of great repute. The impressive paintings which come to mind include 'Robe of Honour', 'Jahangir visiting Golden Temple', 'Mai Bhago going to battle field', 'The birth of Gobind Rai', 'Gobind Rai in the lap of Rani Maini', 'Portraits of Maharaja Ranjit Singh- Lion of Punjab', his generals and courtiers.

**Devender Singh** has his own individualistic style which is reflected in his paintings of Sikh history and religion. He was initiated into painting by his accomplished father who was a commercial artist late S.Sewak Singh. Devender Singh was born in Amritsar and received his formal education at Bombay, Amritsar, Ludhiana and Chandigarh. He was propelled into fame by his first

collection of paintings on Sikh women which was bought by Punjab and Sind Bank for their calendars in 1972. His canvases are not in the nature of a 'satsang in colour' but carry meaningful delineation through the countenances of Gurus, silhouetted women and the elements in sober pastels and oils. The walls of the Sikh museums in Paonta sahib, Anandpur Sahib and Golden Temple are adorned with his paintings. With the sound patronage of financial establishments such as Punjab and Sind Bank, Bank of Punjab and Markfed his paintings have been commissioned by these institutions and converted into calendars for mass circulation. He has also experimented the Sikh themes in contemporary and so called semi abstract style with pleasing colours and bold and engrossing compositions. A series of paintings titled 'Barah Maha' based on compositions on seasons by Guru Nanak Dev in *Raag Tukhari* and Guru Arjan Dev in *Raag Majh* establishes him as an artist who is creative and in step with times. Apart from Sikh history he has done innumerable paintings on Punjabi culture, traditions, ceremonies and folklores. His paintings are appreciated by the Punjabis living in far-flung continents. In a prominent painting titled 'Bandi Chhor Guru' which is a popular Sikh theme from Sikh history, artist Devender Singh has elegantly and expressively depicted Guru Hargobind Singh emerging from the fort of Gwalior along with fifty-two innocent rajas clutching the strings of his robe.

The illustrious son of a very talented artist **Kirpal Singh** well known for his exceptional paintings of Sikh warriors and battles is artist Jarnail Singh who was born at Zira, district Ferozepur, Punjab. He inherited art from his father and chose to be different in approach and style. He painted folklores, ballads of love and war, fairs and festivals, dances, music and Punjabi literature and above all the women of Punjab engaged in various household chores were the favourite subjects of his paintings which found instant admirers in Punjab and amongst Punjabi speaking people all over the world. His paintings of Sikh wars and

royalty are also worth a mention which were under the influence of his father being a prominent painter of Sikh history.<sup>47</sup> But the stylisation and the colour palette chosen by him celebrate the colours of Punjab that is bright, vibrant and luminous. Notable paintings which are popular calendars today are Punjabi bride, Punjabi woman at the spinning wheel, a Punjabi girl embroidering a *Phulkari*, a group of women at *trinjan* and woman churning milk to form butter in the morning against the backdrop of Punjabi rustic life and surroundings.

**Though many critics may opine and predict that *Sikh Calendar art* will be on the decline in popularity and in churning out fresh talent in this field. But it gives us a sense of great satisfaction and hope that this wave of *Calendar art* which was started at the emergence of *Sikh art* in *Janam-Sakhis* is alive and kicking today.** The ideals of Sikhism are universal and instrumental in inspiring fresh talent which is found in abundance in small cities and towns and the pivotal contribution of the stalwarts mentioned above is a fountainhead of *Sikh Calendar art* which is flowing vigorously. Patronage of Sikh religious bodies, academies, institutions and non-resident Indians who are keenly interested in the preservation of Sikh heritage, culture, religion, art and language deserve praise. Streams of new painters of *Sikh Calendar art* are emerging and silently yet steadily working towards carrying forward this genre of art which brings financial support and artistic satisfaction to the new painters who are establishing small studios in their homes and markets. The role of bodies like Punjab and Sind Bank, Bank of Punjab, Markfed, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), Art Academies, Museums, Art Galleries, Printing presses, Publishing houses, Advertising agencies and Animation and Graphic design houses is of immense significance and in fact the introduction of new printing techniques like Digital and Offset printing have made it easier to

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47 **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune

spread the popularity and scope of *Sikh Calendar art* and today *Sikh Calendar art* is not only found in calendars, diaries, book covers, stickers, necklaces, lockets, office decorative items. The specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* are also found on the plastic, PVC, metallic keychains, wall clocks, pen stands, mouse pads and other items of daily use such as T-shirts, stoles, textiles and fabrics. The popularity of *Sikh Calendar art* can easily be gauged from its presence in all spheres of life.

The study of the emergence and development of *Sikh Calendar art* will not be complete without understanding the development of *Sikh art*. While defining the term *Sikh art* the basic ingredients and elements, which have contributed towards its emergence, may primarily be the works of art specifically done by Sikh artists, on Sikh themes patronised by Sikhs or produced within the territory governed or otherwise dominated by Sikhs.<sup>1</sup> The credit for valuable artistic contribution towards its blossoming also goes to those prominent painters who were not essentially Sikh by religion but were equally efficient and appreciative of the basic spirit of Sikhism. **The pinnacle of Sikh art was achieved during the Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh** whose powerful persistent patronage and support encouraged many admirers and connoisseurs of *Sikh art*, who were at the helm of affairs in the Lahore court further facilitating development of *Sikh art* to attain its new glorious heights and expanded boundaries. The literal definition of *Sikh art* thus remains Art by, for and or about Sikhs.<sup>2</sup>

To explain the explicit version of *Sikh art*- **the early Sikh art was a myriad combination of the Sikh religious themes**, the life events of Guru Nanak as illustrated in *Janam Sakhis*,<sup>(Plate-1)</sup> portraits of Sikh Gurus, ideals of Sikh life and canons of Sikh faith. At this stage, the Sikh themes were the essence of *Sikh art* rather than style. While *Sikh art* was essentially thematic in content and spirituality was its all-adoring flavour during this period. The ‘song’ and hymns were the reigning elements in the spread of Sikhism and its values yet the gradual emergence of visuals in the *Janam Sakhis* aptly and emphatically started establishing the new genre of *Sikh art* catering to the devotional needs of

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1 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.3

2 **Brown, Kerry;** 1999, *Sikh Art and Literature*, Routledge, London, p.17

the faithful.<sup>3</sup> The appearance of these religiously and spiritually charged visuals in *Janam Sakhis* impacted the psyche of the people in direct yet all encompassing compassionate manner due to its content, stylisation and a visual feast.

*Sikh art* was born in the *Janam Sakhis* and apart from an isolated series of portraits, it was evidently confined to this context for well over a century. *Janam Sakhis* are hagiographic accounts of the life of Guru Nanak, popular narratives that have enjoyed a considerable popularity throughout the history of the Sikh panth. The *Janam Sakhis* are characterised into two basic traditions as Puratan *Janam Sakhi* and Bhai Bala *Janam Sakhi*.<sup>4</sup>

**The first attempt to illustrate *Janam Sakhis* was made as early as 1658 during the pontificate of the seventh Guru Har Rai.** With the passage of time, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the number of such attempts multiplied. The pioneers who endeavoured in this direction were chiefly *Udasi*, *Ramraiya* and *Sodhi Deras* all offshoots of the mainstream of Sikhism.<sup>5</sup>

*Janam Sakhis* helped the hagiographic growth process of Sikhism, preserved and propagated historical facts from Sikh point of view and advanced a new art style characteristically Sikh.

With the development of illustrated *Janam Sakhis*, *Sikh art* saw the emergence of thematic extension, imaginative expansion, fictional dimension, spiritual concern, devotional aura and artistic manifestation. It also presented a new realm of creative satisfaction and a stretch of artistic evolvement. The structural strength of the magnificent *Sikh art*, which developed later on, had the strength of illustrative *Janam Sakhis* in the nucleus.

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3 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.127

4 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.4

5 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.131



Thus the newly emerging prominent features such as style-portraiture, crystallisation and continuation of events, expressive narration and systematic serialisation, appearance of landscape, motifs, symbols and other elements of aesthetics such as colour balance, minuteness, detailed depiction, refinement in suitable borders and margins with floral designs added a new vibrancy to the illustrative art of *Janam Sakhis* where the seeds of *Sikh art* were sown and later on blossomed into flowering trees.<sup>6</sup>

The role of the *Deras* of the *Udasis*, the self appointed preachers of Sikhism acted as an active catalyst who took upon themselves the pious task of nurturing, promoting and propagation of the art of illustrating and illuminating *Janam Sakhis* due to their ample leisure as well as keen interest.<sup>7</sup>

Simultaneously the appearance of frescos and murals on the walls of *deras*, *dharamshalas*, temples, *akharas*, shrines, *havelis* and palaces depicting the life events of Sikh Gurus, their portraits and those of *Mahants* and priests established and further channelised the propagation of the emerging genre of *Sikh art*. In fact it was an arduous task to continue with this tradition, as the Mughal era is known for demolition and destruction of non-Islamic religious structures. During the Sikh Gurus lifetime the indigenous mural art tradition of Punjab had little scope for growth under the despiseful eyes of Mughals. Yet it slowly crawled to the far-off sectarian buildings mostly the *Thakurdwaras* of *Bairagis* (Plate-2) such as the one built by Sant Jagveen Das Bairagi near the Wagah border at Attari sometime in the mid seventeenth century. These *Thakurdwaras* frescos(Plate-3) strengthen the Sikh painting in many ways for the Hindu motifs and themes that dominated them were as much an integral part of the *Sikh art* tradition.<sup>8</sup>

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6 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.130

7 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.131

8 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.131

Various eighteenth century murals reported from other parts of Punjab depict significant stages of the growth of *Sikh art*. They include the partially washed paintings on the outside walls of the main shrine of Shri Namdev Temple at village Ghoman. The practice of embellishing walls with paintings continued well up to later half of the eighteenth century.

Another vital dimension which was responsible for the extension of Pahari art was the Sikh patronage at the very end of the eighteenth century, when Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra, the chief patron of painting in the Kangra valley was forced to seek the aid of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of the Punjab plains, to put an end to the perennial attacks and disturbances by Gurkhas in 1809. With the result, peace and tranquillity was established after the annexation of Guler in 1813 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and dominance of Sikh rulers was achieved over the hill states.

During the years 1810 to 1830, the Pahari artists themselves came forward and approached the Sikh patrons, which envisaged a keen interest in the minds of patrons at Lahore court.<sup>9</sup> The result being cementing of the bond of Pahari painting with *Sikh art* and enriching it with novel, instinctive, artistic and aesthetical enhancements. Thus *Sikh art* became the direct successor of the Kangra School of painting.<sup>10</sup>

During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Kotla, Guler, Kangra, Basohli, Nurpur, Chamba and other hill states of the region one after the other passed under the Sikh sway. This led to close contacts between the plains and the hills and in consequence the artists of the Kangra valley turned to Sikh themes.<sup>11</sup> A large number of them even left the hills and settled in Amritsar and Lahore and they enjoyed rich patronage of the Sikh rulers.<sup>12</sup>

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9 **Archer, W.G;** 1966, *Paintings of the Sikhs*, Her Majesty's stationary office, London, p.31

10 **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Sikh Painting, Roopalekha*, Vol. 39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi p.21

11 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.134

12 **Archer, W.G;** 1966, *Paintings of the Sikhs*, Her Majesty's stationary office, London, p.31

The prominent artists like Nikka, Gokal, Harkhu, Chhajju and Damodar, all of the Rajol family of artists have established connections with the Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Sher Singh and the family of the powerful Sandhanwalia Sardars.<sup>13</sup>

**The Sikh School of painting is the adaptation of the Kangra style of painting to Sikh needs and ideals.**<sup>14</sup> The first among the various subjects that attracted their attention was the portrayal of the Sikh Gurus. Both the Guler and Kangra artists tried their hands at this subject to the great satisfaction of their new political masters. Their art was still essentially rooted in the Pahari artistic tradition, but the changed conditions under which it now functioned, introduced certain important innovations in its complexion, for which reason it would be best described as the Pahari-Sikh art.<sup>15</sup> (Plate-4)

**The earliest paintings for the Sikhs were painted by the Guler artists in the period 1815-1820 and portray the ten Sikh Gurus which are in the permanent collection of Chandigarh museum.**<sup>16</sup> This testifies the fact that these hill artists had whole-heartedly started adopting Sikh themes in their works.

During the early years of Sikh rule, which was established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh after turmoil and turbulence, received a limited range of interest from the Sikh patrons due to the circumstances in which the Sikh dynasty had risen to power. Though art was not entirely ignored by the Lahore court but portraiture emerged as the preferred form of painting and this demand clearly affected the direction followed by the Pahari artists who migrated to the plains. Portraiture remains the most poignant feature in *Sikh art* for its pageantry vibrance, typical expression, unparalleled panache, true interpretation and

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13 **Goswamy, B.N;** 1981, *A matter of taste: Some Notes on the context of Painting in Sikh Punjab*, Marg Publications, Bombay, p.67

14 **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Sikh Painting, Roopalekha*, Vol. 39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.21

15 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.134

16 **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Sikh Painting, Roopalekha*, Vol. 39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.23

boldness which is otherwise not found in most Indian portraits. This provided a distinct identity to *Sikh art*.<sup>17</sup>

During this period, the traditions of Pahari art continued uninterrupted with new themes under the auspices of Sikh governors. The governors such as Desa Singh Majithia and Sher Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were open enough to come close to the populace of the place they were ruling and always tried to understand the cultural ethos and traditions of their places. There was no hindrance in letting the artists of those Sikh governed areas to divert their creative energies and attentions from the creative work they were pursuing. There were new additions in the themes and artists gladly adopted the subject matter which was the preference of the Sikh patrons.<sup>18</sup>

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's patronage was not only extended to painting but carving, armour design, brassware, jewellery, textiles and architecture were also given much needed impetus for their development. With an open heart for new ideas and thoughts Maharaja welcomed the western philosophy, culture and military discipline. He was generous in employing European generals in his powerful and well-trained army.<sup>19</sup> Presence of numerous western visitors was the result of his warmth and keen interest in recognising and appreciating fresh talents.

The art of portraiture flourished during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in spite of his aversion for getting himself painted. A large number of remarkable portraits of Maharaja, his family, soldiers and the sketches of people were painted by many amateur and professional artists.<sup>20</sup>

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17 **Goswamy, B.N;** 1981, *A matter of taste: Some Notes on the context of Painting in Sikh Punjab*, Marg Publications, Bombay, p.77

18 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.11

19 **Brown, Kerry;** 1999, *Sikh Art and Literature*, Routledge, London, p.11

20 **Singh, Manmohan;** 1977, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court: Painters and the Painted*, Marg Publications, Bombay, P.109 **Singh, Manmohan;** 1977, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court: Painters and the Painted*, Marg Publications, Bombay, p.109

Besides the painters already in attendance in the Lahore court, the two painters from Delhi namely Jivan Ram and Hasan-al-din also contributed enormously to the *Sikh art* of portraiture and an important painting depicting the visit of the Governor General William Bentinck to Ranjit Singh at the Sikh court in 1832 is a fine specimen relating to this period which was painted after considerable efforts on the part of William Bentinck's request to Maharaja to sit for his portrait and Jivan Ram was assigned the task of painting this occasion. Maharaja was fascinated by the way European painters drew the pictures and secretly admired their art.<sup>21</sup>

The dazzle and splendour of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court was a great attraction for European artists. Some had fascination for seeking their fortunes, others landed in Lahore Durbar to satisfy their curious urges and to have a look at the Maharaja of this empire who impressed one and all with his wisdom, nobility and mannerism.<sup>22</sup>

**The European influence which made its first appearance in the Punjab in context of *Sikh art* was through the sketches of Osborne, a member of the Macnaughten Mission to Ranjit Singh in 1838 and Emily Eden who accompanied her brother Lord Auckland during his visit to the Punjab in 1839.**<sup>23</sup> The others who followed the trail were August Schoefft, Baron Hugel, Captain Goldingham, William Carpenter, C.S.Hardingne, the German painter Van Orlich, G.T.Vigne, Russian prince Alexis Soltykoff to name a few.

Among the pioneer European painters, a Hungarian painter named August Theodore Schoefft who visited India in 1838 laid the foundations of western style of painting in *Sikh art*. He was renowned for his competence in oil paintings and painted vast canvasses depicting the scenes of Ranjit Singh's court.

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21 **Archer, W.G;** 1966, *Paintings of the Sikhs*, Her Majesty's stationary office, London, p.31

22 **Aijazuddin, F.S;** 1979, *Sikh Portraits by European Artists*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p.13

23 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.134

Sher Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a great admirer of western art and was immensely impressed by Schoefft's style of illustrative work. The Sikh rulers as well as the painters of the Punjab were for the first time introduced to western style of painting through Schoefft's works. His huge canvases painted in oils were the first step towards the journey of development of *Sikh art*, which imbibed western styles, techniques, mannerisms and composition.<sup>24</sup>

While talking about portraits of Maharaja Ranjit Singh by European painters, the most poignant and authentic portrait that comes to mind is the portrait by Lord Auckland's sister Emily Eden. Her well-known portrait of the Maharaja shows him sitting on a chair with one leg pulled up and the other resting on a foot-rest and his left hand finger is shown pointing in a characteristic posture of earnest gesture.<sup>25</sup> Hardly any other portrait of Maharaja can surpass the superb handling and delicate artistry of this portrait.

This truly was an era of transformation of *Sikh art* from *Janam Sakhis* to canvasses in oils, sketches, engravings, lithographs, etchings, woodcuts, pen-portraits, water-colours, line drawings and miniatures on porcelain. The Europeans found the settings very exotic and the subjects saw a sea change in *Sikh painting* now the portraits had backgrounds with landscapes, buildings, royal group portraits in royal settings, drapery, ornamental furniture, weaponry and tamed animals etc appearing in most of the works. The popularity of these works of art was the depiction of realism, border perspective, foreshortening, unconventional approach, elaborate backgrounds, highlighting, intricate representation of jewellery, embroidered costumes which amazed Indian artists to a great extent. The beauty of the landscape, handsomeness of Sikh faces, the prosperity that came under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign provided an idyllic and mesmerising setting to painting.

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24 **Aryan, K.C;** 1975, *Punjab Painting*, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.17

25 **Singh, Manmohan;** 1977, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court: Painters and the Painted*, Marg Publications, Bombay, p.110

The popular paintings of this period depict the splendour of the Sikh court of Ranjit Singh, its treasures and its robust and handsome Sikh warriors, architectural magnificence of Lahore Durbar, portraits of famous personalities of Ranjit Singh's court- Maharaja's sons Sher Singh, Kharak Singh, Naunihal Singh, infant Daleep Singh, his favourite boy Hira Singh is shown; Dhian Singh is respectfully standing at the back and occasionally shown with his brother, Suchet Singh and Gulab Singh of Jammu. In some works, Maharaja Ranjit Singh is shown sitting with his non-Sikh courtiers such as Finance minister Dina Nath the Brahmin, Foreign minister Aziz-ud-din and Jamadar Khushal Singh who was actually a Brahmin. There are also portraits of his generals like Sham Singh Attariwala, foreigner army trainers like Allard Ventura, Vo'n Cortland and Honibeger.<sup>26</sup> The most lyrical depiction of Shalimar Garden and Maharaja Ranjit Singh's palace have been done in lithographs including a most exquisite one which featured in '*The court and camp of Ranjit Singh*' by famous European artist W.G.Osborne.

**With the British annexation of Punjab in 1849, subjects of the painting which were earlier confined to the elite classes and royalties now shifted their attention towards the quaint and the exotic- occupations and trades of the bazaar such as carpenters, blacksmiths, comb makers, weavers, potters, masons, water-carriers, dyers, beggars, snake charmers, armoured *nihangs*, *sadhus*, *banjaras* and vagabonds etc.** The Punjabi artists for the first time attained orientation in understanding and capturing visual experiences rather than the prescribed and stylised versions.<sup>27</sup> The depiction of the common man engrossed in his daily chores initiated a stupendous bulk of art activity in the last two decades of nineteenth century and the first few of the twentieth century.

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26 **Randhawa, T.S;** 2000, *The Sikhs- Images of a Heritage*, Prakash Books, p.4

27 **Kessar, Urmi;** June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.119

Punjabi painters took to painting portraits in oils with increased interest and zest, which resulted in greater experimentation and achievement of excellence in painting techniques. Some of the Punjabi artists were spellbound with the superb technique of water-colour painting and ventured to paint in newly acquired skills and techniques learnt from the European artists. The foremost among the Punjabi artists was Kehar Singh who flourished at Lahore and Kapurthala in the second half of the nineteenth century was the first to adopt western style of painting especially oil painting. He painted contemporary life in a vivid manner. He was the first painter who abandoned the flat colour treatment typical of indigenous painting in favour of light and shade. A portrait of Ranjit Singh in which he is shown seated on a chair is an excellent specimen of the art of Kehar Singh.<sup>28</sup> He also painted people from all walks of life especially people engaged in various trades and occupations which gives us a glimpse of life in the Punjab. Under the British rule in 1864 a first ever exhibition of art was held in Lahore in which Kehar Singh and other prominent Punjabi painters of this period participated.

Close on heels was yet another remarkable painter known for his magnificent paintings in oils and water-colours and who was a court painter of Kapurthala was Kapur Singh whose contribution to *Sikh art* is of immense value. He excelled in Indo-European style of painting which he learnt through observation while he used to be assigned the job of fanning the European painters who were then working in the court of Kapurthala.<sup>29</sup> His artistic forte was portraiture and his sketches are in Central museum, Lahore and Chandigarh museum. His paintings are comprised of figures which he composed with deep understanding of composition and considerable proficiency in action. There is a spark of fair knowledge of drawing in his works.

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28     **Aryan, K.C**; 1971, *Some Punjabi Artists, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.36

29     Ibid, p.36



His two nephews who were equally talented and carried on the tradition of painting in the family were Kishan Singh and Bishan Singh though their preference was more for Kangra-Sikh style of painting as they were more close to master painters of the Kangra school then residing in Lahore. Amongst them Bishan Singh's work was highly decorative with elaborate floral designs as he excelled in the art of floral decoration and was called a *Naqqash* whereas his brother Kishan Singh was a *Chitera* meaning who excelled in drawing and painting. Credit for painting frescos of this period goes to these painters. Bishan Singh's two sons Jawahar Singh and Nihal Singh followed in the footsteps of his father but there is no indication to suggest that they also worked in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.<sup>30</sup>

Lahore was the chief centre of painting in Punjab and Amritsar was the second well-known centre of *Sikh art*, this city had a complete alley (*Gali*) of painters and was famous as *Gali Naqqashan*. Today this *Gali* is known as *Pratap Gali*.<sup>31</sup>

Yet some painters continued the tradition of painting in Kangra style in spite of the new exposures and improvisations till the early years of twentieth century. The works of painters such as Sardul Singh and Bawa are noticeable and worthy of mention. They were amongst the last few painters of *Sikh art* who continued to work in traditional style of painting in spite of the new winds of change which came with the western style of painting there by starting a whole new style of *Sikh art*. Much of Sardul Singh's work can be seen on the walls of temple 'Daryanamull ka Thakurdwara' in Katra Mohar Singh.<sup>32</sup>

**The artistic contribution of Puran Singh who continued to paint portraits of Sikh Gurus till the end of nineteenth century in Amritsar is of great significance in continuing and enhancing the traditional *Sikh art*.**

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30     **Aryan, K.C;** 1975, *Punjab Painting*, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.20

31     Ibid, p.21

32     **Aryan, K.C;** 1971, *Some Punjabi Artists, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.35

Alongside Puran Singh *Musavvar*, other artists who worked here were Amir Singh, Aroor Singh, Ganesha Singh all of them were *Naqqashas* of considerable standing. Their point of excellence basically was floral decorations that had no dearth of clientele. Yet some artists whose names deserve mention and who were close to famous architect Mian Karam Buxe were Ishar Singh, son of well-known painter Bhai Ram Singh and Mehtab Singh was important amongst traditional *Naqqashas*. They were hired by Mian Buxe architect to decorate the murals of Hindu temples in Amritsar.<sup>33</sup>

With the change of the rulers of Punjab, the artists had to cater to the new patrons of art keeping in mind their different tastes and preferences. This way Punjabi artists started getting commissioned work from the Britishers which gave impetus to their financial prepositions slowly yet steadily establishing the 'Bazaar school of painting' which was a combination of Indian and western styles of painting as well as folk art forms and paintings of native subjects. Many small art studios saw the light of the day where artists and their pupils were engaged in doing commercial painting for their clientele both European, rich and the elite.<sup>34</sup>

**The introduction of Printing presses especially Lithographic printing processes in the 1850s wholly revolutionised the propagation of Sikh Bazaar art.**<sup>35</sup> This was the turning point and works which were only available to the elite now were being mass-produced and sold in the market at nominal rates thus awakening the whole new resurgence of Sikh consciousness and developed into a new stream of publishers, printers, journalists, authors and painters/illustrators.<sup>36</sup>

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33 **Aryan, K.C;** 1975, *Punjab Painting*, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.21

34 **Ibid,** p.23

35 **Kessar, Urmi;** June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.121

36 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.17

The technique of Lithographic printing was used extensively for printing books some with occasional illustrations and elaborate title covers of the publications. For example the ‘*Tulsi Ramayan*’ in *Gurmukhi* was published in 1871 at Lahore and ‘*Qissa Puran Bhagat Jati da*’ in 1872 with a number of impressive Lithographic images of *Puran Bhagat. Janam Sakhis* and important Punjabi love-legends like *Heer Ranjha* were also published by Lithography technique spreading their wider circulation, which became an element of *Popular Sikh art/ Sikh Calendar art*. Also available were the much appreciated *dasti*, hand held or portable prints some of which satirize the rapid shifts in Punjab society.<sup>37</sup>

**The publication of *Janam Sakhis* with appropriate and individual illustrations and texts became the hallmark of this new found *Popular art* using the techniques of Woodcut, Lithography and Letter-Press printing for wider distribution.** Though many may believe that the illustrations of mass-produced *Janam Sakhis* did not compare well with the quality of illustrations which were hand-painted earlier. In the beginning as only the elite and aristocrats of the Punjab were the chief patrons who hired the artists engaged in illustrating *Janam Sakhis*. But *Janam Sakhis* of the nineteenth century received constant and tremendous popularity amongst the masses.<sup>38</sup> The printed versions of *Janam Sakhis* were not very astride and aesthetically rich but the content and the message they carried though crudely was very well received by a large number of Sikh community and the process of popularity of *Sikh art* leapt by leaps and bounds. As the visual narration of Sikh religious messages and history became a roaring success, *Bazaar prints* or *Popular Sikh art prints* are the successful implementation of the new acquired technical skills and advancements.

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37 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.121

38 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.18

A large number of woodcuts are also available from this period dealing with various themes including the portraits of Sikh Gurus and other Sikh heroes and warriors. These woodcuts in their style and content are the direct antecedents of the highly-coloured *calendar prints* of today. In terms of format these woodcuts closely resembled the Anglo-Mughal style of format as here the twelve heroes of Sikhs were presented in a head and shoulders portrait surrounded by an oval frame or as figures on oval rings in woodcut. This type of stylisation exists till today in popular *Sikh calendars* in which the ten Sikh Gurus are presented in chronicle order using bright colours and intricate margins. One such woodcut in the similar fashion and stylisation mentioned above shows Guru Nanak surrounded by his nine successors, his two attendants Bala and Mardana and an unidentified figure beside a horse. Here Guru Nanak is supported by the traditional cushion (*Takia*) on an elevated platform (*Chauki*). These two are the symbols of both royal and spiritual authority and an overspreading tree behind Guru Nanak defines a version of royal umbrella (*Chhatri*). The nine Sikh Gurus are seated on a carpet and in the centre a utensil covered with cloth is supposed to contain *Karah Prasad* (Sacred food) and an open copy of Sri Guru Granth Sahib has been placed on a portable lectern behind Guru Nanak Dev. A parrot in the cage hanging by the branch of the tree a feature associated with the yogis of the *Nath* tradition.<sup>39</sup> (Plate-5)

Some of the other themes in the woodcuts were '*Babe Nanak Mecca Phereya Apni Kala Dikhai*' as Guru Nanak is shown revolving the Mecca. This print was commissioned by Bhai Vasava Singh, as inscription of this detail is clearly visible on the print at the centre in *Gurmukhi*. Another woodcut with the theme 'The Ten Sikh Gurus' bears the name of the artist as Naqqash Sobha Singh in *Gurmukhi*. Yet another print carries the theme Guru Gobind Singh hunting wherein the inscription which is visible at the right end bottom of the

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39 McLeod, W.H; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.19

print shows the name of the printer as Bhai Gujjar Singh and the number of editions as two thousand. Other print in the series depicts the isometric sketch of the Golden Temple titled as '*Naqsha Darbar Sahib Shri Amritsar ji ka*' has beautifully depicted the atmosphere around the Golden Temple with ducks, turtles and fishes swimming in the Holy pond (*Sarovar*). This print was printed by Bhai Gujjar Singh, Proprietor of the Faiz Printing Press near Akal Bunga in Amritsar.

In many woodcut prints of this period Guru Nanak is depicted as a venerable father figure and Guru Gobind Singh as the valiant Warrior. The popularity of these woodcut Prints and lithographs can be gauged from the fact that they were easily available in most of the semi-urban towns and adorned the walls of the houses of a large populace.<sup>40</sup> From here on, there is a clear-cut indication that these prints were on their way to perhaps the first popular specimens of *Sikh calendar art* with newer and less popular themes from Sikh history and folklore entering their ambit. These prints are the indicators of the change of parameters of taste of the vast population who admired them for their content and simplicity.

**The credit for this vast and rare collection of prints goes to J.Lockwood Kipling, principal of the Mayo School of Art in Lahore** but for his dedication and understanding of *popular Sikh art* and the care with which he collected and preserved these prints. These prints would have been lost to oblivion forever. His effort to collect these prints is praiseworthy and at the same time he deserves gratitude and appreciation for studying them analytically and demystifying the psyche and the spirit, which went behind the production of these popular thematic prints. He was so fascinated with these prints that he

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40 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.122

endeavoured to visit fairs (*melas*), bazaars and streets to collect them from the vendors and printers in and around Amritsar and Lahore.

**The pioneering work of J.Lockwood Kipling resulted in an album containing nearly 196 prints, paintings and drawings in pen and pencil together with 37 loose pages of paintings, calligraphic drawings and outline pen drawings. This prestigious collection of *Popular Sikh art* now houses Victoria and Albert museum, London which was presented by his son Rudyard Kipling in 1917.** The themes depicting in these prints form the basis of many a calendars of *Sikh art* in the years to come with added improvisation and individual stylisation by numerous other artists on the way.

There seems to be some stagnation in promotion and practising of *Sikh Calendar art* during the first half of the twentieth century mainly due to two probable reasons. Firstly the general disfavour with which the members of Singh Sabha Movement had accepted the commercial popularisation of *Sikh Calendar art* probably due to the instance with which Sikh scriptures described the almighty God as *Nirankar*, the Formless one and also the preacher through whom the God speaks. Though we see lots of embellishments of Gurdwaras during this period in the form of wall paintings, frescos and murals depicting calligraphic motifs and floral designs. Drawing and painting from imagination done on Sikh themes was not favourably received by the members of the Singh Sabha Movement. This fact is referred to in Kahn Singh's magisterial *Mahan Kos*. Photography was considered more truthful depiction capturing the actual pictures of people, places and events.<sup>41</sup>

The other most valid reason for the slow down of the development of *Sikh Calendar art* was the apprehension and fear of the members of the Singh Sabha Movement that imaginative depiction of Sikh Gurus may make them iconic

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41      **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.28-29

figures as no true and actual portraiture of a particular Sikh Guru was available and the practise of iconic figures being worshipped in the Gurdwaras was to be discouraged. But with the passage of time more liberal representation of the Sikh themes started getting acceptance and artists continued to paint on these themes in various materials i.e. from woodcuts and lithographs to drawings, water-colours, oil paintings in well accepted western techniques which by and now had become quite popular as Punjabi artists had acquired proficiency in handling these techniques with dexterity. New editions of *Popular Sikh art* continued to pour in the market establishing a well laid out circle of production, promotion and circulation of *Sikh Calendar art* in an organised link between the printer, the artists and the clientele.

Later half of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of Art schools by the British in different parts of India on the lines of art schools in Britain. The British painters and art teachers who worked in these art schools followed the Victorian style of painting and then they shifted to Greek style of painting and art teaching model which actually has harmed the country's artistic spirit as gradually Indians started imitating this model which has done considerable damage to traditional Indian style of painting. Britishers flooded the Indian markets with prints from Britain, as they being novel were source of attraction for Indian buyers being depicted in life-like figures and landscapes. Local painters did not lag behind and gradually started painting in the same manner to beat the influx of these western type prints in the market. Traditional Indian painting was harmed by this transformation.<sup>42</sup>

**During the first decade to third decade of twentieth century three categories of artists emerged in Punjab.** Firstly there were **artists who were intoxicated and motivated with the early traditional *Sikh art* which was the culmination of Kangra School style with Sikh themes who refused to change**

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42      **Aryan, K.C;** 1975, *Punjab Painting*, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.22

**their artistic tracks and kept on working in the lyrical and ornamental style.** The second category of **artists belonged to those painters who can be called pseudo-academicians i.e. they followed the latest European/western trends imitating the British School of painting which was being taught in Punjab through the newly flooded art prints wherein life study was a major aspect of the painting and considerable attention was also paid to the background** i.e. the landscape, buildings etc. Punjabi artists who adopted these techniques were partially successful in their depiction and newly attained proficiency in oil painting techniques. The third category of **Punjabi artists can be called bazaar painters who established small shops cum studios and were basically involved in decorative and commercial work.** There was some spark of true artistic mannerism in their works. Most of their works remained popular because of the skill with which they depicted scenes and floral decorations for the backdrops of theatrical companies and some of these works were also got commissioned by the aristocracy of Punjab for the decoration of their *havelis* etc. In this genre the name of Hussain Buxe of Lahore, Mohammad Alam, Malla Ram, Hari Singh, Allah Buxe of Lahore, Thakur Singh and Sobha Singh of Amritsar are prominent.<sup>43</sup>

Malla Ram who possessed an imposing personality was known in the art circles as he had worked in Kapurthala court and later established his studio in Amritsar, excelled in portraits and historical compositions. He dressed very elegantly and enjoyed painting theatrical scenes. Allah Buxe of Lahore was a well-known painter who had mastered the art of draping his paintings in mysticism with a mastery over colour scheme and craftsmanship. His prominent work includes a series of paintings from Krishna legend. Yet another painter Hari Singh who was a disciple of Malla Ram excelled in the art of fresco painting is set to have painted houses of aristocrats in Italy, sadly being a modest person no

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43     **Aryan, K.C;** 1975, *Punjab Painting*, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.26



specimen of his work is available in Punjab today. The second reason being for the non-availability of his excellent works which he did for Royal Talkies in Amritsar was set ablaze in the days of partition. Artists like Hari Singh had to seek other avenues of livelihood due to the fading popularity of theatrical companies as films were becoming more popular.<sup>44</sup>

The painters who left their mark are Sobha Singh and S.G.Thakur Singh who worked in contemporary style of paintings. The elements of Bazaar style painting i.e. commercial and realistic are evident in their works. Their styles have won popular acclaim and they produced some significant works, which are popular even today. Thakur Singh's body of work includes portraits, landscapes in photographic realism. Being an academician, he preferred painting in oils, pastels and in water-colours. His main contribution towards propagation of art was the establishment of an art academy and an art school in Amritsar. He became a legend during his lifetime.

A painter who was later to be known as a saint painter and who excelled in religious and mystical themes and paintings of love legends in unsurpassed technical excellence and astonishing realism was Sobha Singh. His best known works include portraits of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, lovers of Punjab- *Heer Ranjha* and *Sohni Mahiwal* and many other saints and paintings of the people of Kangra valley. Prints of which are appreciated and brought in Punjab and other countries where Punjabis have settled. He had settled in the hills of Himachal Pradesh near Palampur in a village called Andretta.

The academician painters who were products of art schools who received art training according to the curriculum which included stress on life drawing, illustration, drapery, nature study and composition in the manner of European style produced some interesting works worth mention. Among them were

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44     **Aryan, K.C;** 1975, *Punjab Painting*, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.27

M.A.Aziz Din and Sri Ram. Their works were interesting and popular and in the collection of fellow artists, friends, admirers and their pupils. But most of them were destroyed during the partition in 1947. Some works of M.A.Aziz Din who was profusely influenced by British painter called 'Leader' had masterly quality of projecting the minutest details. He migrated to Afghanistan and never returned to India.<sup>45</sup>

Sri Ram was also called qualified artist who was master of painting commercial art and worked for Dadabhai theatrical company, Bombay being art director and stage decorator. He has proved himself as a superb academician as his works speak volumes of his creative competency in nature and life studies. The elements of commercial art are visible in his exciting works which have the mark of skilful drawing and composition imbibed from the European painting. He returned to Lahore and a great number of Punjabi painters were influenced by his work.

To understand the trends in Indian art especially in context of painting the British had made calculative moves to impose their ideas on art as well as other offshoots of civilization in second half of nineteenth century as they were the political masters of India by now. English language became official language in 1835 by replacing Persian language. With art schools came the art of consumer education- a systematic pattern of teaching art was enforced which was linked to the scope of extension of consumerism i.e. art should relate to market and bazaar. The seeds of factory made commercially viable prints, engravings and reproductions were sown which in a way started the decline of unique Indian cultural ethos and artistic heritage. Art was gradually being placed on the same pedestal as a trade or commerce. "*We have become hybrid in dress, in thought, in sentiments and culture,*" lamented the renowned C.R.Dass of Calcutta in 1917.

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45      **Saroj Rani, Dr.;** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.13

People who professed western ideas and adopted European mannerism and who spoke English were given preference over the others. Thus many artists in Punjab who were masters in their own right but did not know English language were neglected and pushed to the background and received little recognition. In Mayo School of Art in Lahore only S.N.Gupta the then principal could speak English and the other members of faculty such as versatile and talented artists like Hussain Buxe, Brij Lal, Hari Singh and Allah Buxe did not receive the acclaim and recognition they deserved. Though Brij Lal was awarded a cash prize of Rs.100 for his painting titled 'Eternal Bliss' being adjudged as best work in an art exhibition in 1937 in Lahore could not be projected as a master painter.<sup>46</sup> A large number of educated Indians had started expressing their thoughts in English effectively, there were painters too who started imitating the western style and produced works relating to every day life in Punjab in western style.

In Calcutta and in Shantiniketan, the latter being a university set up by Rabindranath Tagore in rural surroundings with a peaceful and environment friendly atmosphere continued the traditions of Bengal School. Similarly some painters had attained a limited recognition in other cities such as Ramgopal Vijayavargiya of Jaipur, Bhuvanvarma of Delhi, A.R.Chughtai and Roop Krishna of Lahore. They created works of excellence and had great appeal vis-à-vis saleability and *Popular art*. The impact of their works was visible in many other parts of the country and painters found new ways to exercise improvisation.<sup>47</sup>

The work of A.R.Chughtai is a classical example of newly acquired expression and artistic facility. He was a teacher at Mayo School of Art, Lahore. Bengal School had also cast its spell on the principal S.N.Gupta but he soon realised that he should evolve his own style which was amalgamation of Bengal and Persian style. Painters were striving hard to merge the traditional styles into

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46     **Aryan, K.C;** 1975, *Punjab Painting*, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.28

47     Ibid, p.29

modern western styles, which were more appealing to the masses and had the qualities essential for being commodities of art. This propelled the sales as prints started being produced for wider circulation finding new clients and giving an edge to the *Bazaar art* or *Calendar art*. These works were lyrical and romantic in content and thought, as some of the works depicted Omar khayyam and Ghalib. A.R.Chughtai being himself from a Persian origin had ample creative powers and talent to produce such captivating and enchanting works, as he was skilled in illustration too. Two other painters Mohammad Abdul Aziz Din and Sri Ram were also in the same league but they were not suitably recognised.

All these artistic endeavours however did not result in any mass movement, which failed to influence more painters in Lahore. The need of the hour at that point in Punjab art scene was the necessity of a towering and truly influential painter who could transform the traditional indigenous art of Punjab into a new direction thus creating a truly modern style of its own. To achieve breakthrough in art scene the efforts of artist Roop Krishan in Lahore are worth mention. He had a limited following of some minor budding artists but could not achieve any worthwhile results in forming a new style. He migrated to London and died there very early.

This formidable task of creating a new Punjabi art style or to be more precise truly modern Indian style was undoubtedly initiated by the great Amrita Shergil.<sup>48</sup> Punjabi themes found a new *avatar* in her emphatic and impressive works. These works had the aroma of Punjabi soil. Group of figures painted by her, seated in solemn moods in rare rustic charm, women with haunting and empty eyes huddled together in their Punjabi robes and village priests/*Pandits* seated on coir cots against the backdrop of white Gurdwaras and buffaloes and other animals lazily sitting in the forefront make pictures that were novel in style,

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48     **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Sikh Painting, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.32

a truly western style and a true Punjabi content. She had attained excellence in oil on canvas technique as she spent a considerable time in schools of art in Paris and Italy. This painter was in true sense a mixture of western knowledge and Indian ethos as far as her parentage is concerned her father was an aristocratic Sikh and her mother was of Hungarian origin. Both had a unique vision and had developed a plethora of sensibilities both European and Punjabi. As she was a genius, Amrita Shergil was a rebel too. Clinging to one style was not in her nature and the content kept on changing from region to region. She died in the prime of her youth (1914-1941).

It is in the veins of Punjabis to adopt new directions in whatever field they are engaged. Primarily due to the fact they have inherited a history which was ever changing with emergence of new cultures, entrance of new people and with them new ethos and thoughts. They were the first to adopt the new techniques in painting introduced to them by the Europeans and had a natural talent and calibre to learn quickly and achieve a considerable mastery over the fresh techniques. Punjabi painters did not wait for any artistic movement to emerge and kept on refining their techniques and using them in their works which had truly Punjabi historical and religious themes as these were the themes who were very close to their heart and were being adored by masses as well as classes.

**Around India's independence two major developments in *Sikh art* were taking roots, one was the availability of mass-produced colourful stylised pictures produced by painters in Amritsar** and some of them were even carrying on the *Bazaar style Calendar art* in Delhi and other places which chiefly had paintings of Sikh Gurus, Gurdwaras, prominent Sikh martyrs and warriors. **The other development that was taking shape was the emergence of painters who were highly skilled and were able to produce paintings for the more sophisticated patrons though they had started towards this direction**

**much before independence.**<sup>49</sup> The main plank of their work was painting portraits of Sikh Gurus from imagination and depicting events in Sikh history underlining the Sikh psyche and ethos which may glorify the ideals of Sikhism. As by now the actual portraits of Gurus had been lost to oblivion and these painters were essentially painting the spiritual and much adored qualities of humanism, piousness and valour enshrined in Sikhism. Though some section of the society in Sikhs were not very much impressed with painting the portraits of Sikh Gurus from imagination. Each one of these artists had endeavoured to paint the portrait of Sikh Gurus and events related to their life in their own individualistic and specific styles. These artists were successful in attempting to express Sikh history and underlying ideals in a way that they appealed to large audience.

**In portraiture of this genre, Sobha Singh is perhaps the most well known and a pioneer in *Sikh Calendar art*.** The other important artist who concentrated more on historical events and vehemently depicted the Sikh history through his painterly brush was Kirpal Singh. His major thrust was Sikh wars, *Ghalugharas* or Massacres of Sikhs, portrait of Sikh warriors on horseback and in action engaged in fight against tyranny, scenes from the martyrdom and brutalisation of non-Muslims by Mughal rulers are heart rending. They stir in the onlooker a sense of deep anguish as well as a deep sense of pride for these brave and valiant Sikhs who stood the test of times even in the most horrible and torturous moments and defied the barbaric acts of the rulers of those times. These large paintings attracted the attention of the entire Sikh world and were commissioned by Gurdwaras, Sikh institutions, corporates and even private patrons. The popularity of these paintings is in being that the content was narrative and descriptive. These works were a fit case for *Popular Sikh art* and

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49      **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.30

hence innumerable calendars of these paintings were printed in large numbers, which adorn the walls of nearly every household in Punjab.

Sobha Singh's paintings primarily concentrated on first and the last Sikh Gurus and events relating to their lives. He was a master of detail and perfection and his pictures depict specially the drapery and costumes in photographic details. Deep study of human anatomy, due attention to the background, choice of colours present pictures of perfection and excellence. He was inspired by the divine and spiritual glow on Nanak's face and a spark of bravery, truthfulness, confidence and saintliness in the eyes of Guru Gobind Singh. Study of horse, the falcon and an occasional peacock in some paintings of Guru Gobind Singh captures the myriad moods of the painterly creations. The perfection in his painting techniques and his artistic calibre had added a whiff of fresh air to the creations of *Sikh Calendar art* and it attracted a new clientele. It was a departure from the early oddly bright mass-produced *calendar prints* available in the market. His work was so impressive that it was widely copied by other upcoming and budding artists and today the iconographic pictures of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh are well-accepted portraits of these Gurus and are associated to Sobha Singh.

**Kirpal Singh's** paintings are an ode to the ideals of Khalsa depicted in fluent pictorial form. They are embodiment of unwavering loyalty, heroism and martyrdom. He has achieved a considerable amount of deftness in rendering huge canvases, which are bold, earthy and pastoral in flavour and the depiction of posture warranting a particular action is of profound dimension. These paintings inspire and motivate the faithfuls impacting their inner cords and impulses.

Besides these two artists, the group of artists who have contributed to **the establishment of Sikh identity** as the nucleus of their work throughout their careers are **S.G.Thakur Singh, Jaswant Singh, G.S.Sohan Singh, Trilok Singh**

**Chitrakar, Amolak Singh, Gurdit Singh, Bodhraj, Mehar Singh, Devender Singh, Jarnail Singh** to name a few.

S.G.Thakur Singh is known for his paintings of Golden Temple which he has painted in a light of divinity and mysticism besides that he embarked upon a journey in search of natural beauty of surroundings and its inhabitants. His mesmerising paintings of women, innocent children, poor shepherds, the portrayal of pristine glory and natural bounty of vast landscapes clearly establish his artistic and creative distinction due to deep understanding of perspective, colour and well laid out compositions. *Shingaar* and bathing beauties are some of the very popular paintings, which have a touch of sophistication and mass appeal and have qualities worthy of becoming good examples of *Calendar art*. He worked with a new zest to paint various ethnic and regional women folk in their traditional costumes and jewellery. Inevitably, there is an iota of painterly essence and quality in his works which is akin to Raja Ravi Varma's style. He had many exhibitions to his credit at Lahore, Amritsar, Simla, Bombay and even Calcutta. Being an academician of eminence, he had a large following of artists who chose to try their hands at landscape painting and delved deep in the themes of painting common people in impressive moods and expressions.

Jaswant Singh was one of the first league artists besides Sobha Singh, who were successful in painting imaginative portraiture of Sikh Gurus with élan, inventing a new artistic imagery which had a mark and flair of its own. He went a step further by implementing liberal patterns in portraying some aspects of Guru Nanak's life in his own inimitable style and added a new dimension to the iconographic paintings of Sikh Gurus. 'Guru Nanak- the Pilgrim' is a masterly example of such works. Jaswant Singh's creative acumen lies in passing onto the masses the message of the Guru and humility being the essence of Nanak's teachings. Nanak as a devotee and as well as an apostle of peace and divinity has been painted with deep sincerity and artistic precision.



The large painting titled- 'Guru Nanak- the Pilgrim' which is certainly his masterpiece has depicted Guru Nanak as a traveller in such a surrealistic manner that no other specimen of *Sikh Calendar art* is in similar style, content and mannerism.<sup>50</sup> The painting speaks volumes of the abundance of dexterity, incredible imagination and skilful execution. He was amongst one of the few Punjabi painters of *Sikh Calendar art* who had such magnificent creative competence and vision; study of landscape- rocks, boulders and canyons was his forte. This painting is a classic example of portraying Guru Nanak without painting his face and employing visible symbols associated with Guru Nanak such as a *Simarini* (Rosary), a *Lota* (Vessel), *Choga* (Robe), Wooden clogs to depict his presence. The bold conceptual novelty has raised this work of art to new ethereal level.

G.S.Sohan Singh was a stalwart amongst the popular painters of *Sikh Calendar art* primarily due to his traditional approach to new subjects, an eye for meticulous detail, a strong sense of design and composition, control over rendering, draughtsmanship and execution. He inherited from his father, an artist of eminence- Gian Singh *Naqqash* who painted murals and frescos in Golden Temple in Amritsar, love for decorative elements which he applied profusely in depiction of jewellery, weaponry and costumes of the characters. Besides being an artist of high calibre, he was equally devoted to the art of block making, illustrative work and other forms of commercial art. His quest for finding new idioms of artistic value brought him close to the study of reproductions of many European painters who did paintings on Punjab themes. This enriched his knowledge and competence and further channelised his creative energies in stretching his technical skills to new limits. Among his paintings on exceptional themes from Sikh religion, the one that deserves mention is 'Sri Guru Harkrishan

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50 **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Portraits of Guru Nanak by contemporary artists, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.5

Sahib engaged in curing a leper'. This is an extraordinary work wherein juxtaposition of figures is astounding, colours- hues and tints used are bathed in glowing sunlight and the moods and gestures aptly sum up the enigma of the spiritual prowess of the young Guru sitting in a palanquin being carried by grateful and astonished devotees.

Yet another painting which offers evidence of capability of his artistic insight and understanding of aesthetics presents an unusual theme from Sikh history titled 'Maharaja Maha Singh seeking blessing from Baba Santokh Dass for his toddler son Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the premises of Golden Temple, Amritsar'. This painting has abundance of visual treat with heavenly hues and soft tones, creating a charismatic and mystic charm. Expressions on the face of *Sadhus* and their postures acquaint us with G.S.Sohan Singh's interest in vivid depiction and remarkable control over composing a painting. He was well versed in creating lyrical effects by adding a distinctly handled perspective. True to the spirit of *Sikh Calendar art*, he attempted Punjabi themes depicting cultural events, festivals, *melas* and ceremonies in unparalleled virtuosity. His contribution towards popularisation of *Sikh Calendar art* is of enormous significance and he can be termed as a real *Calendar artist* as all his creations were reproduced in large numbers as calendars and posters. His works are in prized collection of Central Sikh museum, Amritsar. He was positive and progressive in approach and his paintings pleasantly enthrall the onlooker.

Trilok Singh *Chitrakar* had a fascination for the art of painting from his early childhood and he pursued it seriously under famous Bengali artist H.M.Majumdar and S.G. Thakur Singh in Calcutta.<sup>51</sup> He was a very sensitive person and lived a very simple life. His honesty and dedication were admired by whosoever met him and he had a genuine concern in his heart for social causes

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51 **Saroj Rani, Dr.;** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.66

and always gave deep thought to the burning problems in the society. Being a patriot at heart, he wanted to express his true feelings for the upliftment of the downtrodden and the neglected masses. There was poetry in his heart. He attempted some paintings on environment preservation and Kashmir issue. He had high intellect and there was in him a great understanding of *Gurmat Vichar*. He analysed everything in spiritual perspective i.e. the futility of wars and causes of human sufferings. Through his works, he was successful in highlighting the national and political issues, which vexed the nation such as Tibet problem and wars with China and Pakistan. This projected his love for nationalism.

He had a religious bent of mind and through his remarkable works he has painted many aspects of the life of Sikh Gurus and emphasizing the essence of their teachings and the glorification of human values of head and heart in Sikhism. The subject matter of his paintings establishes him as a thinker and a philosopher. He has contributed immensely to the *Sikh art* and has done series of detailed and well researched paintings on Guru Nanak's *Udasis*- events from his life, meditation of Guru Angad Dev and Bhai Lalo's portrait. Other masterpieces on the theme of love legends of Punjab include 'Sassi burning in love in desert', 'Sohni drowning in Chenab River' and 'Heer in love'. An illustrator par excellence, he has done considerable work in this field and illustrated many important magazines such as *Punjabi Duniya*, *Jan Sahitya*, *Dictionary Panj Jilda*, *Punjabi World Dictionary* and *Dictionary for children*.<sup>52</sup> He had a long stint with Language Department, Punjab and was a prolific and versatile commercial artist and did some unforgettable illustrative designs, book jackets and layouts. Love for Punjab and *Punjabi* was his second religion as he had a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Punjabi ethos, traditions, literature and culture.

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52      **Saroj Rani, Dr.;** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.67

Being a gifted artist, he was a master of brushwork and knew the magic of colours. His compositions carry a hint of mysticism and mystery and there is an undercurrent of poetic inclination and philosophy. He has often used soothing and muted tones, which give a queer charm to the painting and deserves appreciation no doubt his works are popular amongst the common people and the intellectuals alike. Many of his works have been converted into calendars and posters. To sum up this great artist and his contribution towards *Sikh Calendar art*, he added a new dimension to this genre of art by adding his love for nationalism, concern for social issues and his deep sense of pride for Punjab and *Punjabi*, which was the hallmark of his painterly works.

Amolak Singh is from the front row of popular artists, who were known for their huge contribution towards *Sikh Calendar art* as he had a large body of work to his credit nearly four hundred paintings which are in permanent collection of Punjab and Sind Bank, PNB Finance, Bank of Punjab, Central Sikh museum, Amritsar, Baba Baghel Singh museum, Delhi and Bhai Mati Dass museum, Chandni Chowk, Delhi. Due to his rare artistic talent, mastery over painting techniques and deep knowledge of Sikh history and religion, he is one of the forerunners of *Sikh Calendar art* whose works have been profusely used in publications published by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar and large number of reproductions of his works are available in the market in the form of calendars and posters. He worked for sometime in Bombay Film Industry and was top-notch painter of backdrops and sets.<sup>53</sup> Due to his versatility and outstanding control over his medium i.e. oil on canvas, he was successful in creating a number of masterpieces, which are in great demand.

The Central Sikh museum, Amritsar recognised his talents as an artist and as an organiser and appointed him as curator of this museum. He worked there

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53      **Walia, Varinder**; October 16, 2006, *Artist Amolak Singh dies in sleep*, The Tribune.

nearly for fourteen years and credit for renovation of this museum after the Operation Blue Star goes to him. His works possess an appealing quality which is appreciated by a large number of lovers of *Sikh Calendar art* due to his magical brushwork and realistic portrayal. He touched all popular religious themes pertaining to Sikh religion and history and organised his paintings in breathtaking manner, controlled precision and skilful detail.

He touched rare themes in Sikh history which shows his deep study of Sikh history and a desire to bring alive visual representation of the original happenings. His painting titled 'Mutual conflicts result in utter destruction' shows Guru Tegh Bahadur bringing peace between Raja Chankardhwaj of Assam and Raja Ram Singh. Both Rajas erected a monument of peace with their weapons lying down there by vindicating Guru's advice that hatred divides and love unites.

In the other unfamiliar theme, the artist has depicted 'Guru Hargobind Sahib giving audience to Nur Jahan'. Nur Jahan once went to Lahore to seek the blessings of Guru Hargobind and Guru Sahib counselled her not to engage herself in the pursuit of worldly things but instead she should try to comprehend truth and discharge the duties of a true wife. In pursuit of depicting some not so popular facets in Sikh history, another painting which is evidence to the fact that he had a deep love for Sikh history. Here in this painting, the artist has elaborated on Guru Gobind Singh's concern for handicapped and invalid followers. The tenth Guru used to exert such followers to learn the art of music and assisted them in acquiring expertise in playing of musical instruments such as *Tabla*, *Saranda*, *Rabab* and *Taus* thereby contributing to the Sikh cause in their own capacity.<sup>54</sup>

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54     **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.77

The Central Sikh museum and other historical Gurdwaras around Amritsar like Gurdwara Goindwal Sahib, Khadoor Sahib, Chharetia Sahib, Taran Taran Sahib and Gurdwara Baba Buddha Ji, all have a medley of paintings by Bodhraj on glowing themes of Dharam Prachar, sacrifices of the innumerable warriors, martyrs, saints and especially the followers of Guru Gobind Singh and his four brave sons- Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh who sacrificed their lives and became immortal for the cause of humanity, truthfulness and honour. The Dharam Prachar Committee, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar in appreciation of his artistic aptitude offered him a rare honour to illustrate countless publications, booklets, pamphlets, calendars and produced reproductions in thousands for the spread of philosophy of Sikh religion using actual tales from Sikh history and culture. Bodhraj though not a Sikh himself had studied and understood the history in detail and had such a magnificent understanding of the characters, period and surroundings that his pictures bring alive the thunder of *Nagaras*, the deafening sound of horse hoofs and the war cry of '*Bole So Nihaal*' piercing through the skies in stupendous and heroic engagement of the Sikhs with the tyrant Mughals. The faces of the Sikh warriors have been shown glowing with a strange spiritualism as they were fighting the holy war of justice.

A specimen of his abundance of creative talent and mastery over the fine art of execution is apparent and visually eloquent in a publication titled '*Saka Chamkaur- Sachitr Sakhi*' (The immortal story of Chamkaur Sahib). He has intricately illustrated scenes from martyrdom of elder *Sahibzadas* of Guru Gobind Singh- Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh. The battle of Chamkaur was indeed unique as on one side there were forty brave and courageous Sikh warriors without much sustenance and with just a handful of arms and weapons facing ten lakh Mughal soldiers who were armed to teeth. It was at the battlefield of Chamkaur Sahib that they displayed an indomitable spirit of determination. The

place was further sanctified by the martyrdom of the elder sons of Guru Gobind Singh. Their illustrious father sent them into the battlefield with his blessings. When they had made the supreme sacrifice the great father shouted *Sat Sri Akal* and thanked God that the debt has been paid. A seer like Guru Gobind Singh alone could offer his gratitude to the almighty for the noble sacrifice of his dear sons. The spirit of these events has been vividly painted in very realistic style which is both impressive and heart rending.

Artist Bodhraj had a deep study of the fundamental elements which constitute the real spirit of righteous struggle of Sikhs for justice and his paintings have contributed a lot in infusing this very spirit into the community. His works are cherished all over the world and reproductions of his calendars are available in and around major centres of Sikhism, printing and publishing houses. The other major sponsors for his works were Punjab and Sind Bank, Bank of Punjab and Markfed.

Master Gurdit Singh stands tall amongst the much admired calendar artists who have ventured to paint many minute facets of Sikh history, events and people whose pious lives enriched the glorious traditions of Sikhism in a remarkably painted oil on canvas works which show a spark of renaissance in Sikh painting in mannerism and execution. Revered Gurdit Singh has painted '*Sain Mian Mir*' who laid the foundation of Sri Harmandir Sahib. This theme exemplified the open heartedness and a genuine love of the Gurus for the mankind- Sikh or non-Sikh was not a point of disagreement. Holy men of all faiths were given due reverence in Sikhism. He was a true master and a strict disciplinarian. Study of drawing and proportion were his wings for creative flights and aesthetical rendering was his hallmark. His palette consists of rich, royal and classical colours which enables him to achieving wonders. His keen eye for detail has lent a queer yet truthful charm to his brilliant works.

A painting of '*Bhai Gurdas*' speaks volumes of the creative wealth he had acquired during his lifetime. Still life, costumes, background and arrangement of elements in the foreground have photographic presentation. He has painted a large number of paintings and most of them are in permanent collection of Central Sikh museum, Amritsar. But has admirers of his art spread across the globe. His paintings truly represent his meditative attitude and a feeling of sanctity and piousness for this sacred task of painting the Sikh history. These paintings too have been reproduced in innumerable editions and are adorning the walls of Punjabi homes.

Sardar Sobha Singh's most dedicated disciple Mehar Singh who started his artistic journey way back in 1946 as he worked relentlessly and dedicatedly under this master painter he learnt the fine nuances of this great artist's work and he acquired name and fame in portraiture and Sikh historical and religious paintings which he did for many patrons and prominent promoters of *Sikh art* such as SGPC, Amritsar; Bank of Punjab; Thakur Singh academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar; Punjab and Sind Bank; Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh; Punjabi University, Patiala and Dr. Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendra, Dehradun. He skilfully and successfully mingled creative painting and commercial art in such a way that the demand for his paintings grew from strength to strength. He has employed the painting techniques and skills, which he acquired from Sobha Singh in fruitful and befitting way. These qualities have enriched his art and enhances its value in commercial perspective.

Immaculate brushwork, understanding of skin tones and expression in the eyes have been captured in his appealing paintings. His lines are graceful, full of rhythm and without any unnecessary clutter celebrating clear vision, delving deep into the subject and mastery over division of space in a framework, which leaves an indelible impression and unfathomed aesthetic charm on the beholder. Apart from painting scores of portraits, the favourite themes which were close to



his heart are 'Portrait of Guru Nanak', '*Chadar* of Nanak', 'Guru Gobind Singh writing', 'Bhai Lehna', '*Tera-Tera*', 'The sacred thread', '*Mecca Pherna*' and 'Banda Bahadur'. He had established his studio in Delhi and worked there for many decades. Now he has settled in Chandigarh and the studio is being run by his two illustrious sons who have shifted to digital printing, making large banners, murals and printing reproductions of his father's works which are being acquired by the admirers of *Sikh Calendar art*.

Amazingly prolific and versatile painter of *Sikh Calendar art*, Punjabi culture and literature- Devender Singh is an epitome of humility and simplicity. Yet his paintings reverberate vibrancy, lyricism and the mannerism and aesthetic idiom is by far more liberal in creative thought. There is a streak of contemporary element in his famous semi-abstract painting series on '*Barahmaha*', which can easily be termed as fine specimens of contemporary art with Punjabi theme. Massive works of historical paintings with detailed depiction of themes, landscape and figures all exemplify his inborn talent and his dedication to *Sikh Calendar art*. Portrait of Sikh Gurus and historical characters have been effectively depicted in his works in lively stance and right use of colour perspective makes them exceptionally bold and powerful. Quick brushstrokes shows his mastery and control over his medium, which is mostly oil on canvas.

Another significant contribution of this artist is painting some unusual and lesser-known events of Sikh history such as '*Mata Khiwi*- a pious lady who was a noble soul and revelled in serving her master and his Sikhs as she toiled lovingly in the *Guru Ka Langar* and served the Guru's disciple with courtesy and joy'; 'Guru Amar Dass appointing women to conduct Sikh missionary and parish work'; 'Bhai Manjh- an ardent disciple of the Guru who used to bring dry wood everyday for the *langar* to be cooked'; 'Guru Ram Dass laying the foundation of Amritsar'; 'Guru Arjan Dev helping the villagers in digging the six channel

Persian wheel (*Chhcharta*) wells which irrigated their fields'; 'Baba Buddha blessing Mata Ganga and Guru Arjan serving the lepers at Taran Taran'. His first collection of paintings on Sikh women was brought by Punjab and Sind Bank for their calendar in 1972 and many other organisations followed suite. His paintings adorn the walls of Sikh museums in Paonta Sahib, Anandpur Sahib and Golden Temple, Amritsar. His numerous paintings have been reproduced in calendar form and are available in the market, which establishes him as a premier painter of *Sikh Calendar art*.

Jarnail Singh's art can be classified pre-eminently into two major aspects of Punjab- firstly being its history, which is full of wars, turmoil and the bravery of its people in fighting the tyrant and oppressors. This aspect is under the direct influence of his father Kirpal Singh's art. The other component of his painting is full of hope and he merrily narrates the cultural, religious and day-to-day life of Punjabis by depicting it in vibrant colours laced with rustic charm. With the advent of green revolution which brought well-deserved prosperity and laughter to the courtyards of Punjabi houses and a new Punjabi cultural and artistic renaissance resurrected to assert *Punjabi* (proud to be being Punjabi) compelled this artist to paint themes such as the daily chores of Punjabi way of life, past times, its dances and music, traditions, ceremonies and festivals. This talented artist though had no formal training, worked closely with his father yet he developed his own distinct style. Women sitting in courtyards, spinning the wheel (*Charkha*) and singing merrily amply sums up his ability to capture the essence of Punjabi soil. *Kachha* houses emit the very aroma of this sun-baked land where *kikar* (acacia trees) shade the dusty villages.<sup>55</sup>

In another painting, he has shown women in *Trinjan* (Ginning of cotton). He has superb knowledge of Punjabi attire and tints-hues of sun kissed Punjabi

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55     **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune

faces. 'Punjabi Bride' is a very popular painting done by him which has depiction of intricate and authentic jewellery, costumes and use of *kajal* (kohl) in the eyes of the innocent brides. Art of embroidery has always engaged Punjabi women and a painting of this theme is a true tribute to *Phulkari*. The people of Punjab are brave, bold, hardworking and sturdy may be because of their simple yet sumptuous food. The tradition of churning milk in the early morning by women is usually the first chore of the day and Jarnail Singh has captured many other such scenes with skilful hand and a deep love for Punjab in his heart. Reproductions of his calendars are very popular and sold all over Punjab and elsewhere. Punjabis settled in other countries collect these reproductions to acquaint their children of the rich Punjabi traditions, heritage and history.

**The source of the river of Sikh Calendar art essentially and pre-eminently is the slow and steady emergence and development of the art of illustrating *Janam Sakhis* drifting from one artistic characteristic to another like small rivulets and brooks passing through many rough and uneven terrains but always retaining its essence and undercurrent of this flowing sacred river being the Sikh religious history, spirituality, truthfulness and universal brotherhood which was preached by Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus spreading the aroma of these divine qualities amongst the people of this land. The river got momentum with the advent of printing press and introduction of many printing techniques and technical advancements brought in by the Europeans to Punjab.** The works of art which were earlier available to a few rich and aristocratic connoisseurs or patrons of art were made available to the masses in the form of colourful reproductions at a very low cost. There is a glorious and unmatched valuable contribution of the local artists primarily the Sikhs, who strove hard and were quick to learn and pursue the newly introduced marvels in painting and printing techniques. Each one has immensely devoted his life in pursuance of refining the *Sikh art* in content, style and visual narration of

popular Sikh themes by mingling Sikh historical perspective and ethos with European painting trends. Today the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* is a mass movement and innumerable amateur and professional painters are seriously engaged in covering new grounds in the spread of this most popular branch of *Sikh art*. A full-fledged iconography of *Sikh Calendar art* is well recognised and individual and specific artists are busy in their artistic pursuits to pay their distinctive tributes in their own yet collective artistic endeavour using even the digital technology and multi-media processes. (Plate-6) The popularity of *Sikh Calendar art* is increasing leaps and bounds and is covering some strange surfaces and objects, which hitherto were not even thinkable. The forms of *Sikh Calendar art* are painted and printed on- notebook covers, diaries, lockets, key chains, pocket calendars, wall calendars, panels, murals, hoardings, T-shirts, mugs and objects of daily use. No doubt the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* has a bright future as now it is popular not only in Punjab and India but in such parts of the globe where Punjabis had made their homes.

In consonance and deep resonance of the lofty ideals of wisdom and spirituality enshrined in the tenets of Sikhism; bestowed upon the mankind by Guru Nanak Dev paved the way to dispel darkness of ignorance thereby heralding a new dawn of knowledge on the horizon. Initially the eloquent divine messages of Oneness of God, Universal brotherhood, Dignity of labour, Satnam (the True Name), Selfless service to mankind, Equality of women and episodes from the four *Udasis* (Missionary Travels) of Guru Nanak Dev were transmitted through holy hymns based on elementary yet enchanting musical compositions. These mesmerising divine compositions stirred an all-encompassing urge in the minds of the devout to recount these messages and episodes through narrative and pictorial forms. Thus the hand-painted *Janam Sakhis* of various versions and styles appeared, emphatically impacting the spread of the Universal message of the Great Guru. Though the basic content of illustrated *Janam Sakhis* always retained its above mentioned subject matter and spiritual flavour yet some artists had practised the liberty to improvise the contents in their own impeccable narrative and pictorial styles without sacrificing the facts and events.<sup>1</sup>

**The subject matter of the *Sikh Calendar art* which travelled through a long capsule of time has the same fragrance of divinity and spirituality.** In fact it has been enriched with values of valour, saga of martyrdom, significance of selfless service and the essence of ‘Miri and Piri’ (Temporal and Spiritual power); further entrenching and fortifying the very humane ideals, preached by Guru Nanak Dev and other Sikh Gurus, *Bhagats*, *Bairagis* and Saints whose spiritual compositions or *Bani* are respectfully compiled in the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Consequently the subject matter of modern day *Sikh Calendar art* amply reinforced the earlier content matter with elaborate and enormous technical expertise and skills, establishing it as the most popular genre of *Sikh*

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1 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.118

*art*, which has seen tremendous transformation and evolution. A medley of its applications covers a wide range of spheres as it has accomplished its penetration on even mundane articles of a modern day life.

### Events from *Janam Sakhis* and *Udasis* (Missionary Travels) of Guru Nanak Dev

**The most popular and poignant subject matter of *Sikh Calendar art* is of course the vivid portrayal of Guru Nanak Dev flanked by his two disciples Bala and Mardana**, former a *chauri* bearer and the latter a *rababi* (rebeck player) who accompanied him on his *Udasis* (Missionary Travels). (Plate-7) The popularity of the theme can be gauged from the fact that till today, the calendars on this theme vehemently adorn the walls of Sikh households and artists of various denominations with deep interest in *Sikh Calendar art* have attempted this subject in their own specific styles and mannerism choosing different mediums and genres. This theme changed hands with different conceptual phases of *Sikh Calendar art* and adopted an assortment of rendering techniques from woodcuts to chromolithographs, oleographs and today's offset and digital printing processes.

Calendars on this subject depict **Guru Nanak Dev sitting cross-legged on a carpet/mat with Bala and Mardana under a banyan tree**. His half opened eyes express spiritual ecstasy and divine intoxication. This is a true depiction of Guru Nanak as an apostle of peace, kindness and wisdom absorbed in spiritual stance slightly reclining on his traditional cushion (*Takia*). A parrot in the cage is shown hanging by the branch of a banyan tree, a feature associated with the *yogis* of the Nath tradition. (Plate-8)

In this sequence the other most admired subject of the *Sikh Calendar art* is the **portrait of Guru Nanak Dev** painted in various artistic manifestations. Here Guru Nanak Dev has been shown with flowing white beard donning a yellow or pale small turban (*ketaki*) and a rosary of beads encircling it. The other

rosary is shown in his hand which is in *abhay mudra* (do not fear gesture). A spiritual halo surrounds his head; he is wearing a patched cloak on his shoulders over *Jama* (robes) as shown in most of these calendars. (Plate-9) Some calendars also depict Guru Nanak Dev standing with *yogis lota* (utensil) in his left hand. (Plate-10)

Yet the splendid calendars relating to **the episodes of Guru Nanak's childhood** narrating anecdotes such as *Sarp Chhaya*- wherein Bal Nanak is shown sleeping and being protected from bright sun by an enormous cobra<sup>2</sup> (Plate-11); *Miraculous restoration of the fields*- Bal Nanak is shown absorbed in meditation and his buffaloes while grazing in the nearby fields completely destroy the crop. The farmer complains to Rai Bular the headman. When Nanak goes to Rai Bular he is wonder-struck by the divine look on Nanak's face. Nanak insists that none of the crop has been harmed. A messenger by Rai Bular ascertains this fact; *Nanak debating with teacher*- Bal Nanak is shown attending school and disagreeing with his teacher Gopal Pandit's lessons on worldly knowledge (Plate-12); *Sacha-Sauda*- where Nanak is shown feeding the poor *sadhus* with the money his father gave him for starting a business and telling his father that he has done Sacha-Sauda because feeding the poor and the hungry is the most truthful business (Plate-13); *Tera-Tera*- in this episode Guru Nanak is shown seated in a grocery shop owned by Daulat Khan Lodi weighing grains and uttering the words 'tera-tera' which denotes everything belongs to the Almighty. (Plate-14) Some people complain that the shop is incurring losses as Nanak is weighing more grains and distributing them to customers but when checked the stocks were in excess and Lodi was surprised and amazed<sup>3</sup>; *Nai koi Hindu Na koi Musalman*- this calendar narrates that at Sultanpur every morning

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2 **Gill, Ranjit Singh**; 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.28

3 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.52

Guru Nanak used to go the local river for his bath. One morning, he did not return. When searched, he was found missing though his clothes lay on the river bank. But he reappeared the third day. He kept introspecting the whole day. The next morning he re-iterated the principle of Universal Brotherhood by uttering the words- '*nai koi hindu na koi musalman*'.<sup>4</sup> (Plate-15)

There are **some calendars specifically devoted to the theme of four Udasis (Missionary Travels) of Guru Nanak Dev** such as *Visit to kuaru-desh*- Nanak during one of his *Udasis* visits kuaru-desh, a territory ruled by female magicians led by a queen called Nuri Shah. These female sorceresses magically transformed any man into an animal and this is precisely what one of them did to Mardana when he approached them at his master's command. Guru Nanak defeated them by the power of the divine *Name* and they were forced to admit their defeat<sup>5</sup>; *Siddha-Goshti*- Guru Nanak's religious discourses with the Siddhas as during his second *Udasi*, Guru Nanak Dev visits Sumer Parbat in the Himalayas. He brings home to the 'Siddhas' the futility of renouncing the world and leaving their homes "*Who will guide the common folk when men of knowledge and understanding give up their responsibility*", he asks. The Siddhas were enlightened to live among the ordinary people as God is immanent in them.<sup>6</sup> (Plate-16)

Another interesting theme of Sikh calendars is *Splashing of water towards the sun*- At Har-ki-Pauri, Haridwar, Guru Nanak started splashing water towards the opposite direction saying that he is irrigating his fields near Lahore and the water has got better chance to reach his fields than water being splashed by

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4 **Bhatia, H.S. and Bakshi, S.R.;** 1999, *Encyclopaedic History of the Sikhs and Sikhism*, Deep & Deep Publications Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.6

5 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.18

6 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi;**1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.9



Pandits towards the sun. This logic of Guru Nanak left the Pandits awestruck hereby emphasizing that meaningless rituals cannot do any good to mankind.<sup>7</sup> (Plate-17) Other amazing subjects include *Encounter of Guru Nanak with the demon 'Kauda'*- Kuada, a cannibal involved in the habit of kidnapping passing travellers and cooking them in his large *Karaha* (Wok). Guru Nanak Dev reformed him with his wisdom and advised him not to indulge in such demonic acts<sup>8</sup> (Plate-18); *Wali Qandhari at Panja Sahib*- Wali Qandhari lived on a hill top near Hasan Abdal (between Rawalpindi and Peshwar). While passing that way Baba Nanak paused to rest at the foot of the hill and asked Mardana to go to Wali Qandhari who controlled a hill top spring. After Guru Nanak and Mardana were refused water thrice, Nanak created a spring by striking a stone after which the Wali Qandhari's spring dried up. The enraged Wali Qandhari then rolled a huge boulder down the hill but Nanak stopped it with his hand leaving a handprint on it. The location has ever since been known as 'Panja Sahib'<sup>9</sup> (Plate-19); *Reetha Meetha* episode which relates the event of Baba Nanak turning the bitter and inedible fruit (*reethas* or wild berries) into sweet eatable (*reethas* or wild berries) for Mardana who always pretended to be hungry.

**The importance of dignity of labour** is depicted in another appealing calendar as a wealthy money lender Malik Bhago had asked Nanak to dine with him but Nanak preferred to eat at the house of Bhai Lalo- a poor carpenter. When asked why, Nanak squeezed one of the flatbreads (*rotis*) from each of the meals. Out of the money lender's bread came blood signifying that he lived off, the sufferings of others whereas the poor Bhai Lalo's humble bread oozed milk bearing witness to his honest labour.<sup>10</sup> (Plate-20) Another popular calendar

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7 **Singh, Roopinder**; 2004, *Guru Nanak- His Life and Teachings*, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, p.1  
 8 **Gill, Ranjit Singh**; 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.58  
 9 **McLeod, W.H**; 1980, *Early Sikh Traditions: A Study of the janam-sakhis*, Oxford, p.92-93  
 10 **Bhatia, S.S.**; 2004, *Malik Bhago*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.324

describes *Guru Nanak Dev's visit to Piri Pur (Multan)*, a place where *Pirs* often held congregations. *Pir Faqirs* got worried on hearing the arrival of Guru Nanak Dev and came to test him. When *Faqirs* presented a bowl of milk before the enlightened Baba Nanak, the Guru put a small jasmine flower in the milk meaning that the Piri Pur is already full of *Pirs* as is the bowl of milk and there is no place for another *Pir*, whereas the action of Guru Nanak meant that as the flower has been assimilated in the milk similarly my presence does not mean any harm to anybody.<sup>11</sup> (Plate-21)

Numerous Sikh calendars describe the *Visit of Guru Nanak to Baghdad*. On reaching Baghdad, Guru Nanak found that the water in the wells of that area was saline. The Guru got a well dug and the water of this well was clear and sweet. (Plate-22) An awakening Sikh calendar on the theme of *Mecca Pherna* or rotating of Mecca in west Asia by Guru Nanak Dev lays emphasis on the presence of God in all directions. This episode shows that while asleep Guru Nanak's feet unconsciously turned towards Ka'aba, the holy shrine. A Qazi who came to pray felt offended. He protested against Guru Nanak's show of disrespect to God's house. Quietly came Nanak's answer, "*Please turn my feet to the direction where the all pervading God is not present*". Qazi was bewildered to see Ka'aba wherever he turned Guru Nanak's feet.<sup>12</sup> (Plate-23) *Self-rotation of the chakkies* (stone grinding wheels), the subject of this calendar describes how tyrant Mughal emperor Babar jailed Guru Nanak and awarded him rigorous punishment of rotating stone grinding wheels in his prison but was astonished to find that grinding wheel in front of Guru Nanak was rotating on its own thereby Babar realising his mistake of arresting a holy and truthful man.

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11 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.13

12 **Gill, Ranjit Singh**; 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.60

Some artists have painted expressively on the subject of **Mughal tyranny and oppression during Babar's rule leading to intolerance and destruction of non-Islamic shrines and structures; depicting the anguish and pain of Guru Nanak** in a calendar titled *Eti maar payi kurlane- Tein ki dard na aya*. Here Guru Nanak is shown pointing towards wailing humanity and raising his head towards heavens in a dialogue with almighty God. There is a gloomy and sombre atmosphere in the background. (Plate-24)

In yet another unusual Sikh calendar painted in surrealistic form, an artist has depicted *Guru Nanak-The Pilgrim* wherein he has not shown his face and full body but has shown symbols of Guru Nanak which catches the imagination of many enlightened onlookers and art connoisseurs.<sup>13</sup>

A rare calendar based on the couplet *Nanak naam jahaz hai jo chade so uttare par* thereby meaning the true Name or *Nam* of God is like a ship whosoever boards it crosses the sea of life and attains enlightenment. (Plate-25) A calendar depicting the equality of genders rendered on the couplet of Guru Nanak Dev *Sau kyun manda akhiye jis jamme rajaan* was also popular which stressed upon the emancipation of woman and pleaded that why woman should be treated badly who gives birth to even kings and emperors.

Calendars showing the **bond of deep love and affection between Nanak's elder sister Bebe Nanaki and Guru Nanak Dev** where Nanaki is shown baking bread (*chappatis*) and thinking of his little brother all the time gained immense popularity. (Plate-26) A large number of portraits of Guru Nanak have been attempted in oval shapes upto the bust (Plate-27) and some calendars include the symbol of 'Ik-Onkar' in the background. (Plate-28) Some other calendars depict a few popular episodes from Guru Nanak's life in a single calendar composed in such a manner that entails mass appeal. (Plate-29)

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13 **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Portraits of Guru Nanak by contemporary artists, Roopalekha*, Vol. 39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.5

## Significant Popular subjects related to the other nine Sikh Gurus

**Guru Angad Dev**, the second Sikh Guru have been illustrated in some calendars as sitting in congregation singing the glory of God and preaching that the service to mankind is the utmost noble cause besides helping the down-trodden is the duty of every human being.

Based on the institution of **Langar or Community kitchen**, two calendars deserve special mention portraying Guru Angad's wife- Mata Khiwi engaged in preparing *Langar* and serving food with her own hands which was always available to everyone. Mata Khiwi was a noble soul and revelled in serving her master and his Sikhs. She toiled lovingly in the *Guru-ka - Langar* and served the Guru's disciples with utmost courtesy and joy. (Plate-30) The *Guru-ka-Langar* in her hands was a source of unlimited bounty and the harbinger of a new social consciousness. By promoting community feasting, the Guru sought to equalize all beyond caste, creed, race, religion or social status.<sup>14</sup>

Old and frail **Guru Amar Das**, the third Sikh Guru used to carry a pitcher of water on his shoulder during the twilight hours through rain and storm for his Guru Angad Dev so that he may take bath in the morning. Once he fell down in the darkness and a weaver's wife remarked sarcastically that he is the '*Amru Nithawan*' (a person who has no place for shelter). Guru Angad Dev blessed this devotee instead prophesising that Guru Amar Das will be "A shelter for the homeless".<sup>15</sup> (Plate-31) Selfless service (*Sewa*) and sacrifice for the comfort of his Guru prodded the attention of many painters of *Sikh Calendar art*. For the first time, Guru Amar Das conferred equal rights to the women to conduct and perform Sikh missionary and parish work thereby uplifting the oppressed and neglected gender.

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14 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.26

15 **Gill, Ranjit Singh;** 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.114

A calendar which underlines the **Sikh ideal of service to sick and suffering mankind** shows Guru Amar Das blessing and giving a bath with his own hands to a leper named '*Prema Chaudhari*' and restoring him to good health.<sup>16</sup>

In keeping with the spirit of social reformation and removal of evil traditions like *Sati Pratha* where the women who lost their husbands were prompted and forced to burn themselves in the same pyre of their husbands. Guru Amar Das forbade this practice of *Sati* as it was considered an insult to human dignity.<sup>17</sup>

The subject of a calendar depicting **the episode of rare humility and pardon shown to his master's disobedient son Datu by Guru Amar Das** who misbehaved with him and kicked him in front of the congregation draws attention. With a rare display of sweetness and humility Guru Amar Das remained seated on the *Gurgaddi* and did not utter a word of anguish. Rather he observed, "*Your foot must have been hurt by my hard bones*". Guru Sahib did not act by way of coercion but displayed his compassion underlining the Sikh tenet that a 'Gurmukh' is always humble.<sup>18</sup> These calendars always served the noble messages preached by the Gurus eulogising the basic tenets of Sikhism.

A subject painted in religious fervour and reverence showcases **Guru Ram Das laying the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar**. The devotees have been shown visiting the holy city for having a dip in the sacred *Sarovar*. This holy city became an important centre of trade and business. (Plate-32) With the help of '*Kar Sewa*' (Self-help)(Plate-33) rendered by devotees under the guidance of Sikh religious preachers the water source was turned into a beautiful *Sarovar* given the name of '*Amrit Sarovar*' meaning 'Pool of Nectar'. Initial digging

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16 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.29

17 **Bhatia, H.S. and Bakshi, S.R.;** 1999, *Encyclopaedic History of the Sikhs and Sikhism*, Deep & Deep Publications Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.14

18 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.32-33

work for the *Sarovar* was started by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru.<sup>19</sup> (Plate-34) *Guru Ram Das Sarovar nahate sab uttare paap kamate* meaning whosoever takes a dip in this *Sarovar* washes off all his sins. These lines project the importance of this holy tank inscribed on the Sikh calendars of this theme.

A calendar depicting **supreme humility and unfathomed emotions of Selfless service projects** a scene of *Guru Arjan Dev serving the lepers at Taran Taran*. In the house of Guru, protection used to be provided to the sick, poor, needy and helpless. Guru Arjan Dev knew the plight of the lepers. Even their close relatives would not touch them. Guru Arjan took special care of the lepers and got constructed a leper's home (*Pingalwara*) near the sacred *Sarovar* of Taran Taran Sahib. Guru Sahib made it a point to personally look after the lepers by providing them medicines, dresses and profusely showered his blessings on them. The Sikh devotees followed these humane examples of the Guru.<sup>20</sup> (Plate-35)

*The compilation of Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan Dev and Bhai Gurdas*- After the completion of sacred tank (*Sarovar*) (Plate-36), Guru Granth Sahib was taken to Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar with reverence and for its installation there. (Plate-37) This theme expresses how the presence of reverent Guru Granth Sahib and its first ever recitation by Baba Buddha deeply moved the devotees present in the congregation and put them into a holy trance.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the most pragmatic and popular Sikh calendar on the subject of **Martyrdom of fifth Sikh Guru- Guru Arjan Dev** at the hands of tyrant Mughals graphically illustrates the inhuman torture meted out to the Guru while making him sit on the large hot plate with burning fire underneath and hot sand was poured on his body by the tormentors but the Guru remains calm and unmoved

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19 **Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.18

20 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.40

21 *Ibid*, p.46-47

and uttered the words “*Tera bhana meetha lage*” meaning ‘Thy will is sweet’. He was also put in a boiling cauldron to shake his faith in his own religion and ideals for which he was known. Guru Sahib resisted the onslaught of emperor Jahangir on freedom of religion and as a result sacrificed his life and became the first martyr of Sikh tradition.<sup>22</sup> (Plate-38)

Guru Arjan Dev was a great reformer and always thought of innovative ideas to help the common man in their daily hardships so that their lives could be easy, comfortable and prosperous. He advocated the importance of using technology and taught the farmers to take advantage of the six-channel Persian wheel (*Chhcharta*) to enable them to draw water from the wells to irrigate their fields. This way elevating their sufferings from the arduous task of drawing water by hand.<sup>23</sup> A skilful rendering of the scene portrays Guru Arjan Dev teaching the use of Persian wheel to his followers.

The foresighted Guru Arjan Dev had insisted that oppressive and tyrant Mughal emperors would soon resist and restrict the spread of religious freedom and will try to suppress the spread of Sikhism with force and military prowess. He encouraged his followers to be ready for this onslaught and to learn the skill of horse riding. He advocated the business of buying good horses, as the main strength of the Mughal forces was good cavalry. The calendar on this subject vividly illustrates the topical content in unmatched artistic excellence. (Plate-39)

*The invincible Guru-* several efforts were made on the life of Guru Hargobind- the sixth Sikh Guru right from his infancy. A snake charmer was bribed who let loose a poisonous snake. But the great Guru overpowered the snake. (Plate-40) A calendar celebrating the concept of Miri (Temporal power) and Piri (Spiritual power) represented by Guru Hargobind Sahib. Guru Sahib used to

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22 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.39

23 **Gill, Ranjit Singh;** 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.136

tie two swords instead of usual one, one each on right and left, to symbolise a Sikh Guru's two roles and to empower the Sikhs with pride and fearlessness and make them able to protect their right to worship their own faith which was under threat from intolerant Mughal rulers. This paved the way for martial training adopted by Sikhs.<sup>24</sup>

In recording the chronicles of Sikh history and its important events, **Sikh calendars have truly played a significant role in documenting the glorious past.** A calendar which is of immense significance showcases *Bandi Chhor Guru* related to Guru Hargobind Sahib. As the tyranny of the Mughals had increased day by day and non-Muslims had to undergo great atrocities in following their faith that they were compelled to take to arms. This annoyed emperor Jahangir who ordered arrest of the Guru Hargobind in the Gwalior fort. But soon he realised his mistake and ordered Guru's release. Guru Sahib refused to accept this offer till fifty-two innocent Rajas were also freed alongwith him. Instructions were issued that whosoever holds the Gurus dress will be freed. Guru Sahib wore a special robe with fifty-two strings attached to it. Each Raja held one string and walked into freedom.<sup>25</sup> (Plate-41)

A rare Sikh calendar narrates the *Visit of Mughal emperor Jahangir to Golden Temple, Amritsar* to pay obeisance to Guru Hargobind Sahib. Emperor Jahangir entered the *parikrama* and bowed before Darbar Sahib. He made an offering of five hundred *mohras* (gold ginnies). Listening quietly to the *Kirtan* sung by Bhai Satta and Bhai Balwand, he was so much enthralled that he got engrossed in the holy recitation of the *Gurbani* for a long time.<sup>26</sup>

The other unfamiliar subject of *Sikh Calendar art* is *Guru Hargobind giving audience to queen Nur Jahan*. Nur Jahan once went to Lahore to seek the

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24 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.41-42

25 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.54-55

26 *Ibid*, p.56-57



blessings of Guru Hargobind and Guru Sahib counselled her not to engage herself in the pursuit of worldly things but instead she should try to comprehend truth and discharge the duties of a true wife.<sup>27</sup>

A calendar recounting *Guru Hargobind blessing Mata Sulakhani*. Mata Sulakhani is remembered in history as a woman of deep faith and piety. Here she is seen seeking the blessings of Guru Hargobind as she was childless. After receiving the blessings of the Guru, she had seven children who sacrificed their lives for the cause of the Guru which she accepted with faith and resignation.<sup>28</sup> (Plate-42) *Tread with care* is a delicate and inspirational subject matter of a Sikh calendar projecting an anecdote related to Guru Har Rai - once the child Guru Har Rai was strolling in the garden. A rose fell down, when it got struck with the fringe of his robe. Guru Hargobind, a symbol of sympathy and humility, told his grandson Guru Har Rai to take care while walking since, flowers and plants are also living organism, lest the act is repeated. Guru Har Rai followed this advice throughout his latter life.<sup>29</sup> *Guru Har Rai curing Dara Shikoh*- Dara Shikoh, the elder son of Shah Jahan fell ill. In spite of the best efforts of *Hakims*, he could not be cured. The rare medicine needed for his ailment was nowhere available. Information reached the royal *Hakim* that required medicine was available with Guru Har Rai. He came personally to the Guru Sahib and requested for the medicine required for the treatment and Guru Sahib also sent a pearl which was to be ground into fine powder and taken with the medicine eloquently advocating the fact that the sick persons need not be discriminated on caste, creed and religious basis.<sup>30</sup> (Plate-43)

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27 **Gill, Ranjit Singh**; 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.161

28 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.52-53

29 **Daljeet, Dr**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.45

30 *Ibid*, p.46

*Guru Harkishan dhayaiye jis dithe sab dukh jaye-* these divine words of the everyday prayer or *Ardas* of the Sikhs sum up the coveted eminence attributed to Guru Harkishan Sahib as during his short life span he performed gigantic tasks of removing the sufferings of the masses. (Plate-44) He devoted his life to eradicate epidemics and cured the worst cases with his kind and dedicated approach to serve the mankind. He visited Delhi where an epidemic was spreading. He went all over the city in narrow lanes and gave succour to all in distress without any discrimination of caste, creed and religion. His very presence and the divine look would rid the patients of their sufferings.<sup>31</sup> The subject of this calendar underlines the essence of kindness and service without any personal gain '*Nishkaam Sewa*' in Sikhism. (Plate-45)

A magnificent calendar attributed to Guru Harkishan conveys the message of humility and shunning the arrogance and pride. The episode of arrogant wise Brahmin named Chandu Lal who boosted of his knowledge in front of the Guru and the gathered devotees. Guru Sahib humbled the arrogant Pandit by making a mute and illiterate poor water carrier name Chhajju to recite *Salokas* from *Gita* and explaining its true meaning by just placing a stick on his head. This left the Pandit and the congregation dazed and amazed.<sup>32</sup> (Plate-46)

The ninth Sikh Guru- Guru Tegh Bahadur known as '*Hind-ki-Chaddar*' who sacrificed his life for the protection of Hindu Dharma and for the freedom to worship their religion marked a very significant and revolutionary event in the Sikh history. At Anandpur Sahib, the aggrieved and harassed Brahmins from Kashmir narrate their woeful stories of atrocities inflicted upon them by the Mughals forcing them to adopt Islam and abandon Hindu Dharma. In this calendar, the child Gobind Rai is shown pointing out to Guru Tegh Bahadur, his

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31 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.25

32 Ibid, p.23

father that none but he (the Guru) has the impending courage and sagacity to save the Brahmins from imminent catastrophic fate.<sup>33</sup> (Plate-47)

After the martyrdom of the great Guru Tegh Bahadur at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi where Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib is situated. The severed sacred head of the Guru Sahib was saved from humiliation by Bhai Jaita who daringly took possession of the severed head and carried it respectfully all the way to Anandpur Sahib. There Guru Gobind Singh complimented him for his sterling bravery. He embraced him and uttered the words '*Rangretta- Guru ka beta*': Rangretta is the son of the Guru.<sup>34</sup> (Plate-48) Such specimens of calendars move the inner chords of the masses and a sense of pride erupts in their hearts. This is a celebration of bravery and fearlessness shown by a humble Sikh disciple (*shishya*) in respect of his Guru.

Some calendars show heartrending scenes of real life valour and strength of character of Sikh devotees such as Bhai Mati Dass who accompanied Guru Tegh Bahadur on way to Delhi and was executed by the Mughals alongwith the Guru. His body was split into two parts with a saw but he remained a picture of firm faith and resolute devotion with his body still reverberant with the sounds of Japuji. (Plate-49) The other Sikh disciple named Bhai Sati Dass who was also martyred alongwith his brother Bhai Mati Dass in the presence of Guru Tegh Bahadur conjures empathy. He was wrapped in cotton and burnt alive by the oppressors. (Plate-50) Bhai Dyala, another follower of Guru Sahib and brother of Bhai Mani Singh was also executed alongwith Guru Sahib by putting him in a cauldron full of hot oil at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi.<sup>35</sup> (Plate-51)

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33 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.26

34 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.69

35 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.28-30

**The calendar depicting the horrific scene of mutilating of body parts of Bhai Mani Singh presents a picture of tremendous faith and deep resolve in the minds of the martyrs to protect their religion.** (Plate-52) Bhai Taru Singh another Sikh follower of Guru Sahib was also executed on the order of Zakaria Khan as his hair were removed alongwith the skull but he quietly recited the Jap when his skull was being hacked off.<sup>36</sup> (Plate-53) These calendars have been painted in a very shocking graphical detail of gory tortures where the blood of the martyrs was shed to convert them to Islam and have a very sensitive and deep-rooted impact on the heart of the Sikhs who recognise their martyrdom with deep sense of gratitude and thankfulness. These pages of the history in the form of calendars have captured the imagination of Sikhs all over the world.

Though the Sikh history is replete with stories of unparalleled valour, sacrifice and bravery, the Sikh calendars painted on the life of tenth Sikh Guru-Guru Gobind Singh right from his childhood to the most poignant and famous event on the concept of *Waho waho Gobind Singh ape Guru chela*. He chose five beloved ones (Panj Pyaras) from the congregation who are ready to sacrifice their lives and administered Nectar or *Amrit* and in turn they were asked to administer *Amrit* to the Guru thereby underlining the equality amongst the disciples and the Guru. He established Khalsa Panth on the auspicious day of Baisakhi at Anandpur Sahib and baptised the Panj Pyaras.<sup>37</sup> This theme of '*Amrit Sanchar Ceremony*' (Plate-54) is perhaps the most preferred subject of many Sikh calendars which have been painted by various artists in a number of styles and in narrative epoch-making descriptions. This calendar has been attempted by nearly all stalwart artists of *Sikh Calendar art*. As this event of birth of Khalsa was a

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36 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi;** 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.44-45

37 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.58-59

revolutionary step which changed the course of history for the Sikhs and the struggle and strive which followed afterwards against the Mughals inspired great number of artists to attempt these glorious episodes which offered such powerful content to the artists who painted them in vibrant and vivid descriptions giving stress on the subject for which Sikh martyrs were known for.

The calendar titled- *Neela ghoda banka joda hath wich baaj sajaye chalo singho prabh darshan kariye Guru Gobind Singh aye* which fascinates the masses relates to Guru Gobind Singh- the tenth Sikh Guru riding a powerful horse decked in decorative ornaments and a falcon perched on his hand, bow and arrow on one shoulder and sword hanging from his waist. (Plate-55) This calendar represents a picture of a bold valiant warrior with a deep resolve on his face yet the eyes are soft and thoughtful giving a hint of Saint Soldier-‘Sant Sipahi’. This is an ideal picture of iconic stylisation of the most loved subject in *Sikh Calendar art* and has been painted by artists in countless versions, backgrounds and compositions. Some artists have stressed upon his royal attire and others have given stress on the posture to portray the inner and outer strength of this legendary protector.

*Chidiyon se mein baaj ladaun tabhi Gobind Singh naam kahaun* meaning that ‘Call me Gobind Singh only when I transform the sparrows to fight an falcon’ is yet a poetic version of the calendar which aesthetically illustrates the concept of Guru’s power of character building and endowing the poor and meek common man with such magnificent qualities of bravery and boldness, a symbol of united fight against an oppressor howsoever strong, defeat him in the battlefield implores this calendar.

*Sura sau pehchaniye jo lade deen ke het-* Guru Gobind Singh being the charismatic hero of the Sikhs, his pictures always moved the Sikhs and the non-Sikhs alike and people looked at his pictures with admiration and gratitude in their eyes as he emerged as a saviour of the oppressed and the down-trodden and

set such glorious examples of divinity, strength and sacrifice which have no parallel in Indian history. He practiced what he preached and united the nation which stood like a rock against the tyranny and bigotry. The saga of valour, wisdom and truthfulness epitomised this Guru and naturally these divine qualities prompted the artists to work on this subject in very expressive and dedicated approach.

**Some artists have worked on the theme highlighting the kind and tender heartedness of Guru Sahib as a father embracing three of his sons (*Sahibzadas*) and the eldest riding his horse in the background.** (Plate-56)

*Uch da Pir Banana*- this theme showcases Guru Gobind Singh's sufferings in the forest of Machhiwara where he was lying wounded and uttered- '*Mitr pyare nu haal muridaan da kehna*'. Some of his Muslim admirers dressed him as a *Pir* and carried him in a palanquin to get out of the dense forest.<sup>38</sup> (Plate-57) Another emotionally charged Sikh calendar shows Guru Gobind Singh sitting in a battlefield, wounded and dying forty *Muktas* (warriors) are begging the Guru to tear the resignation they had submitted in repentance so that they may not be cursed and discarded in the brave Sikh history. (Plate-58)

One of the most popular calendars in *Sikh art* is the bricking alive of two younger sons (*Sahibzadas*) of Guru Gobind Singh at Sirhind by Wazir Khan, a Nawab of Sirhind who forcibly wanted to convert them into Islam. This represented a picture of unmoved and unshakable faith in their religion and a resolve lit large on their faces that they will prefer laying down their lives then converting into Islam. Such ghastly oppression on the small children had shaken even the followers of Islam, as it was an example of spine chilling and unprecedented torture. (Plate-59)

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38 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Machhivara*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.5-6

*Sirhind di gadhi*- where two elder sons (*Sahibzadas*) of Guru Gobind Singh, sacrificed their lives for the sake of the nation and their faith. (Plate-60)  
*Thande Burg di kaid* meaning 'Jail in cold tower'- artists have painted the sufferings of two younger sons (*Sahibzadas*) who were jailed in the cold tower alongwith their grandmother Mata Gujri before their execution.<sup>39</sup> (Plate-61)

*Dev shiva bar mohe hai shubh karman te kabhun na tarun, Na darun ar so lag jaye ladun nishchey kar apni jeet karun*- In this calendar Guru Gobind Singh has been shown in a praying gesture looking upwards resting his chin on his folded hands asking blessings from the almighty to enable him with a resolve to achieve victory in such endeavours. In the background snow capped mountains have been depicted in great detail and realism. (Plate-62)

The calendar- *The battle of Bhangani (Paonta Sahib)* represents Guru Gobind Singh at Paonta Sahib getting ready to face the future. The hill chiefs did not like the growing influence of Guru Gobind Singh and attacked him. A battle took place at Bhangani situated on the banks of Jamuna, few miles away from Paonta Sahib. It was the first battle fought by Guru Gobind Singh. The brave Sikhs emerged victorious. In this battle Pir Buddhu Shah's sons alongwith seven hundred disciples of the Pir fought for the Guru and attained martyrdom.<sup>40</sup> (Plate-63)

*The fortress at Chamkaur*- soon after Guru Gobind Singh had abandoned the Anandpur fort, his two younger sons (*Sahibzadas*), his mother Mata Gujri and innumerable Sikhs were separated from the Guru when they were crossing the river Sirsa. The moment the Guru alongwith his two elder sons (*Sahibzadas*) and other Sikhs entered the Chamkaur Fortress was surrounded by the Mughal

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39 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.37

40 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Bhangani*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.343

army. The battle ensued. Guru Gobind Singh himself armed his son Ajit Singh who while fighting fiercely against the enemy laid down his life and attained immortality.<sup>41</sup> (Plate-64) *Darbar of Sri Guru Gobind Singh* this calendar highlights the glory and resplendence of the court of Guru Gobind Singh. (Plate-65)

### Portraits of Ten Sikh Gurus

Attractive and vibrant posters/calendars depicting the Ten Sikh Gurus in head and shoulders form in oval frames and decorative and ornamental patterns are quite popular wherein there is depiction of Sikh religious symbols such as Ik-Onkar, Khanda-Kirpan and occasional appearance of Sri Guru Granth Sahib surrounded by flowers project an iconic compilation which is compact, concise and very appealing in an aesthetic parlance. The main emphasis though which is a persistent and repeated projection is that the portraits of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh are juxtaposed in these compositions with maximum space reserved for the first and the last Sikh Guru. (Plate-66)

**The subject of painting single portraits of Sikh Gurus either head and shoulders or sitting or standing full length presents an appealing prospect for artists wherein detail and importance of proper background plays a great role both artistically and aesthetically.** These calendars are surrounded by margins and borders with floral patterns and resemble like golden frames. (Plate-67-68) Articles related to specific Gurus are also incorporated and costumes, beads and pieces of jewellery present a royal and majestic look to the portraits of Guru Hargobind(Plate-69), Guru Har Rai(Plate-70), Guru Harkishan(Plate-71) and Guru Gobind Singh(Plate-72) with headgear bedecked with diamonds, pearls and the royal plume (*Kalgi*). Forts and Sikh Gurdwaras in the background add a new dimension to the particular portrait of Sikh Gurus. (Plate-73) Some portraits

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41 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi;** 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.36



though are magnificently decorative as flora and fauna, fountains and forests with waterfalls and streams lend a charm of its own enriching the portraits to superlative aesthetic content. (Plate-74)

### **Pillars of Sikh Militant strength**

Though there are numerous calendars done on the theme of Sikh martyrs yet the calendars which come to mind and are visible till this date are the ones related to Baba Deep Singh Shaheed (Martyr) who is shown engaged in a battle on to Amritsar with a large sword in his right hand and his decapitated head on his left hand who vowed to evacuate Sri Harmandir Sahib from the unholy possession of Qazi Jahan Khan. Deep Singh swore to evict the foul transgressor or die in the precincts of the Temple. While engaged in battle near Amritsar his head was cut off and when he reached the pool of Ramsar on the outskirts of the present city and there finally he succumbed. A hexagonal stone set in the paving surrounding the Golden Temple marks the spot where the hurled head landed.<sup>42</sup>

(Plate-75) Baba Deep Singh's significance is symbolic and the notable popularity of his picture dramatically demonstrates the power of the symbol. Baba Deep Singh as a symbol represents Khalsa loyalty, bravery, militant action, resistance to oppression and martyrdom.

Continuing in the same breadth the other act of bravery shown by Sukha Singh offers the similar stimulus for painters/artists. Sukha Singh with his few fighters speared the head of Massa Rangad who tried to desecrate the Golden Temple and filled the sanctorum with dancing girls and concubines.<sup>43</sup> In this calendar, powerful illustration of Sukha Singh on horseback with Massa Rangad's head mounted on the spear again emphasizing the very ideals of Sikhism of resistance and punitive action against the aggressors and invaders which naturally attracts the followers of Sikhism. (Plate-76)

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42 **McLeod, W.H;** 1995, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, The Scarecrow Press, London, p.73

43 *Ibid*, p.137

The subject which conveys the act of unprecedented bravery shown by Banda Singh Bahadur and his warriors in taking the revenge against the Nawab of Sirhind- Wazir Khan for bricking alive the two younger sons (*Sahibzadas*) of Guru Gobind Singh inspired the artists to depict this saga of valour in Sikh history in their own visual narrations as this event was a turning point and Banda Singh Bahadur after a pitched battle achieved victory over this barbarous and inhuman Nawab thereby establishing Khalsa Raj dedicated to the principles of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak Dev. (Plate-77) His portrait as a victorious Khalsa General is also a prized and precious specimen in *Sikh Calendar art*. The theme of lionizing and transformation of the weak and timid persons to brave and fearless soldiers was attempted by many artists specially the subject of Madho Das Bairagi (earlier name of Banda Singh Bahadur) sitting at the feet of Guru Gobind Singh near Nanded who was an ascetic in his early life was baptised and transformed into a powerful Sikh General who with Guru Gobind Singh's blessings achieved the task of finishing the enemies of religion.<sup>44</sup> (Plate-78) This episode has been painted in a number of styles and artistic formations effectively and expressively and is the popular subject matter of *Sikh Calendar art*.

In the series of calendars on the importance of martyrdom, the bravery of Mai Bhago has been immortalised by artists in calendars portraying her as a woman of chastity, faith and courage. Her blood boiled at the timidity of those who smitten by the ravages of a prolonged siege, disclaimed Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib and returned to their homes. Mai Bhago charged them with cowardice and lack of faith and led them back to fight with the armies of Wazir Khan of Sirhind at Khidrana now Muktsar. She herself fought with valour and redeemed the faithless.<sup>45</sup> (Plate-79)

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44 **Gill, Ranjit Singh**; 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.219

45 **Padam, Piara Singh**; 2004, *Mai Bhago*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.323

## Selfless Service (Nishkaam Sewa) or 'Sarbat Da Bhala'

The calendars celebrating the concept of service of mankind without consideration of caste, creed and religion intensely capture the spirit of Sewa Panth by reminiscing the historic event which highlights the noble act of serving water and medicine to the wounded soldiers in a battlefield where a Sikh devotee (*Sewadaar*) of the Guru- Bhai Kanhaiya is shown serving drinking water to the wounded and the thirsty Turk soldiers alongwith the Sikh soldiers irrespective of whether they are foes or friends- Sikhs or Muslims. This was perhaps the first ever instance of towering level of kindness and service and can justifiably be the beginning of Red Cross Movement and a golden example of human values and rights.<sup>46</sup> (Plate-80)

**The three basic principles of Sikhism (i) *Kirat Karo* (do honest labour), (ii) *Nam Japo* (remember the Almighty) and (iii) *Vand ke Chhako* (share whatever you have with others) have been translated into visual adaptations by artists in scores of Sikh calendars.**<sup>47</sup> (Plate-81) Through these calendars miserable hardships faced by Sikhs when they were reduced to utterly frugal living due to never ending atrocities perpetuated on them by the Mughals made them live together in a spirit of true brotherhood sharing their belongings, remembering the name of the true Guru in the face of adversities while toiling hard to sail through.

**The theme of *Kar Sewa* has been attempted umpteenth of times in Sikh calendars.** The periodic cleaning of the *Sarovar* (holy Tank) at Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar in Sikh tradition is called *Kar Sewa*.<sup>48</sup> The *Kar Sewa* of the sacred *Sarovar* inside the Golden Temple brings forth the ennobling spirit of

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46 **Shankar, Vijay.N and Kaur, Harminder;** *Sri Guru Granth Sahib- A Universal Scripture for Mankind*, Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, Haryana, 2005, p.49

47 **Cole, W. Owen;** 2004, *Nam Japna, Kirat Karni, Vand Chhakana*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.162

48 **McLeod, W.H;** 1995, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, The Scarecrow Press, London, p.119

brotherhood. The people join in this service, to undergo the process of elimination of ego. (Plate-82)

Sewa Panthi Bhai Buddha exemplified the spirit of selfless service in a glorious act of breaking the doors of his house to use them as firewood to prepare *Langar* for the *Sangat*. He did this when it was raining heavily and firewood could not be procured to cook food for the *Langar*.<sup>49</sup> (Plate-83)

### **Sri Harimandir Sahib- The Supreme Sanctorum**

Sri Harimandir Sahib literally means 'House of God' and is considered as the most sacred shrine of the Sikhs situated at Amritsar built in the 'Pool of Nectar' that is the *Amrit Sarovar*. It was designed and established by the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Arjan Dev and its foundation was got laid down by a Muslim Saint- Sain Mian Mir being a place of an epitome of Secularism. Guru Sahib set the building with four doors opened in each of the four directions signifying its accessibility to all irrespective of caste, colour, religion and creed. In this sense, the structure of this sacred building presents the unique Sikh architecture. Guru Sahib also installed 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib' here for the first time and revealed the significance of this place. Harimandir Sahib, the epitome of Sikhism and centre of Sikh religious power is also called 'Darbar Sahib'. Knowing the significance of this place, Maharaja Ranjit Singh performed the service of gold plating on it, due to which it is also known as 'Golden Temple'.<sup>50</sup> Being a source of spiritual inspiration this sacred place attracts millions of devotees and visitors from all over the world and has been a great source of inspiration for the artists who have tried to capture its myriad moods and create the spiritual aura around it and hereby projecting it as a temporal seat of divinity. (Plate-84)

As this holy place is witness to a glorious chapter of Sikh history it has been a favourite subject for painters who have tried to create those significant

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49 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.101

50 **McLeod, W.H;** 1995, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, The Scarecrow Press, London, p.102

happenings with Sikh perspective and in their specific artistic skills and have profoundly been successful in conveying the message of secularism and equality of all mankind which enumerates from this sacred place. (Plate-85) The calendars on this theme are very popular and are considered as precious souvenir by the devotees who visit this place to pay obeisance. (Plate-86) The artistic compositions incorporating this subject are diverse in style, aesthetic content, ornamental aspects and present a melange of textural, religious and visual content with intricate and elaborate juxtaposition of design variations showing Sri Harimandir Sahib in the middle and ten Sikh Gurus are shown around it in attractive and appealing formations. Ik-Onkar, Satnam and the Sikh religious symbols appear in many calendars. (Plate-87) Some calendars also carry the inscription '*Dithe sab thanv nahi tuj jeha koi*' meaning 'there is no place such as Sri Harimandir Sahib'. (Plate-88) Yet in some calendars Guru Sahibs are shown showering holy petals of flowers on this most sacred shrine. It is perhaps the most sought after Sikh calendar. (Plate-89)

### **Historical Gurdwaras**

There is a great demand for calendars of Sikh historical Gurdwaras due to their religious and historical significance as important happenings in Sikh history are associated with these Gurdwaras. Similarly 'Five Takhts' such as Sri Akal Takht Sahib, Amritsar; Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib, Patna Sahib; Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib(Plate-90); Takht Sri Hazur Sahib, Nanded(Plate-91); Takht Sir Damdama Sahib, Sabo ki Talwandi(Plate-92) symbolise a seat of authority combining both the temporal as well as eternal. All the five Takhts equally regarded by the Sikhs as high seats of religious authority, are equally venerated but Sri Akal Takht Sahib at Amritsar enjoys a special status.<sup>51</sup> The other calendars of Gurdwaras such as Nankana Sahib(Plate-93) , Panja Sahib(Plate-94), Sis Ganj Sahib, Rakab Ganj Sahib, Goindwal Sahib known as '*Sikhi da Dhura*'

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51 **McLeod, W.H;** 1995, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, The Scarecrow Press, London, p.206

(axel of Sikhism), (Plate-95) Sri Chuni Mandi, Lahore, Taran Taran Sahib(Plate-96), Sri Muktsar Sahib, Guru ki Wadali, Amritsar, Hemkunt Sahib, Paonta Sahib, Manikaran Sahib, Chamkaur Sahib(Plate-97) and Kiratpur Sahib are associated with various Sikh Gurus and their lives. Artists find it a sacred duty to paint these places with utmost veneration and respect depicting them as abodes of divinity, spirituality and piousness. These images of Gurdwaras cater to the spiritual needs of the masses/devotees.

### **Bhagats and Saints**

Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains *Bani* of Hindu *Bhagats*, *Bhats* and Muslim *Sufis*, generic names used for the works of contributors other than the Gurus. They belonged to different places were born in different castes but believed in ‘Oneness of God’ and spread the teachings of universal brotherhood. They represent four centuries of Indian religions thought beginning from the twelfth century. They are Jai Dev(Plate-98), Baba Sheikh Farid (Plate-99), Namdev(Plate-100), Trilochan (Plate-101), Ravidas (Plate-102), Surdas (Plate-103), Danna(Plate-104) , Ramanand (Plate-105), Sadhna (Plate-106), Beni(Plate-107), Sain (Plate-108), Kabir(Plate-109), Parmanand (Plate-110), Pipa (Plate-111) and Bhikan (Plate-112) making Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the most secular scripture in the world, giving the well-deserved importance and eminence to Saints, *Sufis* and *Bhagats* who had contributed to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>52</sup> Artists have worked on the theme of portraying these holy men as a mark of appreciation and in grateful reverence. Portraits related to these specific Saints such as Baba Sheikh Farid, Bhagat Ravidas, Bhagat Danna, Bhagat Ramanand, Bhagat Surdas, Bhagat Pipa, Bhagat Namdev and events associated with their lives and their teachings and messages to the mankind have been duly illustrated by the artists as they enriched the very essence of Sikhism.

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52 **Shankar, Vijay.N and Kaur, Harminder;** 2005, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib- A Universal Scripture for Mankind*, Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, Haryana, p.108

## Sectarian Mahants, Saints and Nath Yogis

Though not very popular there were some calendars relating to Sectarian and local Bhagats, Saints and Nath Yogis such as Baba Sri Chand (Plate-113), Baba Lakshmi Chand (Plate-114), Baba Balak Nath (Plate-115), Baba Gorakh Nath (Plate-116), Baba Wadbhag Singh (Plate-117) and their followers.

## Kuka Movement

In calendars on the theme of Kuka Movement and their patriotism, one can see some portraits relating to the Kuka Sikh specially the portrait of Baba Ram Singh (Plate-118) who started a reformatory movement had a sizable number of followers known as 'Kukas'.<sup>53</sup> Their contribution in opposing the British invaders and standing against their oppression and atrocities have been painted as they preached non-violence. They faced inhuman tortures and were crushed under running train.

## Barahmaha- Tukhari Chhant Mahala-1

Guru Nanak Dev recited Barahmaha (Plate-119) at Kartarpur (Ravi) soon before his merge with the light Eternal. The artists have drawn paintings based on Barahmaha depicting twelve different seasons such as Chetu, Vaiskhu, Jethu, Asaru, Savan, Bhadau, Asuni, Katakhi, Manghar, Pokhi, Maghi, Phalguni. The pangs of separation, longing for the divine love, the intense desire for union of the soul with the Supreme Being are some of the themes related to Barahmaha portrayed in Sikh calendars.<sup>54</sup>

## Royal portraits of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Apart from Sikh religious themes other specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* are portraits of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as 'Sher-e-Punjab' (Lion of Punjab) (Plate-120) with royal and majestic ambience depicting the royal palaces, his throne and other paraphernalia related to his rich, vibrant and flourishing

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53 **Singha, H.S.;** 2000, *The encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Hemkunt Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.152

54 **Dogra, Ramesh.C and Dogra, Urmila;** 2003, *The Sikh World- An encyclopaedic survey of Sikh religion and culture*, UBS Publishers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.57

kingdom. In some calendars, group of prominent figures of Maharaja's court, courtiers, soldiers and other officials have been shown capturing the essence of his powerful and magnificent regime. (Plate-121) Amongst the popular calendars of this era is the full-length portrait of Maharaja Dalip Singh attired in royal robes with a sword in his hand. (Plate-122)

### **Punjabi Culture and Traditions**

It is evident from the fact that *Sikh Calendar art* has emerged adopting innumerable themes which are basically related to Sikh religion, its message and a vehicle to convey the glorious events of Sikh history and visual accounts of life and times of Sikh Gurus. Interestingly this genre of art is flourishing well with countless new themes on *Sikh art* and culture being rendered by a new generation of artists. In this series which is in vogue for the last two or three decades there is a certain departure visible in this context and day to day life of Punjabis, their culture, ethos, customs, festivals, ceremonies, traditions, literature, music and dance forms have been illustrated in eye-catching compositions in realistic as well as more liberal artistic forms thereby continuing the traditions of promotion of *Sikh art* and culture thorough these calendars. The themes which are more apparent in such calendars are Celebration of Baisakhi (Plate-123), Village fairs (Plate-124), Gurburab celebrations, *Bhangra* and *Giddha* (folk dances) (Plate-125), Punjabi women engaged in *Phulkari* embroidery work (Plate-126), Women in *trinjan* (spinning wheel) (Plate-127), *Teej* festival- women on the swings, *Karwa chauth*, woman engaged in curd churning (Plate-128), *Lohri* festival, Punjabi bride wrapped in *Phulkari* (Plate-129), *Dastaar bandi*- ceremony of tying a turban, Ginning and spinning of cotton (Plate-130), *Sanjha Chulha*- open air group baking loaves of bread (*roti*) in indigenous mud ovens (*tandoor*), *Banjaras* selling glass bangles/ bracelets to young girls, *Rakhdi-Raksha* bandhan festival, Group singing (Plate-131), Applying henna and *Watna* to a to be married girl- a preparation before marriage ceremony, *Pani warna* ceremony- reception by the ladies of the



in-laws house, *Hola Mohalla* festival.<sup>55</sup> With the change of lifestyles after green revolution an added exposure to technology and much visible financial accomplishments, new subjects on the urban and rural projections and perspectives are inspiring the artists to tackle themes which are common and a celebration of the kitsch as the line of urban and rural divide is diminishing.

### **Techniques, Processes and Materials of Sikh Calendar Art**

The establishment of Sikh rule under the invincible leadership and military clout of Maharaja Ranjit Singh laid the foundations of a peaceful, prosperous and ever flourishing regime which was open to new ideas and winds of change swept across the Punjab. The splendour and grandeur of this empire attracted a large number of visitors, thinkers, philosophers, artists, writers, traders and businessmen. The westerners who were eager to visit Ranjit Singh's empire, some were curious and others were spellbound by the warmth and open-heartedness of Sikh rulers and the majestic and royal splendour of the Sikh courts.<sup>56</sup> They were so enthralled with the exotic stance of this empire that they loved to paint on numerous themes connected with the empire and produced some fantastically rich and vibrant portraits of royalties and noble men aristocrats and even were fascinated with the common man and their daily chores and trades.<sup>57</sup> The technique of painting in oil on canvas was introduced by them and later on the introduction to printing press (Plate-132) and other printing techniques gave the much needed impetus to the works of art which were being reproduced in great numbers. This felicitated the spread of mass reproduction of paintings on Sikh themes painted by Indian and European artists and propelled a revolution of sorts and the masterpieces of *Sikh art* which were confined to elite and aristocratic persons reached the homes of common man.<sup>58</sup>

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55 **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune  
56 **Aijazuddin, F.S;** 1979, *Sikh Portraits by European Artists*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p.13  
57 **Kessar, Urmi;** June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.119  
58 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.17-18

To further understand the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* or *Sikh Popular Art* which was spreading through these calendars, a complete acquaintance with its printing techniques, processes and materials introduced by the Europeans needs deep study in order to follow the patterns which advanced the cause of its popularity and spread. The original works of art which were out of reach of the common man were available for a few *annas* in printed versions and as they were being sold in fairs, festivals, bazaars, religious congregations and even at printing presses. Their popularity grew by leaps and bound because of their easy availability and this further promoted the commercial aspect as with in a few decades of the emergence of new printing techniques business houses, traders, shopkeepers adopted them as a mode of advertising their goods and services in a big way making them a commercially viable proposition.<sup>59</sup> Besides, being a popular form of spreading lofty ideals of Sikhism, their ethos, principles such as Universal brotherhood, Dignity of labour, Oneness of God, Equality of women, Love of mankind and other glorious pages from Sikh history of which every Sikh is proud of.

### **Main Techniques/Processes and Materials of Sikh Calendar Art**

(i) Woodblock Printing

(ii) Lithography

(a) Chromolithography or Colour Lithography

(b) Oleography

(iii) Photomechanical Printing

(a) Line Blocks

(b) Half-tone Blocks/ Duo Prints

(c) Albumen Prints

(d) Bromide Prints

(e) Photo-litho transfer or Photolithography

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59 **Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine;** 2003, *Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.1

(iv) Offset Printing

(v) Digital Printing

### (i) Woodblock Printing

One of the earliest printing techniques introduced by the Europeans in the Punjab was 'Woodblock Printing' which was adopted by printing presses as it was simple yet cost effective. This saw a sudden spurt in reproduction of illustrated *Janam Sakhis* and other religious *pothis* primarily in line drawing form. (Plate-133) Thereby it opened the doors to printing of Sikh calendars on themes of Sikh Gurus and events related to their life and times for propagation of Sikh religion.<sup>60</sup> Excellent specimens related to this process or technique are found in abundance in the rare collection of J.Lockwood Kipling, former principal of Mayo School of Art, Lahore who thronged the streets of Lahore and Amritsar and painstakingly collected each specimen. He not only collected these because he was awestruck with this novel art form but also spent valuable time in understanding their meaning and essence by decoding and explaining the contents for the benefit of the westerners. His deliberation and understanding on this subject greatly enhanced their true value in perspective of art and aesthetics embedded in these narrative illustrations. This collection is housed in Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

### Technique of Woodblock Printing

The art of printing from woodblocks was invented in China during the European Dark Ages.<sup>61</sup> Originally woodblock prints were used in Northern China in the T'ang period (627-649A.D) to promulgate Buddhist doctrines. The idea that text and illustrations could be easily replicated spread through the Orient rapidly and was well established in Europe by the early fifteenth century, when it

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60 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.18

61 **Griffiths, Antony;** 1980, *Prints and Print making: An Introduction to the History and Techniques*, British Museum Publications Limited, London, p.13

was turned to the service of the Church, the state and the universities.<sup>62</sup> In both areas, the early woodcuts were for the most part simple holy images for sale to pilgrims.<sup>63</sup> The technique of woodblock printing is a form of '*Relief Printing processes*' because the actual surface from which the printing is to be done stands in relief above the rest of the block which has been cut away. Ink is applied to the surface of the block, and is transferred to paper by applying a light vertical pressure by burnishing or putting through a printing press.<sup>64</sup> (Plate-134)

In woodblock printing the material used is a wooden block(Plate-135), usually about an inch thick. It is always part of the plank of a tree of fairly soft wood e.g. pear, sycamore or beech, sawn lengthwise along the grain, and planed down until smooth. Before use it must be seasoned to ensure that it will not warp or crack. The artist's design is either drawn directly on the block or on a sheet of paper which is then glued to its surface. The cutter uses a knife similar to a penknife and carefully cuts all the wood away from the sides of the lines which the artist has drawn. Chisels and gouges can be used to cut away any large areas of space. (Plate-136) When finished the image will appear as a network of lines standing out in relief. The cutting of the block is a skilled business, and from early times it was usual for the artist only to make the design on the surface of the block and then hand it over for cutting to a professional woodcutter. (Plate-137) It will be obvious that the cutter can only cope with a design drawn in lines, and if shading is required to conventions a parallel or cross hatching must be used; with cross hatching the cutter has laboriously to cut out all the interstices between the hatchings. If a mistake is made and too much has been cut away, the cutter has to make a hole in the block and insert a new plug of wood. The surface

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62 **Simmons, Rosemary and Clemson, Katie;** 1988, *The Complete Manual of Relief Print-Making*, Dorling Kindersley Limited, London, p.20

63 **Gascoigne, Bamber;** 1986, *How to identify Prints- A Complete guide to manual and mechanical processes from woodcut to ink jet*, Thames and Hudson, London, p.5

64 **Simmons, Rosemary and Clemson, Katie;** 1988, *The Complete Manual of Relief Print-Making*, Dorling Kindersley Limited, London, p.13

of the block is inked using a dabber or roller (Plate-138); the printing ink has to be of a stiff consistency in order to remain on the raised parts of the block and not flows into the hollows. The printing is done in a press which is the same or at least works on the same principle as an ordinary type printing press; pressure is applied uniformly and vertically but need only be light(Plate-139). Woodcuts can be hand printed without using a press. The block can simply be stamped on to the paper, or paper can be laid on the block and the ink transferred by rubbing on the back of the paper.<sup>65</sup>

The printing inks used for woodblock printing are oil-based (Plate-140) and Japanese water-based inks. (Plate-141) It should be kept in mind that while tracing the design on the wood when printed it will be reverse of the original design and thus necessary care should be taken to translate the original design in reverse.

## (ii) Lithography Printing

The lithographic process (the Litho suffix means stone in Greek) (Plate-142) that employs the flat stone surface does not need any carving or incision as in other printing procedure it is a '*Planographic Printing*' just like the offset, its well-known offshoot. Lithography printing was invented in 1798 in Munchen, Germany by Aloys Senefelder (1771-1834) (Plate-143) who, according to legend, by chance discovered the quality of a local stone that once drawn with buttery ink, could transfer on paper the original design.<sup>66</sup>

Lithography is based on the chemical fact that grease and water repel each other. If marks are drawn on a suitable printing surface in some greasy medium, the surface can be printed from in the following way. The surface is dampened with water, which settles only on the unmarked areas since it is repelled by the greasy drawing medium. Secondly, the surface is rolled over with greasy printing

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65 **Griffiths, Antony**; 1980, *Prints and Print making: An Introduction to the History and Techniques*, British Museum Publications Limited, London, p.13

66 **Castelli, Enrico and Aprile, Giovanni**; 2005, *Divine Lithography*, United Multicolour Printers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.40

ink, which will adhere one to the drawn marks, the water repelling it from the rest of the surface. (Plate-144) Finally the ink is transferred to a sheet of paper by running paper and the printing surface together through a scraper press. (Plate-145) The lithographic process is often described as surface printing in order to distinguish it from the relief and intaglio processes. Such in essence is the principle of lithography. The actual operations are of course much more complicated.<sup>67</sup>

The printing surface used was originally stone (Plate-146) (when the term 'lithography' which means stone drawing) this had to be capable of absorbing grease and water equally, and the only really suitable type was the limestone quarried in the Solenhofen region of Bavaria.<sup>68</sup> (Plate-147) The stone can be drawn on in any way as long as the drawing medium is greasy; this explains the bewildering variety of appearances that lithograph can present. The most usual medium is chalk, (Plate-148) for which crayons of various finenesses are available. The other methods are pen and wash. If chalk is used the printing surfaces must be given a grain by grinding with an abrasive, but for pen or wash the surface has to be smooth or have only a fine grain. Once the drawing is finished the artist's task is done; the rest is the province of the printer, whose operations are complicated enough to make it unusual for the artist to do his own printing; he may supervise, but he needs the expert's aid. One difficulty is that the stone or plate has to be prepared before printing, and the exact process of preparation varies according to its surface, and also the technique of the drawing. Briefly the surface must be washed with dilute nitric acid to fix the image on the stone, and rubbed with gum Arabic ('desensitised') to prevent any further grease settling on the stone. Only then can be washed and inked for printing. The 'gum etch' has to

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67 **Griffiths, Antony**; 1980, *Prints and Print making: An Introduction to the History and Techniques*, British Museum Publications Limited, London, p.101

68 **Gascoigne, Bamber**; 1986, *How to identify Prints- A Complete guide to manual and mechanical processes from woodcut to ink jet*, Thames and Hudson, London, p.20

be done only once before printing, but the application of water and then ink must be repeated between each impression.<sup>69</sup>

A lithographic stone may preserve a drawing for years. (Plate-149) The drawing if properly preserved, may be renovated by means of apt chemical treatment and employed again. When the drawing is no longer needed, it can be cancelled by graining the stone, a procedure that makes the stone new again; ready for the next drawing.<sup>70</sup>

Once tuned up, lithography gave the artists the possibility to use softer tools as brush, pencil (Plate-150) and pen (Plate-151) (in comparison with chisels and gravers), a quality useful in rendering calm and romantic atmospheres. Its success in the nineteenth century was fast and extraordinary.

#### (a) Chromolithography or Colour Lithography

Chromolithography is a method of making multi-colour prints. This type of colour printing stemmed from the process of lithography and it includes all types of lithography that are printed in colour. Chromolithography replaced colour prints by hand and eventually served as a replica of a real painting. Depending on the number of colours present a chromolithograph could take months to produce. To make what once referred to as a “chromo”, a lithographer- using a finished painting as a model- gradually built and corrected the print to look as much as possible like the painting in front of him sometimes using dozens of layers. The process can be very time consuming and cumbersome, depending upon the skill of the lithographer.<sup>71</sup>

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69 **Griffiths, Antony**; 1980, *Prints and Print making: An Introduction to the History and Techniques*, British Museum Publications Limited, London, p.101

70 **Castelli, Enrico and Aprile, Giovanni**; 2005, *Divine Lithography*, United Multicolour Printers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.40

71 **Myers, Bernard S.**; 1969, *Mc Graw-Hill Dictionary of Art*, Mc Graw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, London, p.74

Chromolithographs begin to emerge in the 1870's that is colour images printed from multiple stone blocks.<sup>72</sup> The process of chromolithography is chemical, because an image is applied to a stone or zinc plate with a grease-based crayon (limestone and zinc plate are two commonly used materials in the production of chromolithographs). After the image is drawn onto stone, the stone is gummed with gum arabic solution and weak nitric acid, and then inked with the oil-based paints and passed through a printing press alongwith a sheet of paper to transfer the image to the paper. Colours may be added to the print by drawing the area to receive the colour on a different stone and printing the new colour onto paper. Each colour in the image must be separately drawn onto a new stone or plate and applied to the paper one at a time. It was not unusual for twenty to twenty five stones to be used on a single image. Each sheet of paper will therefore pass through the printing press, as many times as there are colours in the final print. In order that each colour is placed in the right position in each print, each stone in each print, each stone or plate must be precisely registered, on lined up, on the paper using a system of register marks.

### **Stages of execution**

Chromolithography is such precise job that it required the control of many external factors, ranging from humidity to dust; therefore the press was established in the countryside and in buildings newly built for the purpose. (Plate-152) Artists painted in well-lighted studios which were comfortable enough for them to be working therefore several hours a day. The key figure of the production was director or chief graphic designer entrusted with the responsibility of guiding the team of drawers. Once the oil painting to be reproduced had been copied by the artist himself on the cartoon of suitable size for printing, a *masterstone* was produced. On this stone, the chief graphic designer drew the lines that bordered all the different selected colours on the

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72 **Pinney, Christopher**; 2004, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.14



transferred image that had already been sketched. Each of the drawers then worked on one stone attributed to a specific colour with the most appropriate tool: a pen, a brush or a pencil, within the lines drawn on the *masterstone's* print. The results were of the highest quality only if the team was able to work in harmony: only then it was possible to obtain harmony of colours. After the necessary corrections were made to each of the stones, they were printed on proof paper to obtain a progressive proof. This was a precious report of the work, to be kept in order to paint again one of the stones that may have been damaged during the printing. In order to facilitate the reproduction of each drawing, an extra print of the stone was made by using each ink. The last print of the progressive proof, bearing all colours constituted the *for press* copy: the fresh prints were continuously compared to it to be sure that the quality was not declining because of the exhausting of one of the matrixes. The *for press* copy was the prototype, and it was always compared to the printed sheet. As a matter of fact, the workers were encouraged to match with its quality in order to emulate the perfect result already obtained. By observing the progressive proofs it is possible to understand some of the stylistic choices made in order to obtain the best results: the secrets of the chief graphic designer hidden even to the sharp eyes of the skilled observer, are unveiled in the progressive proof. The first colour e.g. *flesh* (a rosy complexion tint), yellow, pale blue were given with large brushstrokes, black and relevant details in dark colours were executed with the finest pen, the pencil was largely used for *chiaroscuro*.<sup>73</sup>

Generally speaking, colours were printed at first from the lighter ones to which was then added more intense and dark ones. The analysis of progressive proofs led us to notice that fewer than a dozen colours were used and that the mastery was to obtain the requested nuances by combining the few available

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73 **Castelli, Enrico and Aprile, Giovanni;** 2005, *Divine Lithography*, United Multicolour Printers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.42

colours. In the middle of the colours sequence there was always a black layer that needs some more considerations. It was executed with a thin pen which added a graphic quality to the whole, just as *kohl* adds sharpness to the eyes. Lastly varnish was used to finish the print and protect the colours. Unfortunately the gloss painting employed was not as steady as the colours: with time it got yellow giving old lithograph the characteristic yellow patina that obliterates the brilliant colours that were once its beauty.<sup>74</sup>

Chromolithographs using multiple colour blocks and occasionally the application of varnish, produced images of an extreme tactility. Colours were rich and heavy with an astonishing depth and sensuality.<sup>75</sup>

### **(b) Oleography**

The art or process of printing pictures in oil colours by a method called Chromolithography is known as Oleography.<sup>76</sup> Oleographs (Plate-153) developed from chromolithography became very popular towards the end of the nineteenth century. The process was the same but the inks used were extremely oils and differed in texture. When heavily varnished, the effect of an oleograph was almost identical to that of an oil painting. It produced closest resemblance to the original oil painting.<sup>77</sup> The main difference between oleograph and chromolithograph is the choice of paints in the first category oil colours are used in printing process while in the second category, coloured printing inks are used.

The oleograph came in a wide range of sizes, although they almost never exceeded 70x50 cms in size and indeed the earliest prints were of that size. A majority of the prints came in two sizes- 50x36 cms and 35x25 cms. The format was determined by the size of the stone and although larger stones were

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74 **Castelli, Enrico and Aprile, Giovanni**; 2005, *Divine Lithography*, United Multicolour Printers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi p.44

75 **Pinney, Christopher**; 2004, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.14

76 **Peter and Murray, Linda**; 1991, *The Penguin dictionary of Art and Artists*, Penguin Books, p.300

77 **Turner, Jane**; 1996, *The Dictionary of Art*, Macmillan Publishers Limited, London, p.399

available, they were too unwieldy given that they weighed several hundred kilos.<sup>78</sup> Raja Ravi Varma was the pioneer who introduced oleography printing in India and reproduced his own paintings in bewitching oleographs, (Plate-154) which became extremely popular object d' art and are being acquired by art connoisseurs and collectors even today. It is only through oleographic reproductions his paintings attracted a large audience, as these were look alike of the original works.

### (iii) Photomechanical Printing

One after the other new processes with more improvisation in technology and advancement in printing aspects accelerated the process of production of better quality prints/calendars facilitating mass production and reduction in cost. In photomechanical printing processes, the printing matrix is produced by methods based on photographic technologies rather than mechanical work carried out by the print maker. The invention and development of photography in the 1820's and 1830's revolutionised the technical processes of print making, though it was some time before its impact was fully realized. Many photomechanical processes are based on the discovery made by Alphonse Louis Poitevin (Plate-155) in 1855 that bichromated gelatine is sensitive to light: it hardens when exposed to light and remains soft where shielded from light.<sup>79</sup>

#### (a) Line Blocks

The Line Block printing process was developed in the 1870's and by the 1890's it had become the traditional method of producing printing blocks photomechanically.<sup>80</sup> The traditional method of block making was developed from the gillotage process. A zinc plate is coated with bichromated albumen or some other light-sensitive material. This is exposed to light under a high contrast negative; the plate is then rolled over with ink and the soft unexposed albumen

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78 **Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine;** 2003, *Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.14

79 **Turner, Jane;** 1996, *The Dictionary of Art*, Macmillan Publishers Limited, London, p.617

80 *Ibid*, p.617

washed away. The plate is next dusted with a powder which adheres only to the tacky ink and which is heated to form a resist; thus the background of the plate can be etched down to leave the lines of the design standing in relief, protected by the resist. The etching process has to be repeated four times, each time strengthening the sides of the lines with further applications of resist powder. The plate is then cleaned and may be used for printing in any relief printing press. The line block is simple to produce but is severely limited in that it can only reproduce line or granular originals. Printing only blacks, it cannot handle transitions of tone in grey. The appearance of a line block is similar to that of a woodcut and a wood engraving. When it has been used to make a facsimile of a woodcut or wood engraving, comparison with an original will not show that the reproduction has a greater regularity and hardness of line.<sup>81</sup>

#### **(b) Half-tone Blocks/ Duo Prints**

To overcome the inherent limitations of the line block process, the half-tone method was developed so that areas of tone could be reproduced.<sup>82</sup> The procedure adopted is to photograph the original through a cross-line screen of parallel horizontal and vertical lines to produce a negative composed of lines of dots of larger or smaller size depending on the intensity of tone in the original. This negative is then used to make a block in the same way as with a line block. The purpose of this procedure is to break up a tonal original into a series of black dots so that it can be turned into a relief block; yet the dots are so small that they are individually invisible to the human eye, except under magnification. They are instead perceived as greys, in the same way as the eye perceives the lines on a television screen as a continuous tonal image.<sup>83</sup> The half-tone process reduces visual reproductions to a binary image that is printed with only one colour of ink.

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81 **Griffiths, Antony**; 1980, *Prints and Print making: An Introduction to the History and Techniques*, British Museum Publications Limited, London, p.122

82 **Turner, Jane**; 1996, *The Dictionary of Art*, Macmillan Publishers Limited, London, p.617

83 **Griffiths, Antony**; 1980, *Prints and Print making: An Introduction to the History and Techniques*, British Museum Publications Limited, London, p.123

This binary reproduction relies on a basic optical illusion- that these tiny half-tone dots are blended into smooth tones by the human eye. “Half-tone” can also be used to refer specifically to the image that is produced by this process.

Half- tone relief blocks have one complication. It will be obvious that the closer the mesh of lines on the screen, the greater will be accuracy of detail. But if a very fine screen is used (one hundred and fifty lines or more to the inch), the resulting dots are so tiny that they can only be printed successfully on absolutely smooth paper. This explains why newspapers, which have to print on coarse newsprint, are forced to use wide mesh screens, while the high-quality plates in books are always printed on a special glossy chalk-coated ‘art’ paper. A half-tone print is always easy to recognise; under a magnifying glass the mesh of dots will become clear.<sup>84</sup> The first commercially successful use of the half-tone was patented in Germany and Britain in 1882 by Georg Meisenbach.(Plate-156) The principle of half-tone printing was first suggested by William Henry Fox Talbot (Plate-157) in 1852 but was not developed commercially until the 1880’s.<sup>85</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century in Punjab, many prints/calendars using half-tone plate were printed with different grains in two colours imparting to it a sense of depth and a photographic quality. Nonetheless, the plates printed employing these methods were unable to remotely match the brightness and exciting qualities of the oleographs. It was only in the 1920’s that a sizable number of half-tone prints entered the market. Since these prints carried the name of ‘*Karachi Prints*’ (Plate-158), it is likely that this technique was first pioneered by the firm, Brijbasi & Sons, which was founded in 1922 in Karachi and which distributed widely across western India. The firm moved to Mathura after Independence and is still one of the major printing and distributing firms in the Indian display-print business. Most half-tone prints are small pictures printed

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84 **Griffiths, Antony**; 1980, *Prints and Print making: An Introduction to the History and Techniques*, British Museum Publications Limited, London, p.123-124

85 **Turner, Jane**; 1996, *The Dictionary of Art*, Macmillan Publishers Limited, London, p.617

on a white sheet of 39x25 cms, the print in the centre never exceeding 20x15 cms in size. The advantage of these prints was that they could be produced on the letterpress. Small treadle presses of the famous Heidelberger system(Plate-159) were common in every Indian backyard and many small print shops relied on these to churn out half-tone prints. The half-tones, looked more like magazine prints.<sup>86</sup>

### (c) Albumen Print

The process for producing albumen prints was introduced by Louis-Desire Blanquart-Evrard(Plate-160) in 1851. It soon became the most widely used means of producing photographic prints in the nineteenth century until 1895. Paper was coated with salted albumen derived from egg white and sensitised with silver nitrate before use. The print was made by placing this sensitised paper in a printing frame beneath a negative and exposing it to day light until an image appeared. (Plate-161) When fixed, the image was a red-brown colour with yellow highlights. From the mid 1860's lightly tinted albumen paper became popular as a means of masking or disguising the yellow highlights; which many photographers found objectionable. Most albumen prints were gold toned to the rich purple-brown image colour often described as sepia and accepted by many observers as typical of the nineteenth century photograph.<sup>87</sup>

### (d) Bromide Print

The term applied to the first type of gelatine silver bromide development paper, which was introduced in 1880. By the turn of the century bromide prints were in widespread use and remained the standard means of producing monochrome prints. The term 'Bromide Print' was commonly used until the 1920's but with the description gradually fell into disuse.<sup>88</sup>

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86 **Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine;** 2003, *Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.15

87 **Turner, Jane;** 1996, *The Dictionary of Art*, Macmillan Publishers Limited, London, p.648

88 *Ibid*, p.648

### (e) Photo-litho transfer or Photolithography

Photolithograph is a lithograph made from a photographic impression on a sensitised stone or plate. It was just attempted in France in the 1830's when Nie'pce sensitised a lithographic stone with bitumen and oil of lavender.<sup>89</sup> Later on experiments began at least as early as the 1850's to achieve an image photographically on the surface of a lithographic stone. It was a natural development for lithography had proved itself the most versatile of all printing processes and photography was the latest scientific marvel in the business of image making.<sup>90</sup>

In the nineteenth century, various methods of making photolithographs were used. Most were based on the discovery in 1855 of the light-sensitive properties of bichromated gelatine. Early photolithographs are in appearance very similar to ordinary lithographs. When the process is used to make a facsimile of a lithograph, the result can be very deceptive and can only be distinguished from the original by close composition. In the same way it will produce deceptive facsimiles of original drawings of a granular texture. Photolithographic lines and half-tone dots have softer edges and are less sharply defined than those printed by letter press.<sup>91</sup>

The photographic transfer process was introduced in India soon after 1900 by Dadasaheb Phalke (1870-1944), (Plate-162) a versatile artist who was to later become the father Indian cinema. Phalke was trained in England in printing technology and had set up his studio in Malavli that not only worked for the Ravi Varma Press, but also for other printers who set up shop in the area.<sup>92</sup>

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89 **Turner, Jane;** 1996, *The Dictionary of Art*, Macmillan Publishers Limited, London, p.618

90 **Gascoigne, Bamber;** 1986, *How to identify Prints- A Complete guide to manual and mechanical processes from woodcut to ink jet*, Thames and Hudson, London, p.41

91 **Griffiths, Antony;** 1980, *Prints and Print making: An Introduction to the History and Techniques*, British Museum Publications Limited, London, p.125

92 **Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine;** 2003, *Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.15

#### (iv) Offset Printing Process

Offset printing is the most commonly used printing method today. It is a printing technique whereby ink is spread on a metal plate with etched images, then transferred to an intermediary surface such as a rubber blanket and finally applied to paper/disc by pressing against the intermediary surface.<sup>93</sup> Offset printing works in a simple manner. It uses three cylinders to transfer the image onto the substrate. The first cylinder is mounted with the printing plate. The image on the printing plate is 'right' reading or written with the right side up. The first cylinder is inked and the image transferred or offset onto the second cylinder which is mounted with a rubber blanket. The image on to second cylinder is thus reversed or becomes 'wrong' reading. Finally the image is transferred from the blanket cylinder onto the third cylinder or the substrate. The substrate is mounted on the third cylinder also known as the impression cylinder. The image once again is reversed and becomes 'right reading or right side up in the printed version.'<sup>94</sup> (Plate-163)

The first rotary offset lithographic printing press was created in England and patented in 1875 by Robert Barclay. This development combined mid 1800's transfer printing technologies and Richard March Hoe's 1843 rotary printing press(Plate-164) - a press that used a metal cylinder instead of a flat stone. The offset cylinder was covered with specially treated cardboard that transferred the printed image from the stone to the surface of the metal. Later, the cardboard covering of the offset cylinder was changed to rubber, which is still most commonly used material.<sup>95</sup>

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93 **Myers, Bernard S.**; 1969, *Mc Graw-Hill Dictionary of Art*, Mc Graw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, London, p.243

94 **National Institute of Industrial Research Board**; 2003, *A Complete Book on Printing Technology*, Asia Pacific Business Press, New Delhi, p.224

95 **Meggs, Philip B.**; 1998, *A History of Graphic Design*, Third edition, John Wiley & Sons, New York, p.146-150



A unique characteristic of offset printing is that the image and non-image areas are on the same surface level. The printing method uses the chemical fact that oil and water do not mix to print from a single surface level. In fact, offset printing acquired this method from lithography and thus it is often referred to as litho offset printing as well. Compared to other printing methods, offset printing is best suited for cost effectively producing large volumes of high quality prints in an economically sound manner that requires little maintenance. Offset printing is the cheapest method to produce high quality printing on commercial printing quantities.<sup>96</sup>

### **The Printing Process**

Offset printing is something almost every commercial printer is involved in. However the quality of offset printing often depends on the experience of the printer and the equipment used. There are three main steps in the printing process:

#### **(a) Pre-press Production:**

Once the artwork has been approved it needs to be converted to films and plates for printing. The film negatives are created from the digital files. The images from the negatives are then transferred onto the printing plates much like developing photographs. Different materials from paper to aluminium are used to produce plates. Each of the four colours- Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black has a separate plate. (Plate-165)

#### **(b) The Press Run:**

Offset printing works on the principle that oil and water do not mix. The Press run or offset printing process or offset press is made of the feeding system, the printing system or three cylinders, the inking system and the delivery system. There are different types of offset presses as well that are used for the press run.

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96 **Kippan, Helmut;** 2001, *Handbook of print media: technologies and production methods*, Springer, New York, p.354

The press run starts with a blank substrate and ends with a printing substrate. (Plate-166)

### (c) Bindery:

The bindery is the stage when the printed substrate is given the final treatment before it is declared ready for use. If the substrate is in the form of a large roll, it is cut into required size sheets. (Plate-167)

Thus, the offset printing process involves a number of stages and the hardwork of many professionals. It is no wonder that offset printing is a large industry in itself and the applications of offset printing are increasing day by day.<sup>97</sup>

### Types of Offset Presses

There are two main kinds of offset presses:

#### (a) Sheet fed Offset Press

In a sheet fed press the substrate is fed to the press in single sheets and each sheet is printed individually. The printing substrate is then collected in a tray and stacked neatly. Sheet fed presses often give better quality than web fed presses. However, the latter can be more economical for larger runs. (Plate-168)

#### (b) Web fed Offset Press

In a web fed press, the substrate is fed to the press from a continuous roll. After printing the roll is either rewound onto a spool or cut into sheets depending on the requirements. Web fed presses print at a much higher speed than sheet fed presses and hence are more economical for larger runs.<sup>98</sup> (Plate-169)

Advantages of offset printing compared to other printing methods include consistent high image quality- offset printing produces sharp and clean images and type more easily than letterpress printing because the rubber blanket conforms to the texture of the printing surface; quick and easy production of

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97 **National Institute of Industrial Research Board**; 2003, *A Complete Book on Printing Technology*, Asia Pacific Business Press, New Delhi, p.230

98 *Ibid*, p.62

printing plates; longer printing plate life than an direct litho presses because there is no direct contact between the plate and the printing surface. Properly developed plates running in conjunction with optimised inks and fountain solution may exceed run lengths of a million impressions.

Although offset printing developed in Europe before the II World war but it reached India only after Independence, as it was necessary to change the presses and acquire the new ones, an investment beyond the range of the majority of existing lithographs at that time. But the most revolutionary invention that made offset the only system employed to print colour images was the separation that reduced the number of impressions to four main colours: Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black.<sup>99</sup> In 1960 at Sivakasi, the printing centre in the south where the calendar business was concentrated, two-colour offset machines were installed and shortly thereafter four-colour high speed presses from the German Democratic Republic.<sup>100</sup>

#### (v) Digital Printing

Digital printing is printing using digital techniques developed for computer printers such as ink jet or laser printers.<sup>101</sup> The use of digital printing, applications and integrations of these applications into traditional print markets is rapidly expanding. Digital, unlike the traditional print processed, is a direct to output device process thus it does not employ a “pre-press” operation as would be associated with traditional commercial printing technologies i.e. lithographic printing. In digital printing, an image is sent directly to the printer using digital files such as PDFs and those from graphic software such as illustrator and Indesign. This eliminates the need for a printing plate, which is used in offset

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99 **Castelli, Enrico and Aprile, Giovanni**; 2005, *Divine Lithography*, United Multicolour Printers Pvt Ltd., p.45

100 **Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine**; 2003, *Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.15

101 **Romano, Frank. J.**; 2000, *Digital Printing- Mastering On-Demand and Variable Data Printing for Profit*, Windson Professional Information, LLC, California, USA, p.16

printing, which can save money and time. Without the need to create a plate, digital printing has brought about fast turnaround and times and printing on demand. Instead of having a print large, pre-determined runs, requests can be made for as little as one print. Digital methods are being worked on at a fast rate to improve quality and lower costs.<sup>102</sup>

The digital printing process differs from lithography and letterpress printing in several ways: as every print can be different because printing plates are not required, as in traditional methods; there is no need to bring the image “up to colour” and check for registration and position; the ink or toner does not permeate the substrate as does conventional ink but forms a thin layer on the surface and may in some systems be additionally adhered to the substrate by using fuser fluid with heat process (toner) or UV curing process (ink). The other distinct difference between the use of digital applications and traditional print is the relationship between the equipment and ink delivery system. Output devices such as inkjet printer are developed with specific ink and ink delivery system in place which is unique to each digital press.

The two kinds of equipment used to produce digital printing are the Direct Imaging Press (DI) (Plate-170) and the Digital Colour Printer. (Plate-171) Both the Direct Imaging Press (DI) and the Digital Colour Printer are used for quick, short runs of digital printing, but they are quite different and give different results. DI presses are based on an offset or conventional printing method that develops the images automatically and may be waterless. Digital Colour Printers use electrophotography, Ink Jet to develop the images with toners, dry ink or dyes. A DI press usually produces better quality results, but digital printing done with a Digital Colour Printer is still comparable with traditional offset printing.<sup>103</sup>

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102 **Romano, Frank. J.**; 2000, *Digital Printing- Mastering On-Demand and Variable Data Printing for Profit*, Windson Professional Information, LLC, California, USA, p.4

103 Ibid, p.16

Digital printing technology has enhanced the quality of images in such a phenomenal way that photographic as well as artistic creations commercial or otherwise can be turned into gigantic sizes and proportions in minutes saving the laborious and tedious job works done by painters. Now a bus wrap or a building wrap with this technology has enabled the graphic artists and printers to transfer mammoth and eye-catching visuals on permanent and waterproof vinyl and flex sheet surface upto a size of hundred feet and more. We can easily print on thin plastic, fabrics, poster boards, foam boards, metal, glass, wood, paper, ceramics and tiles. Benefiting from these technological advancements in documenting and transferring of images through electronic media the realm of *Sikh Calendar art* has apparently been stretched to cross new boundaries and shores. Images created by artists on Sikh themes are easily available in other continents in fact it has acted as a boon to the popularity and propagation of this genre of art, which has its admirers and collectors in almost all the countries where Punjabi settlers have made their homes. The rich traditions of Punjabi culture and Sikh religion a harbinger of universal ideas of peace, prosperity and goodwill of human fraternity are being shared by the vast family of mankind. In the true sense of the word *Sikh Calendar art* has acted as a goodwill ambassador of Sikh religion and ethos.

The sources of *Sikh Calendar art* are both diverse and numerous as being a popular genre of *Sikh art*, it has been successfully catering to the manifestations of humanism and essence of its content is embedded in the high annals of Sikh history, culture and traditions which proliferate a long saga of valour and sacrifices. The hallmark of Sikhism disseminates spirituality, service to mankind and upholding of high moral and ethical personal piousness in day-to-day living, as preached and practiced by the Great Ten Sikh Gurus. The art which has taken upon itself to carry forward the flame of spirit of Khalsa has set a special sacred task for its promoters, propagators, artists and collectors. Thus the all encompassing spirit of Sikhism was primarily featured in the *Janam Sakhis*<sup>1</sup> (traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak) - the perennial source of themes, imagery and content of *Sikh Calendar art* which later spread to more elaborate frescoes and wall paintings depicted in a stylized form impacting the minds and souls of a large populace with divine messages of spiritual manifestations. As the lofty aromas of Sikh faith spread far and wide, more and more artists and creative persons contributed in the development of visual presentation of themes related to Sikhism in varied styles and conceptual adaptations. This saw the rapid development of illustrated *pothis*<sup>2</sup> (manuscripts) which covered the plethora of essence of Sikhism. To further promote the visual messages of the Sikh Gurus and episodes related to their lives, the artists/painters adopted the then technologies in vogue that is mass production of these Sikh calendars started in Woodcut and Lithography Printing techniques. With the advent of western techniques in painting and advent of printing processes, the realm of *Sikh Calendar art* expanded both vertically and horizontally as fantastic works of art on Sikh themes were mass produced and reached both masses and classes at

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1 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.504

2 *Ibid*, p.787

nominal rates. The role of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar is unparalleled in the context that it established itself as the pioneer agency in promotion of *Sikh Calendar art* by engaging well-known artists to paint remarkable works of art depicting Sikh history, ethos and philosophical perspectives. Another landmark contribution is the establishment of *Ajaibghars* (museums) attached to historical Gurdwaras in many cities and towns. The intellectuals and literary stalwarts who anticipated the importance of collecting, preserving and promoting the Sikh heritage and art formed a core committee to establish a towering 'Central Sikh Museum' in the precincts of The Golden Temple, Amritsar which has the largest collection of paintings and other artifacts relating to the genre of *Sikh Calendar art*. Many other prominent Gurdwaras followed this example and these set up museums on the similar lines. Due credit should be given to Sir J.Lockwood Kipling who in the initial stages of *Sikh Calendar art* understood its value and collected all available specimens of this genre which are housed in Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The Dharam Prachar Committee, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar performed the sacred duty of propagation of Sikhism by publishing aesthetically illustrated books, brochures, calendars, pamphlets etc. Pursuing the same crusade, many government and corporate houses, corporations, banks and educational institutions did tremendous task of producing and publishing Sikh calendars in a big way.

The first and foremost source of *Sikh Calendar art* is truly embedded in the golden pages of *Janam Sakhi* (traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak) manuscripts which are considered as popular and sacred in the Sikh tradition as are *Puranas*<sup>3</sup> in Brahmanical and *Jatakas*<sup>4</sup> in Buddhist traditions.<sup>5</sup>

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3 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.778

4 *Ibid*, p.517

5 **Daljeet, Dr.**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.118

The preparation, documentation, propagation and stylization endeavours related to this tradition presumably are attributed to the Udasi, Ramraiya and Sodhi *Deras*<sup>6</sup> (monasteries) - all offshoots of the mainstream of Sikhism. Of these, the *Deras* (monasteries) of the Udasis, the self-appointed preachers of Sikhism, were perhaps the most active, being the best-fitted for the job by their leisure as well as interest.<sup>7</sup> The chronology of the *Janam Sakhis* (traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak) or the date when the first *Janam Sakhi* (traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak) was created is not known. However, it is evidenced from one of the *varan*<sup>8</sup> (ballads) written by Bhai Gurdas, a disciple of Guru Arjan and the scribe of the *Adi-Granth*<sup>9</sup> (Sikh scripture) that there was a well-developed *Janam Sakhi* (traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak) tradition in vogue during the tenure of the fifth Sikh Guru.<sup>10</sup> Gradually, a new practice started: the practice of illustrating the *Janam Sakhis* (traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak). The first such attempt, as far as we have been able to ascertain, was made as early as 1658 during the pontificate of the seventh Guru, Har Rai. With the passage of time, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the number of such attempts multiplied.<sup>11</sup> Works like *Janam Sakhis*, *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, Mehraban's *Sachkhand Pothi*, Bhai Mani Singh's *Gian Ratnawali* and *Bhai Bala Janam Sakhi* appear to attempt at recounting the life-story of Guru Nanak, though each one save an unanimity as regards the details of his birth, parentage, family and its links, travel accounts and his discourse during such

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6 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.649

7 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.131

8 **Singh, Dharam;** 2004, *Varan Bhai Gurdas*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.411-412

9 **Singh, Taran;** 2004, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.239-252

10 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.118

11 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.131



travels with *yogis, sadhus, faqirs* etc, has its own vision of him, obviously, for the being they wrote of was different in each one's case. The illustrations were individually improvised in representing Guru Nanak by each successive artist.<sup>12</sup> The use of illustrations in the biographies of Guru Nanak was in reality intended to meet the religious- and not so much aesthetic-requirements of the readers. The aesthetic beauty, if there was any, was only incidentally present because the entire emphasis was here laid on gratifying the devotional needs of the faithful.<sup>13</sup>

There are some old illustrated *Janam Sakhis* (traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak) of Guru Nanak which contain a large number of paintings. Some of these valuable manuscript *pothis* (manuscripts) are available with widely scattered individual families which for centuries have preserved them with great reverence and care and even now are unwilling to part with them. A few of them are available in some libraries and archives as well, situated both in India and abroad. Some of the notable *Janam Sakhis* (traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak) are: *Janam Sakhi with Pyare Lal* (1715 B. /1658 A.D.)- the oldest dated *Janam Sakhi* in the possession of Shri Pyare Lal Kapur (resident of Hauz Qazi, Delhi) for several generations, brought by the family from western Punjab while migrating to Delhi in 1947. The *Janam Sakhi*, transcribed by one Gorakh Das from an earlier version of *Bhai Bala's Janam Sakhi*, has 267 folios and contains 28 paintings; *Janam Sakhi at the Bagharian Fort* (1781 B. /1724 A.D.)- this is in the custody of Bhai Ariduman Singh of the Bagharian Fort, District Patiala. This manuscript is a prized possession with Bagharian family for several generations. It appears similar to the Pyare Lal *Janam Sakhi* and is a transcription of some older version. The name of the transcriber is not given anywhere. It has 212 folios and 42 paintings; *Janam Sakhi at the Punjab*

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12 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.118

13 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.131-132

**Language Department, Patiala** (1790 B. /1733 A.D.)- this manuscript is a Photostat copy of a certain *Janam Sakhi* preserved in the Old India Office Library, England and has been in the custody of the Punjab Language Department, Patiala for several decades. A microfilm copy of the same *Janam Sakhi* is available at the Punjab State Archives, Patiala. It is akin to the *Puratan* or *Walayat Wali Janam Sakhi* and presumably is a close version of the same. The paintings contained in this manuscript are done by Alam Chand Raj and Bhai Sanghera deserves praise for accomplishing the task of production of this rare manuscript; ***Janam Sakhi with the Maharaja of Patiala, No-1*** (1804 B. /1747 A.D.)- the *pothi* (manuscript) is in the personal library of Maharaja Yadavindra Singh of Patiala and its version is close to the ‘*Gyan Ratnawali*’ of Bhai Mani Singh. It was written by a writer named Charpat. It has 572 folios and 152 paintings; ***Janam Sakhi with Harbhajan Singh Chawla*** (1817 B. /1760 A.D.)- it is a transcript of certain earlier version of the *Bala Janam Sakhi*. It has 256 folios and 80 paintings. There are suitably labeled by the writer himself. This manuscript is in the possession of Harbhajan Singh Chawla, an antique dealer of Amritsar; ***Janam Sakhi at Patna*** (1825 B. /1768 A. D.)- this manuscript is also a transcript of earlier version of *Bala Janam Sakhi* and is in the possession of an Udasi Mahant of Patna city, Shri Ram Krishan. According to the Mahant, the *Janam Sakhi* has come down to him as part of the valuable property of the Udasi Ashram of which he is the present head. This manuscript is written by Smat Ram and illustrated by artist Sadhu Ram; ***Janam Sakhi with the Maharaja of Patiala No.2*** (circa 1770 A.D.)- this manuscript also a transcript of certain version of the *Bala Janam Sakhi* preserved in the personal library of Maharaja Yadavindra Singh of Patiala. There are 137 folios and 82 paintings in it; ***Janam Sakhi at Una*** (circa 1800 A.D.)- this *Janam Sakhi* is believed to have been got prepared by Baba Sahib Singh Bedi (1756-1834 A.D.) of Una under his personal supervision. Supposed to be written during the beginning of the reign of Maharaja Ranjit

Singh. Presently it is housed in National Museum, New Delhi; *Janam Sakhi at the Punjab State Archives, Patiala* (circa 1800 A.D.)- it was purchased by the Punjab State Archives, Patiala from one Hakim Sita Ram of Amritsar. It has 38 paintings of Guru Nanak, all of them depicting him as a child; *Janam Sakhi at the Central State Museum, Amritsar* (circa 1857 B. /1800 A.D.)- this manuscript is also a transcript of some old version of *Bala Janam Sakhi*. It has 410 folios and 16 paintings in all; *Janam Sakhi at the National Museum, New Delhi* (circa 1800 A.D.)- this *pothi* (manuscript) is a copy of the *Janam Sakhi* prepared by Bhai Sant Das Chhibbar in 1834 B. /1777A.D. It has 525 folios in all, out of which 482 are concerned with the life of Guru Nanak and the remaining 43 are in praise of the Goddess. There are 74 paintings in it; *Janam Sakhi at the Panjab University, Chandigarh Library* (1902 B. /1845 A.D.)- it was originally prepared by Bawa Ishar Singh Bedi of Phagwara. The *pothi* (manuscript) of the Panjab University, Chandigarh is a copy of the Bawa's *pothi* having 382 folios and 66 paintings; *Janam Sakhi with Principal Pritam Singh* (1926 B. /1869 A.D.)- also a transcript of some old version of the *Bala Janam Sakhi*, it was prepared by one Charan Dass at instance of one Bawa Sukhdev. The *pothi* (manuscript) has 346 folios and 101 paintings. The owner of the *pothi* is Sardar Pritam Singh, former Principal, Government College, Ludhiana and *Lithographic Janam Sakhi* (1940 B. /1883 A.D.)- it is also version of *Bala Janam Sakhi* printed in 1883 A.D. by Chirag Din Tajar of Lahore in his Litho Press. It has 96 paintings of Guru Nanak arranged *Sakhiwise*. A copy of this *pothi* (manuscript) is with Dr. Rattan Singh Jaggi of Punjabi University, Patiala.<sup>14</sup>

The *Janam Sakhi* (traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak) illustrations form the foundation of all religious, spiritual, historical,

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14 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.152-156

philosophical and devotional manifestations of Sikhism and act as a lighthouse which guides the imaginative stretch and expanse by throwing light on the entire fictional dimensions, spiritual concerns and divine messages. These gave *Sikh Calendar art* its style portraiture, crystallizing events, arresting movement, narration and serialization, landscape, all motifs and symbols, colours' balance, minuteness, refinement, defining borders, margins and other graphic renderings, imbuing in visual forms the invisible spirit and in personal likenesses the appropriate personality aspects and all that was required for discovering and re-discovering in a theme its inherent message and object.<sup>15</sup> Thus the *Sikh Calendar art* presents itself as the body and soul of the Sikh ethos and thought processes, divine and spiritual manifestations and a visual charter which guides the course of life of the faithfuls.

The other main sources for *Sikh Popular art* and *Sikh Calendar art* comes from Murals or Frescos painted on the walls of Gurdwara of Baba Atal Sahib at Amritsar and on the *samadh*<sup>16</sup> (structure build on a grave of a religious person or saint) of Baba Ram Rai at Dehradun. The Gurdwara Atal Sahib has a historic nine-storeyed building topped by a golden dome with a golden spire. The first three storeys were constructed during the eighteenth century and the rest of the work including the gold work was accomplished in the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh under the supervision of Desa Singh. The murals of Guru Nanak, however, are a much later work and do not seem to be older than the last decade of the nineteenth century but are not later than the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> Frescos and murals are also painted in the far-off sectarian buildings;

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15 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.130

16 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.160

17 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.158

mostly the *Thakurdwaras*<sup>18</sup> (temples) of *Bairagis*<sup>19</sup> (Hindu ascetics) such as the one build by Sant Jagveen Das Bairagi, near the Wagah Border at Attari in the mid seventeenth century. These *Thakurdwara* (temples) frescos presented composite cultural traditions where Sikh and Hindu motifs and themes co-exist. This indigenous art of wall painting in Punjab progressed simultaneously with other artistic forms specifically dwelling on the Sikh themes. The landmark source in the development of *Sikh art* of painting and murals in Punjab pertains to *samadhi* (structure build on a grave of a religious person or saint) of Bhai Dalla, a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh at Talwandi Sabo, now Damdama Sahib. On the similar lines some murals at Bahadurgarh (Patiala) opposite the fort were witnessed in the Gurdwara Bahadurgarh Sahib but have been eroded due to white wash and are dimly visible. The other eighteenth century murals reported from numerous places of Punjab depict significant stages of growth of *Sikh art* of paintings during the eighteenth century. They include the partially washed paintings on the outside walls of the main shrine of Shri Namdev Temple at village Ghoman; sixteen well preserved panels rendered with Hindu and Sikh themes like the one depicting Guru Nanak with some holy men panted on the walls of *Akhara*<sup>20</sup> (sectarian seminary) Sangalwal built by Mahant Pritam Das at Amritsar near Hari Mandir in *Katra Ahluwalia*; the panels on the walls of *Shivala*<sup>21</sup> (Shiva temple) Buta Ram at Hoshiarpur, better preserved on portico walls and damaged inside the shrine; the paintings on the walls of *Marhi*<sup>22</sup> (small building built on the grave of a particular person) of Baba Sidh at village Marhi in Faridkot; the paintings on the *samadhi* (structure build on a grave of a religious person or saint) of Bhai Guddar Singh and Mai Rajji in Handiaya near

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18 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.555

19 *Ibid*, p.891

20 *Ibid*, p.38

21 *Ibid*, p.202

22 *Ibid*, p.958

Barnala and Dyalpura and well preserved panels inside the *Dera* (monastery) Udasian. The murals contained in *Deras* (monasteries), *Dharamshalas*<sup>23</sup> (place of worship or religious asylum), *Shivalas* (Shiva temple), *Marhis* (small building built on the grave of a particular person), *Samadhis* (structure build on a grave of a religious person or saint), *Havelis*<sup>24</sup> (house surrounded by four walls), shrines have infact consolidated the traditions of *Sikh art* which became the source of *Sikh painting* and *Sikh Calendar art*.<sup>25</sup>

Subsequently the traditions of developing Individual Portraits got credence and specimens of such individual portraits are in collection of Punjab State Archives Museum, Patiala which has a sizable portfolio of 16 paintings produced by the artist Lahora Singh of Lahore towards the end of the nineteenth century. Before 1947 these paintings were at Lahore and adorned the walls of the Baoli Sahib Gurdwara there. At the time of Partition (1947), these were brought to the Indian side of the Punjab and later, through the good offices of Bawa Prem Singh Hoti, a Sikh historian and biographer, were deposited where they are now found.<sup>26</sup> The Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh has a collection of 77 cardboard miniatures. But they are just sketches and not complete paintings. There is no definite evidence to show how old they are, but it is estimated that they belong to the later part of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> The Alwar Museum has five paintings of the Sikh Gurus prepared under the patronage of Maharaja Vinai Singh of Alwar (1808-1857 A.D.) in 1840 A.D. when the Punjab

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23 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.662

24 Ibid, p.269

25 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.131-132

26 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.156-157

27 **Khanna, Poonam** (Curator); April 15, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Sector-10, Chandigarh

was still under the rule of the Khalsa.<sup>28</sup> The other important sources are the museums of various denominations connected to the Gurdwaras of some historical importance devoted to an explicit Sikh Guru, a Sikh warrior, a saintly character or a Gurdwara established to record an event in Sikh history. Such museums collect and preserve paintings created to visually narrate legendary episodes highlighting the inspirational incidents to motivate the followers of Sikhism. In this direction valued contribution of Sikh preachers in Gurdwaras is of immense value in patronizing, propagating, commissioning and preserving *Sikh art* works. Specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* are thus exhibited in such places which are thronged by masses thus serving the first and foremost task of reaching out to the people through this art. Artists of this genre of *Sikh Popular art* find encouraging and inspiring patrons in dedicated devout individuals who manage such religious and holy places to spread the lofty ideals of Sikhism.

The incredible contribution of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee has resulted in a remarkable collection of *Sikh Calendar art* works from the well-known artists settled in India and abroad and this premier agency has emerged as the foremost patron of *Sikh Calendar art* in patronizing, commissioning, collecting and preserving of *Sikh art* and history. The ‘Central Sikh Museum’ at Amritsar raised in the precincts of ‘The Golden Temple’ houses hundreds of good specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* and is vehemently engaged in acquiring and commissioning numerous noteworthy artworks. Taking a cue from this main museum, other small museums attached to various Gurdwaras in cities and towns have seen a steady flow of paintings reaching their premises as these Gurdwaras offer a rare opportunity to upcoming talented artists who were mainly inspired by the iconic works of the stalwart artists like Sobha Singh, G.S.Sohan Singh, S.G.Thakur Singh, Bodh Raj, Trilok Singh Chitrakar,

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28 **Fauja Singh, Dr.;** March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4<sup>th</sup> Session, Patiala, p.156-157

Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh, Gurdit Singh, Amolak Singh, Devender Singh, Mehar Singh, Jarnail Singh engaged in the realm of *Sikh Calendar art*. Such museums have become immensely popular as a large number of devotees visit them everyday and are witness to these enchanting and mesmerizing paintings which narrate heroic tales of valiant Sikh warriors and episodes of Sikh history soaked in religious fervour. Special congregations for the celebration of *Sakranti*, *Puranmashi* and *Gurpurabs* or other sacred days attributed to a particular Sikh Guru, attract streams of devotees who pay their obeisance at these Gurdwaras. The devout find an opportunity to pass through these galleries/museums and come out deeply impressed with artworks displayed there due to the thematic content of these paintings which highlighted the high tenets of Sikhism. This enhances the ever growing popularity of *Sikh Calendar art* due to mass exposure.

The land for the 'Central Sikh Museum' at Amritsar was allotted by Master Tara Singh near the Ghanta Ghar (clock tower) inside the precincts of Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar in 1957 A.D. and it was inaugurated on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1958 A.D. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar was assigned the task of maintaining this museum.<sup>29</sup> It is mainly a religious museum. The preserved elements of this museum unfold the Sikh history. The painting gallery of the museum contains paintings of Sikh Gurus, Saints, Sikh warriors and other famous Sikh leaders. Significant religious documents, old coins of Sikh kingdom, weaponry, manuscripts, paintings, architectural maps, map depicting the routes of travels of Guru Nanak Dev, portraits of Sikh martyrs, Sikh writers, poets, artists, Sikh warriors, prominent Sikh personalities, Sikh leaders, rare specimens of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh scripture) and objects related to Sikh Gurus have been tastefully exhibited here. Miniature paintings of Sikh School of

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29 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar* (Keynote), Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.6



art; Guru Hargobind's hand-written *Mool Mantra*<sup>30</sup> (opening lines of Sri Guru Granth Sahib) on a *pothi* (manuscript); comb, *kamarkasa* (waist cloth) and *gatra* (sword cover) of Guru Gobind Singh; Baba Deep Singh Shaheed's *chakkars* (metal head rings); sword of Sardar Mehtab Singh Mirakot; sword of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and rare musical instruments belonging to *Gurmat Sangeet*<sup>31</sup> (sacred music of the Sikhs) are some of the significant object d' art in the permanent collection of this museum.<sup>32</sup>

Works of pioneer painters of *Sikh Calendar art* such as Sobha Singh, G. S. Sohan Singh, Kirpal Singh, Master Gurdit Singh, Amolak Singh, Bodhraj, S. G. Thakur Singh, G. S. Bansal and Mehar Singh project glimpses of Sikh history. The paintings which deserve special mention are full of heartrending scenes titled such as '*Singhan- Singhnian walo dharam het sees dite*' [Sri Guru Granth Sahib *Asa di Var mahalla:1, salok:2, mahalla:2 (475/1)*]<sup>33</sup>: Glorifying and highlighting the Sikh martyrs both male and female who offered their heads for the sake of faith and religious convictions and sacrificing their lives in pursuit of religious freedom, '*Band-band katwaye*'<sup>34</sup>: Presents a scene where Sikh martyrs' limbs are being severed one by one by the tyrant Mughal oppressors, '*Khopariyaan luhaiyaan*'<sup>35</sup>: Yet in another painting skulls of the Sikh followers are shown being removed in a gory scene torturing those who resisted the conversion to Islam, '*Charkhadiyaan te chade*'<sup>36</sup>: Some of the other horrifying scenes depict torture of Sikh followers being mounted on large wooden wheels

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- 30 **Talib, Gurbachan Singh**; 2004, *Mul Mantra*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.139-142
- 31 **Curtiss, Marie Joy**; 2004, *Gurmat Sangeet*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.157-179
- 32 **Singh, Mohan**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar* (Introduction), Writer: Principal Satbir Singh, Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, P.7
- 33 **Neki, Jaswant Singh**; 1989, *Ardas Darshan Roop Abhyas (Punjabi)*, Singh Brothers. Mai Sewa Bazar, Amritsar, p.144-145
- 34 Ibid, p.148-151
- 35 Ibid, p.153-155
- 36 Ibid, p.156-158

fixed with blades and knives, ‘*Tan ariyaan naal chirwaye*’ [Sri Guru Granth Sahib *Asa Kabir* (484/9)]<sup>37</sup>: In a painting, the Sikh followers are shown being cut into half with large saws being operated by devilish looking Mughal tyrants who are thrusting upon Sikhs tortures of unimaginable magnitude and there is no trace of sorrow or grief on the faces of these brave Sikhs who gladly accept such inhumane treatment being matted out to them uttering the Name of ‘Satnam Waheguru’, ‘*Degaan wich ubale gaye*’<sup>38</sup>: Continuing in these historical paintings the narration of Sikhs being boiled alive in large utensils placed on burning hearths is another horrifying experience which enlists a deep sense of pride from the Sikh viewers, ‘*Gurdwareyaan di sewa te sambhaal layi kurbaaniyaan kitiyaan*’<sup>39</sup>: Paintings which appeal to the masses also show scenes of the umpteenth sacrifices made by innumerable Sikhs for the protection of Sikh Gurdwaras which were attacked and invaded by cruel, cunning and heartless invaders, ‘*Sikhi kesaan swasaan naal nibhayi*’ [Sri Guru Granth Sahib *Siriraag Var mahalla-4, salok mahalla-1* (84/2)]<sup>40</sup>: For the pride of *kes* (hair) Sikhs offered their lives but resisted disrespect to their long hair.<sup>41</sup> These above scenes also form the content of *Ardas*<sup>42</sup> (Sikh prayer) which is recited everyday in every Gurdwara and Sikh masses hail and acknowledge these brave acts of sacrifices. These paintings are visually so powerful that no viewer is left unimpressed. A sense of pride overwhelms the viewers by viewing the scenes of unbelievable sacrifices and sufferings borne by Sikh masses during the course of the glorious

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- 37 **Neki, Jaswant Singh**; 1989, *Ardas Darshan Roop Abhyas (Punjabi)*, Singh Brothers. Mai Sewa Bazar, Amritsar, p.159-160
- 38 **Neki, Jaswant Singh**; 2004, *Ardas*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.186-187
- 39 **Singh, Bhai Pindarpal**; 2010, *Ardas Part-I (Punjabi)*, Bhai Chattar Singh Bhai Jiwan Singh, Mai Sewa Bazar, Amritsar, p.311-318
- 40 **Neki, Jaswant Singh**; 1989, *Ardas Darshan Roop Abhyas (Punjabi)*, Singh Brothers. Mai Sewa Bazar, Amritsar, p.164-166
- 41 **Singh, Mohan**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar* (Introduction), Writer: Principal Satbir Singh, Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.7
- 42 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.81

Sikh history. People are spellbound by such impressive and evocative paintings which stir the cords of their hearts and wish to possess calendars of these paintings for display on the walls of their houses in an expression of acknowledgement for their glorious history.

There are paintings which depict and highlight the other pages from Sikh and national history pertaining to different movements undertaken by brave Sikhs during the course of freedom struggle such as ‘*Chhota Ghallughara* (June 1746)’ by Master Gurdit Singh: the first holocaust at Kahnuwan forest near Gurdaspur, Punjab, committed by Yahiya Khan, the Mughal governor of Lahore and Lakhpat Rai, the revenue minister of Lahore, saw the massacre of nearly ten thousand Sikhs but the retreating regiments of the Sikhs braved the onslaught under the command of Nawab Kapur Singh resisted this forced attack very valiantly<sup>43</sup>; ‘*Vadda Ghallughara* (5 February 1762)’ by Kirpal Singh: the Great Holocaust at Kup Rahira Sangrur, Punjab, claimed the lives of fifty thousand Sikhs who were earlier given a good thrashing to the armies of Ahmed Shah Abdali after the battle of Panipat. Ahmed Shah Abdali had resolved to liquidate the Sikhs in his next invasion. The Sikhs fought valiantly under the command of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and various Sikh *misls*<sup>44</sup> (confederacies) formed to save the Sikh *panth* (Sikh nation)<sup>45</sup>; ‘Guru Ka Bagh Morcha by Akalis (31 August, 1922)’ by Kirpal Singh: to assert the right to the firewood grown at Guru Ka Bagh in Ghukkevali village, near Amritsar, Punjab, A *morcha* (agitation) had been launched by the *Akalis*<sup>46</sup> (the Guru’s beloved soldiers). A batch of one

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43 Nijjar, B.S.; 2004, *Chhota Ghallughara*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.460-461

44 Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.969

45 Bhatia, S.S.; 2004, *Vadda Ghallughara*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.395-397

46 Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.36

hundred peaceful *Akalis* (the Guru's beloved soldiers) with Gurbani<sup>47</sup> (the Guru's word) on their lips marched everyday towards the shrine. The police interrupted them and subjected them to ruthless torture. Though this was a peaceful resistance to the police brutalities<sup>48</sup>; 'Massacre at Jaito (21 February, 1924) during the Nabha Agitation' by Kirpal Singh: to protest against the interruption of Akhand Path<sup>49</sup> (no-stop recitation of Sikh scriptures) at Jaito, Faridkot district, Punjab, during the Nabha Agitation, batches of five hundred Sikhs proceeded daily towards Jaito. The police opened fire on the group killing twenty Sikhs on the spot and wounding more than one hundred<sup>50</sup>; 'Massacre at Jallianwala Bagh (13 April, 1919)' by Master Gurdit Singh: thousands of Punjabis assembled at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar on Baisakhi Day were caught unaware when General Dyer ordered fire at them without warning. Nearly one thousand and five hundred people lost their lives. This episode evoked a strong reaction of anger and grief throughout the whole country<sup>51</sup>; 'The Carnage at Nankana Sahib (21 February, 1921)' by Master Gurdit Singh: Mahant Narayan Das, manager of Gurdwara Sri Nankana Sahib, Sheikhpura district, Pakistan Punjab, with connivance of police trapped two hundred *Akalis* (the Guru's beloved soldiers) who came to visit the shrine and hacked them to pieces by hired mercenaries. Later they were burnt in kerosene oil. However the Gurdwara was handed over to Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee on the following day. This episode is considered to be one of the bloodiest of the twentieth century

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47 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.418

48 **Singh, Rajinder;** 2004, *Guru Ka Bagh Morcha*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.205-206

49 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.40

50 **Singh, Mohinder;** 2004, *Jaito Morcha*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.327-329

51 **Datta, V.N.;** 2004, *Jallianwala Bagh Massacre*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.332-335

massacres<sup>52</sup>; ‘The Sacrifice at Panja Sahib (30 October, 1922)’ by Master Gurdit Singh: on hearing that the Sikhs arrested at Guru Ka Bagh were being taken to Naushera Jail at Attock, Pakistan Punjab, in a train, the Sikh devotees of Panja Sahib, Attock district, Pakistan Punjab, decided to serve them refreshments on the way under the leadership of Bhai Pratap Singh and Bhai Karam Singh. Hundreds of followers lay on the railway track to stop the train for providing *langar*<sup>53</sup> (community kitchen) to the arrested Sikhs but the train stopped only after cutting both of them into pieces under its wheels<sup>54</sup>. Paintings on the subjects chronicling the historical events and happenings are ‘Guru Angad Dev forbidding Humayun to use power at Khadur Sahib, Amritsar district, Punjab’<sup>55</sup>; ‘Emperor Akbar in the presence of Guru Amar Dass at Goindval, Amritsar district, Punjab’<sup>56</sup>; ‘Guru Arjan Dev giving lessons to Bhai Gurdas regarding the compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the most holiest Sikh scripture’<sup>57</sup>; ‘*Tere Bhane Wich Amrit Wase- Thy will is like shower of Nectar*’ (Sri Guru Granth Sahib: 119) showing Guru Arjan Dev stepping on a red hot ironplate<sup>58</sup>; ‘*Guru lado re Guru lado re- I have found the Guru I have found the Guru*’ showing Makhan Shah Lubana, a wealthy trader, standing on top of the roof and declaring that he had found the Guru’<sup>59</sup>; ‘*Tumre Griha Prategha Jodha Jaan Ko Bal Gun Kinnu Na Sodha- In your home will appear a great warrior, whose powers shall no one tame*’ (*Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi* cantos 1-3) showing Baba Buddha

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52 **Ram, Raja**; 2004, *Nankana Sahib Massacre*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.201-203

53 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature* (Punjabi), Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.1076

54 **Singh, Gurmeet**; 2004, *Saka Panja Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.28-29

55 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.59

56 **Padam, Piara Singh**; 2004, *Guru Amar Das*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.88

57 **Talib, Gurbachan Singh**; 2004, *Guru Arjan Dev*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.188-193

58 *Ibid*, p.193

59 **Banerjee, A.C.**; 2004, *Makkhan Shah*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.25

giving blessings to Mata Ganga<sup>60</sup>; ‘Bidhi Chand Chhina, a brave Sikh warrior, cleverly escaped out with the two horses- ‘Dilbagh’ and ‘Gulbagh’ by jumping over the high wall of the fort of Nawab of Lahore into the river Ravi’<sup>61</sup>; ‘Bhai Kanhaiya serving water to the wounded Turks and Sikh soldiers in the battlefield at Anandpur, Ropar district, Punjab’<sup>62</sup>; ‘*Kaho Khalsa, Khalsa, Dusar Ayur na Aas, Waheguru Mukh Te Kahiyo Sangat Singh Taje Saas*’ (Sri Gur Sobha *canto*-12) depicting Guru Gobind Singh dressed up a Sikh Bhai Sangat Singh who was one of the forty Sikhs who were besieged with Guru Gobind Singh in an improvised fortress at Chamkaur, Ropar district, Punjab<sup>63</sup>; ‘*Rangretta Guru Ka Beta- Rangretta is the son of the Guru*’ portraying Bhai Jaita as *Rangretta*<sup>64</sup> (a person belonging to Ranghar caste) who daringly took possession of the severed head of Guru Tegh Bahadur and carried it all the way to Anandpur Sahib where Guru Gobind Singh complimented him and exclaimed *Rangretta Guru Ka Beta*<sup>65</sup>; ‘*Guru Ke Bachan Sat Sat Kar Mane- The Word is the Truth*’ (Sri Guru Granth Sahib: 982) showing Guru Gobind Singh asking Dalla to get one of his soldiers as target for a testfire at Talvandi Sabo, Punjab<sup>66</sup>; ‘*Sada Kurbaan Kita Guru Vithu- Faith in the Guru*’ [(Sri Guru Granth Sahib *Anand Sahib Ramkali mahala*-3 (917)] representing Baba Buddha leading a band of Sikh Sangat<sup>67</sup> (followers) to Gwalior Fort where Guru Hargobind was interned on the orders of

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- 60 **Sital, Jit Singh**; 2004, *Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.134-135
- 61 **Singh, Bhagat**; 2004, *Bhai Bidhi Chand*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.367-368
- 62 **Padam, Piara Singh**; 2004, *Bhai Kanhaiya*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.423-424
- 63 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Sangat Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.43-44
- 64 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.1052
- 65 **Banerjee, A.C.**; 2004, *Bhai Jivan Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.389-390
- 66 **Padam, Piara Singh**; 2004, *Bhai Dalla*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, P.497
- 67 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.240

Mughal Emperor Jahangir during 1617-19<sup>68</sup>; ‘Battle of Chamkaur- *Piyo Pyala Prem Ka, Magan Bhayo Aswan, Aaj Khas Bhaye Khalsa, Satguru Ke Darbar*’ (*Sri Gur Sobha canto-12*) depicting Guru Gobind Singh’s eldest son Ajit Singh fighting bravely in the battle of Chamkaur and attaining martyrdom on 7 December, 1705<sup>69</sup>; ‘Again in the Battle of Chamkaur’- depicting Guru Gobind Singh’s son Baba Jujhar Singh fighting and attaining martyrdom on 7 December, 1705<sup>70</sup>; ‘The valour of Moti Mehra’ illustrating Moti Mehra, a water carrier offering milk to Baba Fateh Singh and Baba Zorawar Singh- the young *Sahibzadas*<sup>71</sup> (sons) of Guru Gobind Singh who were interned in the ‘Thanda Burj’<sup>72</sup> (cold tower) alongwith their grandmother Mata Gujri at Sirhind, Punjab, on 8 December, 1705<sup>73</sup>, ‘Execution of Sikh followers alongwith Banda Bahadur from Gurdas Nangal on the orders of Mughal emperor Farukkh Siyar at Delhi on 9 June, 1716<sup>74</sup>; ‘Reward for killing Sikhs’- Zakaria Khan, governor of Lahore and Mir Mannu, governor of Punjab had given a call to throw out all the Sikhs from the province and had fixed rewards for their prosecution or liquidation. Ten rupees for information, fifty for killing and eighty for bringing a severed head of a Sikh<sup>75</sup>; ‘Baba Deep Singh Shaheed (1682-1757)’ - founder of

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- 68 **Singh, Fauja**; 2004, *Guru Hargobind*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.232-233
- 69 **Ashok, Shamsher Singh**; 2004, *Sahibzada Ajit Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.33-34
- 70 **Ashok, Shamsher Singh**; 2004, *Sahibzada Jujhar Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.402
- 71 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.178
- 72 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.17-18
- 73 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.44
- 74 **Singh, Ganda**; 2004, *Banda Singh Bahadur*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.273-275
- 75 **Singh, Bhagat**; 2004, *Zakaria Khan*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.459

the *Shahid Misl*<sup>76</sup> or principality as well as of the *Damdami Taksal*<sup>77</sup> or Damdama School of Sikh learning<sup>78</sup>; ‘Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, founder of the *Ramgarhia Misl*<sup>79</sup> or chiefship, fighting in the battlefield at Red Fort, Delhi in 1783’<sup>80</sup>; ‘*Teen Ko Baaj Nahi Mein Dena, Taaj Baaj Teen Te Sabh Leina, Des Raaj Mein Teen Ka Le Hon, Garib Anathan Ko Sabh De Hon*- I will grab your crown and eagle and give it to the poor and homeless’ (*Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi* cantos 10) depicting Guru Hargobind taking a stern stance against brutal tyranny perpetuated by the royal eagle of Mughal emperor Shahjahan<sup>81</sup>; ‘Singh- an embodiment of mercy’ depicting Sikhs rescuing twenty-two hundred young girls being abducted by Ahmed Shah Abdali during the Battle of Panipat.<sup>82</sup>

In the portrait section, masterly painted oil on canvas portraits demand attention of the visitors. The portraits pertain to the Sikh personalities who have made their mark in the Sikh word in their own respective fields and who have sacrificed their lives keeping alive the glorious traditions of Sikhism, Sikh ethos and philosophy. The portraits of ‘Baba Deep Singh Shaheed (1682-1757)’- founder of the *Shahid Misl* or principality as well as of the *Damdami Taksal* or Damdama School of Sikh learning<sup>83</sup>; ‘Banda Singh Bahadur (1670-1716)’- a humble devotee of Guru Gobind Singh and a Sikh Warrior who for the first time

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76 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.136

77 Ibid, p.620

78 **Thapar, K.S.**; 2004, *Baba Dip Singh Shahid*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.587-588

79 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.1034

80 **Gupta, Hari Ram**; 2004, *Jassa Singh Ramgarhia*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.358-359

81 See reference no. 68

82 **Singh, Khushwant**; 2004, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.145

83 See reference no.78



seized territory for the *Khalsa Panth*<sup>84</sup> (a religious path representing the whole system of precept and practice laid down by the Sikh Gurus) during eighteenth century<sup>85</sup>; ‘Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839)’- pioneer of Khalsa Rule and popularly known as Sher-e-Punjab, i.e. the Lion of Punjab<sup>86</sup>; ‘Maharaja Dalip Singh (1838-1893)’- the youngest son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the last Sikh sovereign of the Punjab<sup>87</sup>; ‘Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia (1718-1783)’- founder of the *Ahluwalia Misl*<sup>88</sup> or chiefship and commander of the Dal Khalsa<sup>89</sup>, the sovereignty of the Sikhs<sup>90</sup>; ‘Nawab Kapur Singh (1697-1753)’- an eighteenth century Sikh hero and founder of the Dal Khalsa, the sovereignty of the Sikhs<sup>91</sup>; ‘Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia (1723-1803)’- founder of the *Ramgarhia Misl* or chiefship and prominent military leader of the Sikhs<sup>92</sup>; ‘Baba Ram Singh Namdhari (1816-1885)’- leader of the Namdhari or Kuka<sup>93</sup> movement in the Punjab<sup>94</sup>; ‘Shaheed Bhagat Singh (1907-1931)’- a Sikh revolutionary and martyr who played an important role in struggle for India’s Independence<sup>95</sup>; ‘Shaheed Udham Singh Sunam (1899-1940)’- a militant nationalist of Punjab born at

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- 84 **Singh, Fauja**; 2004, *Panth*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.288-289
- 85 See reference no.74
- 86 **Singh, Khushwant**; *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.479-487
- 87 **Wylam, P.M.**; *Maharaja Duleep Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.500-602
- 88 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.93
- 89 **Gupta, Hari Ram**; *Dal Khalsa*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.494-496
- 90 **Singh, Ganda**; 2004, *Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, P.355-357
- 91 **Gupta, Hari Ram**; *Nawab Kapur Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.428-430
- 92 See reference No.80
- 93 **Singh, Fauja**; 2004, *Kukas or Namdharis*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.532-535
- 94 **Ahluwalia, M.L.**; 2004, *Baba Ram Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.465-467
- 95 **Brown, Emily C.**; 2004, *Bhagat Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.316-318

Sunam, in the then princely state of Patiala<sup>96</sup>; ‘Shaheed Kartar Singh Sarabha (1896-1915)’- a member of the *Ghadar*<sup>97</sup> revolutionary movement and born in village Sarabha, Ludhiana district, Punjab<sup>98</sup>; ‘Baba Gurdit Singh Komaghatamaru (1861-1954)’- a patriot of Komaghatamaru<sup>99</sup> (a Japanese tramp-steamer) fame<sup>100</sup>; ‘Akali Phoola Singh (1761-1833)’- a commander of Akal Takht<sup>101</sup> (a primary seat of Sikh religious authority and centre altar for Sikh political assembly), a Sikh hero and an eminent religious figure of the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>102</sup>; ‘Sardar Baghel Singh (d.1802)’- leader of the *Karorsinghia Misl*<sup>103</sup> or chiefship and celebrated in Sikh history as the Vanquisher of Mughal Delhi<sup>104</sup>; ‘General Hari Singh Nalwa (1791-1837)’- a celebrated General of the Khalsa forces of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>105</sup>; ‘Master Tara Singh (1885-1967)’- a dominant figure on the Sikh political scene during the twentieth century<sup>106</sup>; ‘Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957)’- an eminent poet, scholar and a major figure in the Sikh renaissance and in the movement for the revival and renewal of Punjabi literary tradition<sup>107</sup>; ‘Sardar Nanak Singh (1897-1971)’-

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- 96 **Gill, Manohar Singh**; 2004, *Udham Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.381-382
- 97 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.395
- 98 **Juergensmeyer, Mark**; 2004, *Kartar Singh Sarabha*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.456-458
- 99 **Brown, Emily C.**; 2004, *Komaghatamaru*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.526-528
- 100 **Jas, Jaswant Singh**; 2004, *Baba Gurdit Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.142-143
- 101 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, P.36
- 102 **Singh, Mohinder**; 2004, *Akali Phula Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.337-338
- 103 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.307
- 104 **Gupta, Hari Ram**; *Baghel Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.249-250
- 105 **Sandhu, Avtar Singh**; *Hari Singh Nalwa*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.251-252
- 106 **Nayar, Baldev Raj**; *Master Tara Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.312-315
- 107 **Singh, Attar**; 2004, *Bhai Vir Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.428-432

an eminent novelist and one of the pioneers of fiction in Punjabi language<sup>108</sup>; ‘Sardar Teja Singh Samundari (1882-1926)’- a leading figure in the Gurdwara Reform Movement and one of the founder members of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar<sup>109</sup>; ‘Sirdar Kapur Singh (1909-1986)’- a civilian, parliamentarian, distinguished linguist and a moving spirit behind the Anandpur Sahib Resolution<sup>110</sup>; ‘Sardar Saroop Singh (1919-1984)’- founder of the All India Sikh Students Federation in 1945<sup>111</sup>; ‘General Bikram Singh’- known as ‘Saviour of Kashmir’ and under his gallant and astute command, Indian troops were able to crush the tribal insurgency in 1947<sup>112</sup>; ‘Bhai Randhir Singh (1878-1961)’- a revolutionary as well as saintly personage much revered among the Sikhs<sup>113</sup>; ‘Baba Vasakha Singh (1877-1957)’- a great revolutionary and one of the leaders of *Ghadar* Movement<sup>114</sup>; ‘Shaheed Bhai Pratap Singh (30 October, 1922)’- a devoted Sikh who laid down his life in Panja Sahib Massacre in 1922<sup>115</sup>; ‘Baba Kharak Singh (1895-1986)’- undertook the onerous task of reconstructing the historical shrines by *Kar Sewa* (community service) such as Guru Granth Sahib Bhawan at Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib<sup>116</sup>; ‘Sant Baba Sewa Singh (1890-1982)’- supervised the reconstruction of the Anandgarh Fort at

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108 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.86

109 **Singh, Piar**; 2004, *Teja Singh Samundri*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.340-341

110 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Bhai Sahib Sirdar Kapur Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vo. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.430-431

111 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.86

112 Ibid, p.89

113 **Deol, Gurdev Singh**; 2004, *Bhai Randhir Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.476-477

114 Ibid, p.424

115 See reference no.54

116 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.93

Anandpur Sahib, Ropar district, Punjab<sup>117</sup>; ‘Sardar Sobha Singh (1901-1986)’ - an eminent Sikh painter<sup>118</sup>; ‘Kirpal Singh (1923-1900)’ - an eminent Sikh painter and one of the founder of Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar<sup>119</sup>; ‘Master Gurdit Singh (1901-1981)’ - an eminent Sikh painter and one of the founders of Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar<sup>120</sup>; ‘S.G. Thakur Singh (1899-1976)’ - an eminent Sikh painter who played an important role in popularizing the *Sikh art*<sup>121</sup>, are highly acclaimed portraits created in the nuances of *Sikh Calendar art*.

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar has performed an enormous task of producing colour reproductions of these fabulous paintings in several lacs and some of them have been distributed free of cost. Calendars of these paintings are also available in the market, which are being produced under the due authorization of the management of this museum and the devotees record their visit to the ‘Golden Temple’ by purchasing these Sikh calendars as souvenirs. The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar duly recognizes their deep gratitude for the persistent efforts and vision of artist Kirpal Singh, Master Gurdit Singh and Sardar Bhan Singh (Curator of the museum) in establishing this museum in the initial stages which is presently a full-fledged professionally managed and well curated museum with systematically displayed paintings and objects synchronizing principles of aesthetics with fundamentals of

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- 117 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.94
- 118 **Bhatti, S.S.**; 2004, *Sobha Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.222-223
- 119 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Kirpal Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.513-514
- 120 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.97
- 121 *Ibid*, p.97

skillful visual display.<sup>122</sup> This museum has also acquired paintings on a number of Sikh themes done by scores of other artists including Jarnail Singh, Gurvinderpal Singh, Mohan Singh, Satpal Singh Danish, Bhupinder Singh and Sukhwinder Singh underlining the fact that this museum is a truly premier institution engaged in the promotion of *Sikh Calendar art* and has immensely contributed in popularizing the Sikh history in true visual verve.<sup>123</sup> It provides at a glance insight on evolution and development of Sikhism, its fundamentals, ideals and psyche. The philosophy behind the movement is amply visible through these magnificent paintings.

‘Sri Anandpur Sahib’ known as “The City of Divine Bliss” is situated in the foothills of shivalik hills in Ropar District of Punjab where Guru Gobind Singh founded the *Khalsa Panth* (a religious path representing the whole system of precept and practice laid down by the Sikh Gurus) on Baisakhi day in 1699 A.D. has a special sacred place in the hearts of Sikhs. Being a city of immense historical and religious value is visited by lacs of devotees every year. It is located 45 kilometers from Ropar on the left bank of the river Sutlej known as village Makhawal.<sup>124</sup>

‘Sri Anandpur Sahib’ is one of the five Takhts (Temporal Seats) of Sikhism. Guru Tegh Bahadur laid the foundation of Anandpur Sahib in 1664 A.D. He purchased this land from the Raja of Bilaspur. Picturesquely perched in the foothills of Shivaliks, the town exudes an aura of natural beauty combined with ethereal joy. In the sacred memory of ‘Guru Tegh Bahadur’s Tercentenary of Martyrdom’, Punjab Government formulated a scheme in 1977 A.D. to establish ‘Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Museum’ at Anandpur Sahib and it was

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122 **Tohra, Gurcharan Singh**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar* (Preface), Writer: Principal Satbir Singh, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.5

123 **Central Sikh Museum**, *Through Personal Visit*, Amritsar, Punjab dated 28 January 2011.

124 **Randhir, G.S.**; 1990, *Sikh Shrines in India*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, New Delhi, p.16

inaugurated on 25 January, 1983 A.D. This museum was set up in the memory of Guru Tegh Bahadur who made the supreme sacrifice for sake of liberation of the oppressed and for the freedom of conscience and belief. The site for the museum was selected near the main approach of the historic 'Gurdwara Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib'. In conformity with the historical significance and ceremonial symbolism of the Gurdwara, the architecture of the museum's building was so designed as to synchronize it with the structure of the sacred precincts. This monumental museum has two levels; an area of 3751 sq. feet on the ground floor and of 1387 sq. feet on the first floor. This building has nine domes of fibre glass which shower light in the galleries during day time. At night when the lights are turned on these fibre glass domes are brilliantly illumined and look like a floating galaxy of heavenly spheres. They appear as many splendoured domes of eternity. To a man of deep feeling and faith, they communicate intimation of divinity. Effective light arrangements have been done for proper display of paintings in the galleries. Seats have been provided for the visitors.<sup>125</sup>

The great saga of Sikh history of this period is full of struggles and sacrifices, which is depicted here through the medium of oil paintings executed by eminent Sikh artists Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh and Devender Singh.<sup>126</sup> These paintings are primarily in realistic style covering the most turbulent, significant and epoch-making period of the Sikh history. Paintings displayed in this museum are large in size and awe-aspiring which are capable of transcending the viewer to the days of the struggle of Khalsa and depict scenes of horrifying atrocities, oppression and turbulent treatment being meted out by tyrant Mughals to followers of Sikhism in order to repress and restrain them from performing

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125 **Department of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology & Museums, Punjab**; n.d., *Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Museum, Sri Anandpur Sahib*(Catalogue), Script by Mohan Singh (Curator), Assisted by Ram Saroop (Keeper) & Malvinder Kaur (Gallery Assistant), Layout by Amrik Singh (Art Executive), Photography by Jai Tegh Singh & Ranjit Singh, Rana Printech, Chandigarh, p.1-2

126 **Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Museum**, *Through Personal Visit*, Anandpur Sahib, Ropar district, Punjab dated 19 October 2009

their religious duties. Artists have done these works in very bold and straight forward style thereby enhancing the impact of a particular scene to the optimum. The medium of the paintings is oil on canvas and forceful expression has been achieved on the faces of the figures in bright and vibrant colours. One notices a particular artistic merit in the figurative compositions and the characters come alive true to life stylization in appealing well balanced compositions. This quality enhances visual appeal and can be considered a true dimension of *Sikh Calendar art*. Calendars of these paintings have been reproduced especially by the 'Markfed' and 'Bank of Punjab' which are available in the shops near the entrance of the Gurdwara. These calendars are printed on glazed and glossy art paper making them symbolic items of pilgrimage.

The paintings on the subjects displayed here include 'Guru Gobind Singh training the Sikhs in the art of warfare at Paonta Sahib during 1685-1688'<sup>127</sup>; 'Guru Gobind Singh administering *Amrit*<sup>128</sup> (baptismal water) to *Panj Pyaras*<sup>129</sup> (the five beloved ones) on Baisakhi Day, 30 March 1699 at Anandpur Sahib, Ropar District, Punjab'<sup>130</sup>; 'Bhai Jaita offering the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur to his son Guru Gobind Singh' and 'Bhai Jaita taking the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur'<sup>131</sup>; 'Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur'- on refusal to accept Islam, Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded on 11 November, 1675 at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi on the orders of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and 'Guru Tegh Bahadur confined in a spiked cage at Chandni Chowk, Delhi'<sup>132</sup>; 'Martyrdom of Bhai Mati Dass'- a Sikh martyr who too was executed alongwith Guru Tegh

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127 **Singh, Ganda**; 2004, *Guru Gobind Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.88-89

128 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.76

129 Ibid, p.791

130 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Anandpur*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.128-129

131 See *Bhai Jivan Singh* reference no.65

132 **Banerjee, A.C.**; 2004, *Guru Tegh Bahadur*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.329-334

Bahadur on 11 November, 1675. Even his body was split into two parts with a saw, he remained a picture of firm faith and resolute devotion, with his body still reverberant with the sounds of holy *Japuji*<sup>133</sup> (the opening composition of Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib)<sup>134</sup>; Martyrdom of Bhai Sati Dass'- a Sikh martyr who too was executed alongwith Guru Tegh Bahadur on 11 November, 1675. He was wrapped in cotton and burnt alive by the oppressors<sup>135</sup>; 'Martyrdom of Bhai Dyala'- a Sikh martyr who too was executed alongwith Guru Tegh Bahadur on 11 November, 1675. He was boiled to death in a hot cauldron of water<sup>136</sup>; 'Kashmiri Pandits requesting Guru Tegh Bahadur to save Hindu Dharma on 25 May, 1675 at Anandpur Sahib, Ropar district, Punjab' and 'Guru Tegh Bahadur in meditation'<sup>137</sup>; 'The Guru discovered by Makhan Shah Lubana, a wealthy trader at Baba Bakala, Amritsar district, Punjab'<sup>138</sup>. This museum is particularly visited on celebration day of '*Hola Mohalla*' (a Sikh festival) and *Gurpurabs* where lacs of devotees congregate and they are witness to acts of martial feats performed by Nihangs<sup>139</sup> popularly known as '*Guru Ki Ladli Fauj*' since the birth of Khalsa. Special bazaars and *melas* are set where variety of Sikh calendars are sold in great numbers.<sup>140</sup>

Another landmark has come up near this museum which will be perhaps the largest museum containing the Sikh artifacts and have a monumental symbol

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- 133 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.506
- 134 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Bhai Mati Das*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, P.68-69
- 135 **Banerjee, A.C.**; 2004, *Bhai Sati Das*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.76
- 136 Ibid, p.582-583
- 137 See reference no.132
- 138 See reference no.59
- 139 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.704
- 140 **Department of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology & Museums, Punjab**; n.d., *Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Museum, Sri Anandpur Sahib*(Catalogue), Script by Mohan Singh (Curator), Assisted by Ram Saroop (Keeper) & Malvinder Kaur (Gallery Assistant), Layout by Amrik Singh (Art Executive), Photography by Jai Tegh Singh & Ranjit Singh, Rana Printech, Chandigarh, p.3-4



‘Virasat-e-Khalsa’ known as “Khalsa Heritage Museum”. Large and modern galleries with state of the art technically sound projection theatres, seminar halls, cafeterias, administrative blocks and residential complexes form a huge and gigantic structure designed by world famous US-based Israeli architect- Moshe Safdie. This museum displays a large number of Sikh paintings and other artifacts related to this faith.<sup>141</sup>

‘Sahibzada Ajit Singh Museum’ at ‘Gurdwara Paonta Sahib’ is situated on the way to Nahan, district Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh in the foothills of lower Himalayas on the bank of the river Yamuna. ‘Gurdwara Paonta Sahib’ is dedicated to Guru Gobind Singh, who spent the happiest period of his life here. Its outskirts are dotted with gardens, green meadows and tall evergreen trees that echo the gushing waters of Yamuna. Guru Gobind Singh took many steps to beautify ‘Paonta Sahib’ and devoted most of his time in composing poetry. Guru Sahib was so much enamored of poetry that he invited fifty-two poets to his court. The pleasant environment and salubrious climate refreshed his mind. Most of the time he spent in reading and writing. Besides, the Guru selected a site noted for its scenic beauty and splendour and got constructed a fort on the bank of Yamuna.<sup>142</sup> A fairly large museum is attached to the historical Gurdwara named after Sahibzada Baba Ajit Singh who was born at this place on 26 January, 1687 A.D. He laid down his life fighting bravely against lacs of soldiers in the ‘Battle of Chamkaur Sahib’ and attained martyrdom on 7 December, 1705 A.D. ‘Sri Paonta Sahib’ is of great historical significance and used to be frequented by people from all walks of life Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims.<sup>143</sup>

At a short distance from this holy and sacred place, a small town ‘Bhangani’ is situated where a fierce and bloody battle was fought when Rajput

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141 **Yadav, Priya**; November 24, 2011, *Virasat-e-Khalsa: Bringing alive the Gurus’ Inspiration*, The Times of India.

142 **Randhir, G.S.**; 1990, *Sikh Shrines in India*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, New Delhi, p.47

143 See reference no.69

Hill Rajas jointly attacked Guru Gobind Singh. Raja Bhim Chand, Raja Fateh Singh and Raja Kesri Singh led the Rajput troops. The Sikhs fought valiantly with courage and determination. Their patriotic fervour came handy and they carried the day under the command of Guru Gobind Singh. This was a decisive battle won by the Guru. Praises were showered on him of his valour, skill and courage in the battlefield. Pir Buddhu Shah alongwith his five hundred disciples fought on the side of the Guru. His timely help was appreciated by the Guru. A Gurdwara stands today at the place where the Battle of Bhangani took place.<sup>144</sup>

The magnificent collection of paintings at ‘Sahibzada Ajit Singh Museum’ have mostly portrayed ‘Scenes from the Battle of Bhangani fought between the hill Rajas and Guru Gobind Singh on 18 September, 1688 at Bhangani, Sirmaur district, Himachal Pradesh’<sup>145</sup>; ‘Guru Gobind Singh in Kavi Darbar alongwith his fifty-two poets and scholars at Paonta Sahib, district Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh’<sup>146</sup>; ‘Sahibzada Baba Ajit Singh on horseback at Chamkaur Sahib, Ropar district, Punjab’<sup>147</sup>; ‘Guru Gobind Singh standing alongwith a horse and two peacocks have been shown in front of his feet at Anandpur Sahib, Ropar district, Punjab’<sup>148</sup>; Guru Gobind Singh engaged in writing scriptures at Paonta Sahib, district Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh’<sup>149</sup>; ‘Pir Buddhu Shah, a Muslim saint offering military services to Guru Gobind Singh with his disciples and sons during the Battle of Bhangani on 18 September, 1688 at Bhangani, Sirmaur district, Himachal Pradesh’<sup>150</sup>; ‘Scene from the Battle of Bhangani depicting wounded soldiers and Khalsa soldiers brandishing their

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144 **Randhir, G.S.**; 1990, *Sikh Shrines in India*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, New Delhi, p.47

145 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Bhangani*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.343

146 **Singh, Jagjit**; 2004, *Paonta Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.291-292

147 See reference no.69

148 See reference no.130

149 See reference no.127

150 **Singh, Gurcharan**; 2004, *Pir Buddhu Shah*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.410

swords with an expression of valour and determination on their faces'<sup>151</sup>; 'Scene depicting Guru Gobind Singh distributing salary to his soldiers near Sri Talab Sahib in the precincts of Gurdwara Paonta Sahib'<sup>152</sup>; 'Discourse between Pir Buddhu Shah' and Guru Gobind Singh and Pir Budhu Shah's accepting Sikh ideology who was basically a Muslim saint living in Sadhaura near Paonta'.<sup>153</sup> Some paintings depict 'Banda Bahadur' who established Khalsa Raj at Lohgarh Fort situated at a short distance from Paonta Sahib in the Shivalik hills.<sup>154</sup> All these paintings possess richness of technical and aesthetic levels, costumes and perspectives have been skillfully handled executing an amazing artistic ability in rendering figurative compositions.

'A portrait of Bhai Nand Lal', who was an eminent poet in the court of Guru Gobind Singh, graces the walls of this museum at Gurdwara Sri Paonta Sahib, being a centre of literary activities and discourses. Scholars and poets enjoyed great freedom under the patronage of Guru Gobind Singh- the tenth Sikh Guru.<sup>155</sup> A remarkable painting is devoted to the 'Battle of Chamkaur Sahib' where Sahibzada Ajit Singh sacrificed his life alongwith his younger brother Sahibzada Jujhar Singh. The brave sons of Guru Gobind Singh have been shown surrounded by the Mughals in a pitched battle.<sup>156</sup> A painting narrating the episode of 'Baba Ajit Singh and his younger brother Baba Jujhar Singh bowing before their father Guru Gobind Singh asking for water to quench their thirst during the continuation of the Battle of Chamkaur Sahib' and the Guru advised them to go back to the battlefield and lay their lives instead of showing their

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151 See reference no.145

152 See reference no.146

153 See reference no.150

154 See reference no.74

155 **Talib, Gurbachan Singh;** 2004, *Bhai Nand Lal*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, P.195-196

156 **Singh, Major Gurmukh;** 2004, *Chamkaur Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.430

backs to the enemies.<sup>157</sup> This painting evokes a sense of pride and compassion in the viewers and overwhelms the visitors with high spirits of sacrifice and unparalleled valour. A scene full of mirth and happiness depicts the 'Birth and Celebration of Baba Ajit Singh' who was born at Paonta Sahib.<sup>158</sup> The other paintings depicting atrocities on Sikhs by invaders are heartrending and moving. The works of famous artist Sobha Singh, Kirpal Singh and Amolak Singh form the bulk of paintings at this museum. On the occasion of *Hola Mohalla*<sup>159</sup> (a Sikh festival) thousands of pilgrims assemble here to pay obeisance at this Gurdwara and visit this museum to seek inspiration and learn about the glorious Sikh history. The reproductions of these paintings displayed in this museum are available in the form of Sikh calendars and the visitors admire and purchase them. Special stalls are put up in front of the Gurdwara where besides swords, *karas* (steel bracelets) and other articles of Sikh faith, these calendars see a brisk sale due to their popularity during the festivals.

The museum situated at 'Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib', Sirhind was constructed in 1985 A.D. inside the premises of the historical Gurdwara. The ancient town of Sirhind is replete with ruins of beautiful mosques and tombs. During Mughal days it was a town of considerable importance. Its ancient fort was built by Firoz Tughlaq. The 'Fatehgarh Sahib Gurdwara' marks the spot where the two brave children- the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh were bricked alive for the noble cause of their fight against bigotry. They refused to be converted to Islam during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb. After the heroic sacrifice of two elder sons of Guru Gobind Singh in the Battle of Chamkaur Sahib on 22 December 1704 A.D., his two younger sons namely Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh were bricked alive in the fort of Sirhind on 28

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157 **Singh, Rachhpal Gill**; 2004, *Punjab Kosh*, Part-I, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.826-827

158 See reference no.69

159 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.283

December 1704 A.D. by the order of the tyrant Nawab Wazir Khan. Mata Gujri, grandmother of the two *Sahibzadas* expired due to the shock of brutal murder of her two grandchildren. A Hindu philanthropist Dewan Todar Mal cremated three dead bodies with the help of other devotees of the Guru. He purchased the land by paying gold coins to the Muslim Zamindar named Atta. Here stands the 'Gurdwara Jyoti Swarup'. Every year a 'Jor Mela' is celebrated commemorating the memory of martyrdom of *Chhote Sahibzadas*- younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh and thousands of pilgrims from all over the world assemble to pay their respect at the Gurdwara.<sup>160</sup> Each pilgrim makes it a point to visit the museum here as this museum has a wonderful collection of Sikh calendars by famous Sikh artists on the Sikh themes. Though new editions in the form of oil paintings on canvas has also been included in this museum which have been done by a local artist Jagdish Singh Brar who has endeavoured to paint twenty-two paintings on the history of this sacred place in appealing and simplistic style but he has been successful in capturing the historical events in an earthy and truthful form which is appreciated by the visitors due to its content and soulful depiction.<sup>161</sup>

A variety of Sikh calendars done by established artists like Sobha Singh, G.S.Sohan Singh, Master Gurdit Singh, Kirpal Singh, Devender Singh, Trilok Singh Chitrakar and Mohinder Singh also adorn the walls of this museum. The subject matter of these calendars and paintings mainly relates to the chronicles of Sikh history and events which occurred at this place. A historically significant scene showing two younger *Sahibzadas* (sons) of Guru Gobind Singh- Baba Fateh Singh and Baba Zorawar Singh while being bricked alive, are shown raising their hands in a resolve. There is a divine glow on their faces and not a

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160 **Randhir, G.S.**; 1990, *Sikh Shrines in India*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, New Delhi, p.31-32

161 *Through Personal Visit* to the Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib Museum, Sirhind, Punjab dated 16 September, 2010

slight trace of fear or gloom is visible even though a fierce looking Mughal *Jallad*<sup>162</sup> (executioner) is shown engaged in bricking them alive. A *Qazi*<sup>163</sup> (a Muslim priest) standing near the wall is requesting the *Sahibzadas* to convert to Islam or face imminent death. The whole scene captures the essence and strength of the character of Khalsa which withstood the onslaught of Mughal repression and brutality. Later on, the death of young *Sahibzadas* was avenged by the great Sikh warrior Banda Bahadur. In yet another painting, Mata Gujri alongwith two younger *Sahibzadas* is shown detained in a Thanda Burj (cold tower) looking at the deep blue skies and wintry black clouds. Artist Devender Singh's painting depicts the scene of Mata Gujri with younger *Sahibzadas* lost in the forest near Sirhind projects a gloomy and haunting atmosphere which stirs the heart of every viewer.<sup>164</sup> Calendars with images of 'Sodhi'<sup>165</sup> *Patshah* (king or emperor)<sup>166</sup> Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708)'- the tenth Sikh Guru (prophet or teacher of Sikh faith)<sup>167</sup>; 'Patshahi (kingdom)<sup>168</sup> Sixth Guru Hargobind (1595-1644)'- the sixth Sikh Guru (prophet or teacher of Sikh faith)<sup>169</sup>; 'Guru Harkrishan Sahib (1656-1664)'- the eighth Sikh Guru (prophet or teacher of Sikh faith)<sup>170</sup>; 'Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675)'- the ninth Sikh Guru (prophet or teacher of Sikh faith)<sup>171</sup>; 'Bhai Taru Singh (1720-1745)'- a Sikh martyr who was executed on the order of Zakaria Khan, the governor of Lahore, as his hair were removed alongwith the

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162 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.514

163 Ibid, p.316-17

164 See reference no.72

165 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.232

166 Ibid, p.762

167 See reference no.127

168 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.762

169 See reference no.68

170 **Anand, Balwant Singh**; 2004, *Guru Har Krishan*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.254-256

171 See reference no.132

skull<sup>172</sup>; ‘Makhan Shah Lubana’- a wealthy trader of Lubana<sup>173</sup> clan<sup>174</sup>; ‘Baba Deep Singh Shaheed’- (1682-1757)’- founder of the *Shahid Misl* or principality as well as of the *Damdami Taksal* or Damdama School of Sikh learning<sup>175</sup> have a place of pride in this museum.

‘Gurdwara Sri Dukh Niwaran Sahib’ at Patiala solemnizes and eternalizes the visit of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs, ‘*Sagal srisht ki chaddar*’ (lit. protective sheet of the world) who offered his head instead of conversion to Islam on behalf of all the Kashmiri Pandits in 1675 A.D. As says Bhai Gurdas ‘*the spot sanctified by the holy touch of the lotus feet of the Guru is raised into a place of worship by the devout congregation*’, ‘Gurdwara Sri Dukh Niwaran Sahib’ was founded in 1930 A.D. perpetuates the memory of the holy visit to consecrate this spot.<sup>176</sup>

It goes without saying that the town of Patiala in its present form did not exist when Guru Tegh Bahadur visited this place. ‘Gurdwara Sri Dukh Niwaran Sahib’ is situated on the Patiala Sirhind road barely half a kilometer from Patiala railway station. According to a strong local tradition the Guru came to this place a second time in *Samvat* 1732 corresponding to 1675 Christian era from Saifabad fort since renamed Bahadurgarh after Guru Tegh Bahadur. His first visit is said to have taken place in 1667 A.D. when he left Anandpur for his preaching tours in October. The site where the Gurdwara now stands as a peaceful and calm place with a small *tobha* (pond) with a banyan tree near it within the revenue limits of the village Lehal, now a part and parcel of the city of Patiala. The Gurdwara Sri Dukh Niwaran Sahib derived its name from the incident when Guru Tegh

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172 **Singh, Bhagat**; 2004, *Bhai Taru Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.325-326

173 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.1059

174 See reference no.59

175 See reference no.78

176 **Singh, Dr. Gurbachan**; 1991, *Around Gurdwara Sri Dukh Niwaran Sahib Patiala*, Manjit Singh Calcutta (Secretary S.G.P.C., Amritsar), Dharam Parchar Committee, Amritsar, S. Saranjit Singh Diamond Lithographers, New Delhi, p. 3

Bahadur said to have blessed a lady named *Karmo* whose child was suffering from *athra* (infant mortality) and the child recovered instantly after taking a dip in the *tobha* (pond) as advised by the Guru. Nevertheless, a *hukamnama*<sup>177</sup> (a letter written by the Guru to the Sikh followers) representing the local tradition is lying near the place sanctified by the holy touch of the feet of the Guru on the eve of his visit where he seated under a banyan tree, the mark of which still perpetuates this historic event. A flame lit in pure country made (*desi*) ghee burning throughout day and night symbolises the light eternal.<sup>178</sup>

A large room for Sikh Museum has been built near the ‘*Nishan Sahib*’<sup>179</sup> (the holy flag of the Sikhs representing the sovereignty of the Sikhs) to the East of the Darbar Sahib inside the boundaries of the Gurdwara. Rich collection of fabulous paintings pertaining to Sikh history is contained in this museum. An extraordinary painting narrating the legend of ‘Guru Tegh Bahadur’s visit to the village Lehal’ where he is seated under the banyan tree after having washed his feet in the nearby pond. Bhag Mal, a water carrier is shown informing the Guru that an epidemic has been persisted in the village. The Guru ordained that whosoever takes a dip in the pond on the eve of *Panchmi* (fifth day of the bright phase of the moon) would be cured of all the diseases.<sup>180</sup> Though the name of the artist is not decodable. Other paintings in oil on board depict ‘Portraits of Ten Sikh Gurus (prophets or teachers of Sikh faith)- *Dus Satguru*’<sup>181</sup>; ‘Four *Sahibzadas* (sons) of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru’ - Baba Ajit Singh,

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177 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.278

178 **Singh, Dr. Gurbachan**; 1991, *Around Gurdwara Sri Dukh Niwaran Sahib Patiala*, Manjit Singh Calcutta (Secretary S.G.P.C., Amritsar), Dharam Parchar Committee, Amritsar, S. Saranjit Singh Diamond Lithographers, New Delhi, p.4

179 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.702

180 **Bhatia, S.S.**; 2004, *Patiala*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.318-319

181 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, P.614



Baba Jujhar Singh, Baba Fateh Singh and Baba Zorawar Singh<sup>182</sup>; ‘Baba Deep Singh Shaheed (1682-1757)’ - founder of the *Shahid Misl* or principality as well as of the *Damdami Taksal* or Damdama School of Sikh learning<sup>183</sup>; ‘*Panj Pyaras* (the Five Beloved ones) being baptized by Guru Gobind Singh’ at Anandpur Sahib on 30 March, 1699<sup>184</sup>; ‘Mata Gujri (mother of Guru Gobind Singh) with two younger *Sahibzadas* (sons) of Guru Gobind Singh’ and ‘*Thande Burj di kaid* (detained in a cold tower)’ depicting Mata Gujri alongwith her grandsons- Baba Fateh Singh and Baba Zorawar Singh interned in a cold tower at Sirhind, Punjab, on 8 December, 1705<sup>185</sup>; ‘*Thande Bunge Jug Jug Atal*’ (May our choirs, standards and citadels flourish forever)<sup>186</sup> - In their *Ardas* (routine supplicatory prayer), Sikhs daily of infact everytime they pray individually or collectively recall these words; *Panj Takht*<sup>187</sup> (Five high seats of religious authority) with ornamental oval frame’; ‘Mata Khiwi (d.1582)’- wife of Guru Angad Dev, always engaged in supervising *Langar* (community kitchen) and serving food with her own hands which was always available to everyone. Mata Khiwi was a noble soul and revelled in serving her master and his Sikhs<sup>188</sup>; ‘Bhai Dyala (d.1675)’- a Sikh martyr who was executed alongwith Guru Tegh Bahadur on 11 November, 1675. He was boiled to death in a hot cauldron of water<sup>189</sup>; ‘Bhai Sukha (d.1752) Singh and Mehtab Singh (d.1745)’- one of the eighteenth century Sikh warriors and martyrs, who speared the head of Massa Rangad, the *Kotwal* (police inspector) of Amritsar who tried to desecrate the Golden Temple and

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182 **Bhatia, S.S.**; 2004, *Char Sahibzade*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.446

183 See reference no.78

184 **Ashok, Shamsheer Singh**; 2004, *Panj Piare*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.282-283

185 See reference no.72

186 **Neki, Jaswant Singh**; 1989, *Ardas Darshan Roop Abhyas (Punjabi)*, Singh Brothers. Mai Sewa Bazar, Amritsar, p.256-265

187 **Singh, Harcharan**; 2004, *Takht*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.300-302

188 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Mata Khivi*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.500

189 See reference no.136

filled the sanctorum with dancing girls and concubines in August 1740<sup>190</sup>; Guru Gobind Singh crossing Sirsa river on December, 1704<sup>191</sup>; ‘Bricking alive of two younger *Sahibzadas* (sons)- Baba Fateh Singh and Baba Zorawar Singh at Sirhind by Wazir Khan, a Nawab of Sirhind who forcibly wanted to convert them into Islam on 28 December 1704’<sup>192</sup>; ‘Guru Gobind Singh with bow and arrow’<sup>193</sup>; ‘Sri Harimandir Sahib (House of God) at Amritsar (Punjab)’- the most famous sacred shrine of the Sikhs<sup>194</sup>; ‘Shaheed Bhai Mani Singh (d.1737)’- a Sikh scholar and martyr who led the Sikhs at a crucial time and organized them under one leadership. On an excuse that Bhai Mani Singh did not pay the promised amount, Zakaria Khan, the governor of Lahore ordered his execution by chopping off each limb of his body<sup>195</sup>; ‘Guru Gobind Singh destroying the letter of the deed of renunciation in front of forty Muktas (the forty liberated ones)’<sup>196</sup>; ‘Dhan Sri Guru Granth Sahib’- the holy scripture of the Sikhs and is a voluminous anthology of the sacred verse by six of the ten Sikh Gurus whose compositions it carries and of some of the contemporary saints and men of devotion<sup>197</sup>; ‘Shriimaan Baba Deep Singh Shaheed (1682-1757) with hymn- ‘*Sura Sau Pehchaniye*’ (*Guru Granth Sahib Kabir Raag Maaroo*: 1105-5/6)’- founder of the *Shahid Misl* or principality as well as of the *Damdami Taksal* or Damdama School of Sikh learning<sup>198</sup>.’ The *Sewadaars*<sup>199</sup> (a person performing religious

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190 **Bhatia, Sardar Singh**; 2004, *Sukha Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.266-267

191 **Daljeet, Dr.**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.60

192 See reference no.72

193 See reference no.127

194 **Kerr, Ian J.**; 2004, *Harimandar*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.239-248

195 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Bhai Mani Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.39-41

196 Ibid, p.135-137

197 See reference no.9

198 See reference no.78

199 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.228

service) of the museum informed that these paintings have been donated by some person who did not wish to be named. This is a ‘*Gupt Daan*’,<sup>200</sup> (secret donation).

The other imposing *Calendar art* paintings which draw attention are done by famous artist Sobha Singh, Kirpal Singh, Devender Singh and Master Gurdit Singh. Some other noteworthy paintings are done by local artists Paramjit Singh, Sohal and Ajit Lok. Innumerable digital prints of famous landmark paintings done by pioneer artists of *Sikh Calendar art* have also been included in this collection and they portray mostly popular events in Sikh history, battle scenes and scenes depicting valour, sacrifice and divine devotion. The devotees who visit this holy shrine in large numbers also pay a visit to the museum here on the eve of *Panchmi* (fifth day of the bright phase of the moon) as a religious fair is organized on this day of every month and a brisk purchase of Sikh calendars is witnessed. These Sikh calendars are printed in glossy paper are displayed prominently in the shops adjoining the *Jora Ghar*<sup>201</sup> (voluntary shoe-keeping service at a religious place) in front of the Gurdwara.<sup>202</sup>

‘Baba Baghel Singh Museum’ located in the basement of ‘Gurdwara Bangla Sahib’ in New Delhi, has a large collection of paintings done on the theme of historical events of Sikh history highlighting the lofty ideals or ethics of universal brotherhood, service to mankind, importance of sacrifice and fight for the spirit of freedom and Sikh ideals which prohibit discrimination on the lines of caste, creed, colour, sect, religion or nationality. This museum is especially dedicated to Sikh General Sardar Bhagel Singh in recognition of his dedication and endeavours in constructing a Sikh shrine in Delhi in 1783 A.D. during the

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200 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.414

201 Ibid, p.538

202 **Gurdwara Sri Dukhniwaran Sahib Museum**, Patiala, Punjab *Through Personal Visit*, dated 11 August, 2010.

time of Shah Alam II. Sardar Bhagel Singh was the *Jathedar*<sup>203</sup> (commander) belonging to Karor Singhia *Misl* (confederacy) who conquered Delhi and unfurled *Kesri* (saffron) flag on the Red Fort and appointed Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to the Delhi throne in 1781 A.D.<sup>204</sup> After ‘Central Sikh Museum’ at Amritsar, perhaps this museum has the largest collection of paintings done by eminent painters of *Sikh Calendar art* including Sobha Singh, G.S. Sohan Singh, Kirpal Singh, Master Gurdit Singh, Bodhraj, Devender Singh and Amolak Singh<sup>205</sup> and cover all popular subjects relating to the ‘life and time of Ten Sikh Gurus (prophets or teachers of Sikh faith)’; ‘their Battles’; ‘Emergence of Sikhs as a Marshal race’; ‘Portraits of Chiefs of Sikh *Misls*<sup>206</sup> (confederacies)’; ‘Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur’- on refusal to accept Islam, Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded on 11 November, 1675 at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi on the orders of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb<sup>207</sup>; ‘Martyrdom of Bhai Mati Dass’- a Sikh martyr who too was executed alongwith Guru Tegh Bahadur on 11 November, 1675. Even his body was split into two parts with a saw, he remained a picture of firm faith and resolute devotion, with his body still reverberant with the sounds of holy *Japuji* (the opening composition of Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib)<sup>208</sup>; ‘Martyrdom of Bhai Sati Dass’- a Sikh martyr who too was executed alongwith Guru Tegh Bahadur on 11 November, 1675. He was wrapped in cotton and burnt alive by the oppressors<sup>209</sup>; ‘Martyrdom of Bhai Dyala’- a Sikh martyr who too was executed alongwith Guru Tegh Bahadur on

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203 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.502

204 **Randhir, G.S.;** 1990, *Sikh Shrines in India*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, New Delhi, p.59

205 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharam Prachar Committee, New Delhi;** 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum’s Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.4-54

206 **Gupta, Hari Ram;** 2004, *Misls*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.93-111

207 See reference no.132

208 See reference no.134

209 See reference no.135

11 November, 1675. He was boiled to death in a hot cauldron of water<sup>210</sup>; ‘Portraits of Ten Sikh Gurus (prophets or teachers of Sikh faith) - *Dus Satguru*’<sup>211</sup>; ‘Bhai Lakhi Shah Vanjara (d. 1680)’ - when Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred on 11 November, 1675 at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi and his head severed from the body, a strict watch was kept so that no Sikh could have a glimpse of the mortal remains of the Guru. Lakhi Shah, a devout Sikh, risked his life, taking advantage of the dust storm he put Guru’s body in one of his bullock carts and rushed to his home. Then he set his own house ablaze to cremate it<sup>212</sup>; ‘*Regretta Guru Ka Beta*- is the son of the Guru’ portraying Bhai Jaita as *Rangretta* (a person belonging to Ranghar caste) who daringly took possession of the severed head of Guru Tegh Bahadur and carried it all the way to Anandpur Sahib where Guru Gobind Singh complimented him and exclaimed *Rangretta Guru Ka Beta*<sup>213</sup>; ‘Darbar of Guru Gobind Singh at Sri Damdama Sahib, Talvandi Sabo in 1706’<sup>214</sup>; ‘Portrait of Banda Singh Bahadur (1670-1716)’ - a humble devotee of Guru Gobind Singh and a Sikh Warrior who for the first time seized territory for the *Khalsa Panth*, ‘Banda Singh Bahadur and his seven hundred forty brave soldiers in a unique procession showing Banda Bahadur in a cage placed on an elephant at Delhi on 27 February, 1716’, ‘Execution of seven hundred forty Sikhs at Chandni Chowk March 1761 A.D. on the orders of Mughal emperor Farrukh Siyar’, ‘Martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur on 9 June, 1716’<sup>215</sup>; ‘Martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh (d.1737)’ - a Sikh scholar and martyr who led the Sikhs at a crucial time and organized them under one leadership. On an excuse that Bhai Mani Singh did not pay the promised amount,

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210 See reference no.136

211 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.614

212 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Lakkhi Shah*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.557

213 See reference no.65

214 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Damdama Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.500

215 See reference no.74

Zakaria Khan, the governor of Lahore ordered his execution by chopping off each limb of his body<sup>216</sup>; ‘Bhai Taru Singh (1720-1745)’ - a Sikh martyr who was executed on the order of Zakaria Khan, the governor of Lahore, as his hair were removed alongwith the skull<sup>217</sup>; ‘Bhai Subeg Singh (d.1745) and his son Bhai Shahbaz Singh (d.1745)’- during the time of Yahiya Khan’s (governor of Lahore) tyranny against the Sikhs, Bhai Subeg Singh, a government contractor and his son Shahbaz Singh were ordered to be crushed mid-between the *Charkhari* (spiked wheels) due to their refusal to embrace Islam<sup>218</sup>; ‘Execution of hundreds of Sikhs on the orders of Mir Mannu, the governor of Punjab at Nakhas Bazaar, the horse market, Lahore in 1753’, ‘Brave Sikh women and children bearing inhumane and unbearable torture by the oppressors at Nakhas Chowk, Lahore on the orders of Mir Mannu, the governor of Punjab in 1753’<sup>219</sup>; ‘Sikhs march to Bikaner (Rajasthan)’ - when Ahmed Shah Abdali desecrated Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar and destroyed the holy *sarovar* (the holy tank) and started massacring the Sikhs, they left Punjab under the leadership of Baba Balaka Singh for the jungles of Bikaner<sup>220</sup>; ‘Sikhs freeing twenty-two hundred young girls enslaved by Ahmed Shah Abdali during the Battle of Panipat in 1762’<sup>221</sup>; ‘Sardar Baghel Singh entering Delhi in 11 March, 1781’, ‘Portrait of Sardar Baghel Singh’, ‘Sikhs capturing the Red Fort at Delhi in 1781’<sup>222</sup>; ‘The war at Chillianwala 1849’ - the Anglo-Sikh War-II between the British and Sikhs under

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216 See reference no.195

217 See reference no.172

218 **Singh, Bhagat**; 2004, *Subeg Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.257

219 **Singh, Bhagat**; 2004, *MU’N UL- MULK*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.129-131

220 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharam Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum’s Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.51

221 **Singh, Khushwant**; 2004, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.145

222 See reference no.104

the leadership of Sardar Sher Singh Atarivala<sup>223</sup>; ‘Portrait of Baba Ram Singh Namdhari (1816-1885)’- leader of the Namdhari or Kuka movement in the Punjab<sup>224</sup>; ‘Portrait of Akali Phoola Singh (1761-1833)’- a commander of Akal Takht (a primary seat of Sikh religious authority and centre altar for Sikh political assembly), a Sikh hero and an eminent religious figure of the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>225</sup>; ‘Portrait of Shaheed Bhagat Singh (1907-1931)’- a Sikh revolutionary and martyr who played an important role in struggle for India’s Independence<sup>226</sup>; ‘The sacrifice at Panja Sahib (30 October, 1922)’- on hearing that the Sikhs arrested at Guru Ka Bagh were being taken to Naushera Jail at Attock, Pakistan Punjab, in a train, the Sikh devotees of Panja Sahib, Attock district, Pakistan Punjab, decided to serve them refreshments on the way under the leadership of Bhai Pratap Singh and Bhai Karam Singh. Hundreds of followers lay on the railway track to stop the train for providing *langar* (community kitchen) to the arrested Sikhs but the train stopped only after cutting both of them into pieces under its wheels<sup>227</sup>; ‘Portrait of Shaheed Udham Singh Sunam (1899-1940)’- a militant nationalist of Punjab born at Sunam, in the then princely state of Patiala<sup>228</sup>. Most of the paintings have been attempted in masterly strokes in vibrant colours.

A few paintings done by G.S. Sohan Singh are spellbinding and full of minute details and intricate ornamental frames in vivid and bright colours. These paintings portray Guru Harkrishan who came to Delhi to eradicate a severe epidemic which had taken many lives. Guru Harkrishan cured hundreds of patients with his service and kindness.<sup>229</sup> He was of tender age and a glow of

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223 **Singh, Ganda**; 2004, *Sher Singh Atarivala*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.107

224 See reference no.94

225 See reference no.102

226 See reference no.95

227 See reference no.54

228 See reference no.96

229 See reference no.170

divine innocence encompasses his face. There is a glint of kindness and compassion in his gaze which leaves a magnetic effect on a viewer. There are more paintings attributed to the life of this young Guru as all his life he was engaged in serving the mankind and many institutions in Delhi have been named after him. The ‘Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee’ deserves great appreciation as they have done a towering service in the promotion of *Sikh Calendar art* by establishing this fabulous museum which is well managed and well curated under the guidance and supervision of eminent scholars, artists and historians of *Sikh art*. A visit to the museum inspires and motivates the other young artists to follow the footsteps of Sikh painters who devoted their lives in creating such magnificent *Sikh Calendar art* paintings which have a high dose of aesthetics as well as technical excellence. Another remarkable task performed by the ‘Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee’ is the propagation of Sikhism through the production of reproductions of all the paintings contained in this museum and high quality Sikh calendars are available in their publication section as they produced these calendars in thousands for the general public and devotees.

About eighteen kilometers in the periphery of Amritsar city, a landmark Gurdwara stands near Goindwal Sahib which is termed as “*Sikhi Da Dhura*” (Axel of Sikhism) devoted to Guru Angad Dev. The town of Goindwal Sahib is situated on the bank of river Beas and was a center of trade and commerce during the time of the Guru. Khadur Sahib close to Goindwal is the sacred village where Guru Angad Dev, the second Sikh Guru propagated the message of One God. A grand Gurdwara Khaddi Sahib has been constructed here in memory of Guru Amar Das. The spot where the Gurdwara stands today is located at a *Khaddi*<sup>230</sup> (loom) of a cloth weaver. One dark night Guru Amar Das stumbled into a weaver

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230 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.366



pit, while carrying a pitcher of water on his head. He was fetching water from river Beas at a distance of ten kilometers for his Guru Angad Dev. Notwithstanding his fall, he succeeded in saving the water filled pitcher. The noise of the fall awakened the weaver who suspected a thief. When weaver's wife heard a voice uttering '*Japuji*' (the opening composition of Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib) she remarked that there was no thief but poor, homeless Amar Das. When the incident came to the notice of Guru Angad Dev, he was pleased to observe, "*Amar Das was not homeless and lowly. He shall be the home of the homeless and honour of the unhonoured, the support of the unsupported, the shelter of the shelterless, the protector of the unprotected and the emancipator of the captives*". Guru Angad Dev then formally held the investiture ceremony, appointed Guru Amar Das as his successor and the third Sikh Guru. There are two other Gurdwaras namely Thara Sahib and Killa Sahib located at Khadur Sahib.<sup>231</sup>

As this place is dotted with numerous historical Gurdwaras and sacred sites related to Gurus, establishment of a 'Multimedia Sikh Museum' is an appropriate choice. This museum is precisely situated at 'Gurdwara Angitha Sahib' in Khadur Sahib. This Multimedia Museum was originally opened for public in April 2004 A.D. and was dedicated to the fifth Centennial Gurburab Celebrations of Guru Angad Dev. This museum has been set up in a beautiful building adjacent to 'Gurdwara Angitha Sahib' under the able guidance of Dr. Raghbir Singh Bains. The museum is equipped with LCD Touch Screens, projectors and many more audio visual aids. The technology is interactive, very friendly and easy to use by the people of all ages. The museum is a living memorial to honour those who sacrificed their life by celebrating their lives-cherishing the civilization that they built their achievements and faith, their joys

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231 **Randhir, G.S.**; 1990, *Sikh Shrines in India*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, New Delhi, p.27

and hopes and the vibrant Sikh community that is their legacy today. The museum serves as an educational resource for students, teachers, scholars and general public.<sup>232</sup> This museum projects a vivid illustration of the era gone by particularly in context to development and propagation of Sikhism. The bulk of paintings displayed at this museum are related to ‘Guru Angad Dev’ and ‘Guru Amar Das’. New and interesting facts are revealed about the lives of these Gurus painted in very realistic and expressive mannerisms and have the capacity to directly establish a contact with the viewer. This rich collection is capable of transforming the viewer to the times of Sikh struggle and to the days when compassion and tolerance ruled the atmosphere. There is a thread of harmony and peaceful co-existence narrated in very lucid and pleasing styles. Besides these paintings, this museum is equipped with the state of the art digitalized animations, graphics, audio visual aids and rich text about Sikh philosophy.<sup>233</sup>

The paintings contained in this museum had been prepared with the active cooperation of Patiala based Sardar Mohan Singh (Ex-Founder Curator- Punjab Museum).<sup>234</sup> Important paintings include ‘Guru Angad Dev engrossed in watching bouts of children and annoyed Emperor Humayun is also shown standing in the scene’<sup>235</sup>; ‘Mata Khiwi, wife of Guru Angad Dev, serving *langar* (community kitchen) and *kheer* (rice pudding) dually cooked with *desi* ghee (clarified butter) to the visiting *Sangat* (followers)- (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*: 967)’<sup>236</sup>; ‘Baba Amar Das fetching water in a *Gaggar*<sup>237</sup> (metallic pitcher) from river Beas of Goindwal’, ‘Baba Buddha and Guru Angad Dev blessing Guru

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232 **Dhaliwal, Sarabjit**; November 23, 2009, *Messiah for Khadoor Sahib Belt*, The Tribune  
 233 **Multimedia Sikh Museum at Gurdwara Angitha Sahib, Khadur Sahib, Amritsar district, Punjab**, *Through Personal Visit* dated 26 December, 2010  
 234 **Dhaliwal, Sarabjit**; November 23, 2009, *Messiah for Khadoor Sahib Belt*, The Tribune  
 235 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.59  
 236 See reference no.188  
 237 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, P.404

Amar Das as future Sikh Guru'<sup>238</sup>; 'Funeral ceremony of Guru Angad Dev in the presence of Guru Amar Das and *Sangat* (followers) on 29 March, 1552 at Khadur Sahib, Amritsar district, Punjab'<sup>239</sup>; 'Bhai Lehna listening *Gurbani*<sup>240</sup> (sacred compositions of the Sikh Gurus and of the holy saints incorporated in the scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib) from Bhai Jodh, a disciple of Guru Nanak', 'Bhai Lehna alongwith other devotees on their way to have a glimpse of Guru Nanak Dev', 'Bhai Lehna inquiring the house address from Guru Nanak Dev', 'Surprised Bhai Lehna looking at Guru Nanak Dev sitting on the *gaddi* (throne)<sup>241</sup>; 'Bhai Lehna washing clothes of Guru Nanak Dev on the bank of river at night time', 'Bhai Lehna taking care of Guru Nanak Dev's clothes during a freezing night on the bank of river Ravi'<sup>242</sup>; 'Bhai Lehna in the home of Guru Nanak Dev with a pack of salt', 'Mata Sulakhni guiding him about Guru Nanak'<sup>243</sup>; 'Seeing Bhai Lehna soaked in mud displeased Mata Sulakhni making enquiry from Guru Nanak'<sup>244</sup>; 'Bhai Lehna bringing out the fallen bowl from a muddy pit whereas the sons of Guru Nanak refused to do this job'<sup>245</sup>; 'Guru Nanak Dev testing the mettle of his followers in *Dhanak roop* (a frightened appearance)<sup>246</sup>; 'Guru Nanak blessing Bhai Lehna with Guruship', Guru Nanak ordered Bhai Lehna to eat the corpse in the cremation ground'<sup>247</sup>; 'Baba Buddha and the *Sangat* (followers) enjoying a glimpse of Guru Angad Dev when he

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- 238 **Padam, Piara Singh**; 2004, *Guru Amar Das*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.87-89
- 239 **Bhalla, Diwan Singh**; 2004, *Khadur Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.471-472
- 240 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.418
- 241 **McLeod, W.H.**; 2004, *Guru Angad Dev*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.146-149
- 242 **McLeod, W.H.**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.59
- 243 **Bains, Dr. Raghbir Singh & Singh, Roop**; 2004, *The Life Story of Guru Angad Dev Ji- An Illustrated Spiritual Journey*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, p.15
- 244 Ibid, p.15
- 245 Ibid, p.17-20
- 246 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.665
- 247 See reference no.241

came out from the basement of Mai Bharai's house at Khadur Sahib, Amritsar district, Punjab'<sup>248</sup>; 'Guru Angad Dev distributing *Balbodh*<sup>249</sup> (primers) among children'<sup>250</sup>. Reproductions of these unusual and rare paintings displayed in this museum form part of digitalized calendars available at this sacred place which have been got printed by the management of this museum.

A Gurdwara dedicated to Baba Buddha, a highly respected Sikh saint and scholar who was associated with many Sikh Gurus is situated on the road to Amritsar in the scenic rustic surroundings. Here one finds large mural type paintings hung on the walls inside the Gurdwara and narrate the historical events like 'Baba Buddha offering onions as Prasad to Mata Ganga' and blessing her that '*Waheguru shall fulfill your longing for a son who will be a great warrior whose powers shall no one tame*'. The painting has been painted by famous Sikh painter Kirpal Singh.<sup>251</sup>

'Sachkhand Gurdwara Hemkunt Sahib' in the Himalayas is also regarded as one of the holiest places of the Sikhs. It was there that Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs is reported to have mediated in his previous life. In '*Bachitra Natak*'<sup>252</sup> the great Guru relates his story (*Bachitra Natak* canto-6). This place was discovered in the early thirties by 'Pandit Tara Singh Narotam'. A small hut was constructed there in 1936 A.D. by the side of the lake with bluish green waters. The place is of enchanting beauty surrounded by tall trees and flowers bursting from every bush. Next year in 1937 A.D. 'Guru Granth Sahib' was installed by the devotee Sikhs in this hut, where now stands a beautiful Gurdwara situated at a height of 4,636 meters in the Uttrakhand region. Now the

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248 See reference no.239

249 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (**Punjabi**), Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.858

250 See reference no.241

251 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.34

252 **Dulai, Surjit Singh**; 2004, *Bachitra Natak*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.243-245

Gurdwara is visited by thousands of pilgrims every year in fair weather. One has to go to Rishikesh from where three hundred kilometers journey to Hemkunt starts. The pilgrims move along Dev Prayag, Srinagar (Garhwal), Rudra Prayag, Chamoli, Joshimath, Gobind Ghat and Ghagariya. Before reaching Hemkunt pilgrims pass through a flower decked valley called “Valley of Flowers”.<sup>253</sup> It is interesting to note that this Gurdwara too has a fair collection of large digitalized versions of paintings in the form of *Sikh Calendar art* tastefully adorning the walls of this sacred place. Some painters have attempted oil on canvas paintings on this theme by coping from the coloured photographs and have composed them with pilgrims taking bath in the pool of nectar near the Gurdwara. These *calendar art* posters are available in the market and are revered by the public who carry them as souvenirs of their visit. The calendars pertain to paintings done by saint, philosopher and painter Sobha Singh and G.S. Sohan Singh. The iconographic Sikh calendar of ‘Guru Gobind Singh on horseback’ and another calendar showing ‘Guru Gobind Singh on a galloping horse’ displayed here, is very eye-catching and a fine specimen of *Sikh Calendar art* which is usually found in all Sikh homes.

The Gurdwaras situated in big or small hamlets of north-west India both in urban as well as rural areas have a sizable collection of good specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* displayed on the walls in the form of small *Ajaibghars* (museums) which are of great significance to pilgrims who throng these places. This generates their keen interest in observing these calendar art paintings as these are replete with narrative and self-explanatory scenes painted in vibrant colours, decorative and ornamental styles strengthening the view that such big or small museums attached to the Gurdwaras are a real and authentic source of *Sikh Calendar art* due to their popularity amongst the masses. Painters of different

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253 **Randhir, G.S.;** 1990, *Sikh Shrines in India*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, New Delhi, p.71

artistic and creative calibers both trained and untrained have put in their valuable contribution towards setting up of such museums.

The city of Amritsar which was founded by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru has the holiest of holy Sikh shrine 'The Golden Temple' situated in a 'Pool of Nectar' aptly called Amritsar. Being the most important center of trade, commerce, music, art, culture, theatre, literature and heritage, this city also has the summer palace of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who was known as 'The Lion of Punjab'. This palace is now protected under the 'Punjab Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological sites and remains Act, 1964'. It has been converted into the shape of a museum during the fourth Centenary Celebrations of Amritsar. The museum was formally established by Sh. Jagjiwan Ram, the then Union Minister of India on 29 November 1977 A.D. This Museum is the most important and cultural pride of the Punjab. It is famous for its rare and priceless collections, particularly paintings (drawings, water-colours and sketches), weapons, armours, manuscripts and coins. A large number of visitors visit this museum to see the valuable antiquities and art objects related to eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>254</sup> The magnificent paintings displayed here have been painted by eminent European artist 'August Schoefft'. He had painted these remarkable masterpieces in oil on canvas medium with minute details and had a great sense of architectural as well as scenic perspective which he utilized in the form of backgrounds in the paintings. Great emphasis has been given to the study of human figures, their striking resemblance with actual characters and the costumes and draperies of the era have been skillfully drawn and painted in an aesthetically sound manner. The expressions on the faces of courtiers, soldiers

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254 **Department of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology & Museums, Punjab**; n.d. *Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar* (Catalogue), Script by Mohan Singh (Curator), Consultancy by Dr. J.S. Grewal (Prof. & Head Maharaja Ranjit Singh Chair, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar), Edited by Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (Director, Cultural Affairs, Archaeology & Museums, Punjab), Guidance by Sh. S.L. Kapur (Financial Commissioner & Secretary Cultural Affairs, Punjab), Layout by Amrik Singh (Art Executive), Photography by Ranjit Singh, Rana Printech, Chandigarh, p. 1-9

and important officials of the *Lahore Darbar* have been captured faithfully in captivating true to life style. Details of embroidery and furniture, is another element in these paintings which fills these paintings with dazzling rich splendour and projects the ambience in amazing expression. The paintings which are popular and attract every viewer's attention include 'The scene from the *Lahore Darbar*, the Sikh court at Lahore denoted the government of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors (1799-1849)',<sup>255</sup>; 'Portrait of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839)'- pioneer of Khalsa Rule and popularly known as Sher-e-Punjab, i.e. the Lion of Punjab<sup>256</sup>; 'Portrait of Maharaja Sher Singh (1807-1843)'- son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>257</sup>; 'Portrait of Maharaja Kharak Singh (1801-1840)'- the eldest son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>258</sup>; 'Portrait of General Sham Singh Attariwala (d.1846)'- general in Sikh army under Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>259</sup>. The other important works are lithographs done by Emily Eden, the sister of Lord Auckland. She also attempted some portraits of famous Sikh personalities, chieftains and officials of the court of Lahore and had an excellent control over this medium.<sup>260</sup> Reproductions of these paintings have been published in many European art journals and history books. The European artists had endeavoured to show the rich splendour of Maharaja's court. Colour plates and calendars have also been printed of these famous paintings which used to be

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255 **Hasrat, B.J.**; 2004, *Lahore Darbar*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.547-549

256 See reference no.86

257 **Hasrat, B.J.**; 2004, *Maharaja Sher Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.109

258 **Ahluwalia, M.L.**; 2004, *Maharaja Kharak Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.494-495

259 **Singh, Ganda**; 2004, *Sham Singh Atarivala*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.101

260 **Department of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology & Museums, Punjab**; n.d. *Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar* (Catalogue), Script by Mohan Singh (Curator), Consultancy by Dr. J.S. Grewal (Prof. & Head Maharaja Ranjit Singh Chair, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar), Edited by Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (Director, Cultural Affairs, Archaeology & Museums, Punjab), Guidance by Sh. S.L. Kapur (Financial Commissioner & Secretary Cultural Affairs, Punjab), Layout by Amrik Singh (Art Executive), Photography by Ranjit Singh, Rana Printech, Chandigarh, p.3-4

sold in Amritsar and Lahore. Some limited editions have also been reproduced by many corporate houses and a few of them are in permanent collection of 'The Imperial Hotel' at New Delhi.

The 'Anglo-Sikh War Memorial' situated at Ferozpur city near two big rivers namely 'Sirhind Feeder' and 'Rajasthan Feeder' is yet another valuable and rich source of *Sikh Calendar art*. This museum was created to commemorate the war between the Sikhs and the British in a battlefield barely four kilometers from this museum. Indo-Pak Border is about twenty-two kilometers from this memorial and nearby Husainiwala Border falls on the banks of river Satluj which has a special place in the struggle for India's Independence. The sacred ashes of the three great martyrs namely Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were immersed in the river and a suitable memorial has been erected here. The Anglo-Sikh War Memorial attracts a great number of visitors who acquaint themselves with the events which occurred on this soil and the paintings exhibited in the museum are a true testimony of the valour and bravery displayed by the Sikh soldiers against the British invaders.<sup>261</sup> The visitors are overwhelmed with pride while watching these splendid paintings which carry remarkable details capturing the powerful action and expression on the faces of the brave Sikh soldiers exuding a rare mastery of composition and a robust realistic palate.

Most of the paintings in this museum have been painted by artist Kirpal Singh in his own inimitable style. The weaponry and the uniform of the Sikh army and the British army have been truthfully recorded and depiction of warriors on horsebacks and some cavalries with spears, swords and guns present an actual war-like atmosphere where soldiers from the British army have been

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261 **Department of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology & Museums, Punjab**; n.d. *Anglo-Sikh War Memorial Museum, Ferozeshah* (Catalogue), Script by Mohan Singh (Curator), Consultancy by Dr. J.S. Grewal (Prof. & Head Maharaja Ranjit Singh Chair, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar), Edited by Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (Director, Cultural Affairs, Archaeology & Museums, Punjab), Guidance by Sh. S.L. Kapur (Financial Commissioner & Secretary Cultural Affairs, Punjab), Layout by Amrik Singh (Art Executive), Photography by Ranjit Singh, Rana Printech, Chandigarh, p.1



running incoherently due to booming of cannons and guns. The prints of these paintings have many admirers which include military officer's messes and garrisons at Chandimandir and Jalandhar cantonment are few examples. They make it a point to collect these works for display in their common rooms as these have a capacity to boost the moral of present day army men by according a sense of pride in their history and heritage. The prominent scenes in these paintings are 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh crossing Attuck'<sup>262</sup>; 'Scene from the Battle of Chillianwali' - the Anglo-Sikh War-II fought between the Britishers and Sikhs on the river Jhelum on 13 January, 1849 under the leadership of Sardar Sher Singh Atarivala<sup>263</sup>; 'Battle of Sabhraon' - the Anglo-Sikh War-I fought between the Britishers and Sikhs on 10 February, 1846<sup>264</sup>; 'Battle of Pheru Sheher (Ferozshah)' - the Anglo-Sikh War-I fought between the Britishers and Sikhs on 21 December, 1845 at Firozpur<sup>265</sup>; 'Battle of Mudki' - the Anglo-Sikh War-I fought between the Britishers and Sikhs on 18 December, 1845<sup>266</sup>; 'Portrait of General Sham Singh Attariwala (d.1846)' - general in Sikh army under Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>267</sup>; 'Portrait of Maharaja Sher Singh (1807-1843)' - son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>268</sup>; 'Portrait of Maharaja Dalip Singh (1838-1893)' - the youngest son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the last Sikh sovereign of the Punjab<sup>269</sup>;

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262 **Department of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology & Museums, Punjab**; n.d. *Anglo-Sikh War Memorial Museum, Ferozeshah* (Catalogue), Script by Mohan Singh (Curator), Consultancy by Dr. J.S. Grewal (Prof. & Head Maharaja Ranjit Singh Chair, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar), Edited by Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (Director, Cultural Affairs, Archaeology & Museums, Punjab), Guidance by Sh. S.L. Kapur (Financial Commissioner & Secretary Cultural Affairs, Punjab), Layout by Amrik Singh (Art Executive), Photography by Ranjit Singh, Rana Printech, Chandigarh, p.2

263 **Hasrat, B.J.**; 2004, *Anglo-Sikh War-II*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.173

264 Ibid, p.168

265 See reference no. 264

266 See reference no. 264

267 See reference no. 259

268 See reference no. 257

269 See reference no.87

‘Portrait of Maharani Jinda (1817-1863)’- wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>270</sup>;  
 ‘Portrait of Diwan Mool Raj (1814-1851)’- the governor of Multan<sup>271</sup>.<sup>272</sup> Sardar K.S. Bains, former Chairman-cum-Managing Director, Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi has the opinion that *“Painting is perhaps the most expressive form of art to depict the emotions, spirit and events of an era. They constitute the signatures of the stage development of a society has achieved. Their real significance some times eludes us, may be because not many efforts have been made to organize paintings in a sequential form with a well defined purpose in view. The lives and times of the Sikh Gurus is an era which has influenced the society not only in the field of religion but has left an indelible imprint on the mankind as a whole”*. To capture the ambience of those times, the Punjab and Sind Bank has been specially commissioning renowned artists for making paintings for its annual calendars. Over a period of more than three decades the Bank has collected nearly two hundred such paintings. The collection contains paintings depicting the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and their contemporary Saints and *Sufis* as also the state of society of those times. Through these calendars, the Bank has been spreading the message of universal love, peace, unity and service to humanity. The Punjab and Sind Bank has already taken steps to house these paintings in a proper Art Gallery and for the time being in order to reach to the masses the Bank has come up with a remarkable Book titled *“Sikh Heritage in Paintings”* which has a large multi-coloured collection of these paintings with suitable titles and descriptions and it is a valuable source of *Sikh Calendar art*. Another noteworthy aspect of this publication is that it has been published in English, Punjabi and Hindi transcriptions to maximize its reach to a

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270 **Hasrat, B.J.**; 2004, *Maharani Jind Kaur*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.381-384

271 **Gupta, Hari Ram**; 2004, *Diwan Mul Raj*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.143

272 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

large population of this country.<sup>273</sup> No doubt this publication is considered a rare work of art; it has crossed boundaries and reached in many countries where Punjabi population is settled. This book appears like a mini encyclopedia of *Sikh Calendar art* and carries the soulful and lofty ideals of Sikhism which abound in humanism. The messages of the Sikh Gurus have reached many shores and these paintings are commonly found in all Punjabi households in the form of fascinating calendars. There is an ever increasing demand for collection of these calendars which can be hung on the walls or can be got framed to look like real paintings. Digitalization of art has served this purpose in befitting manner and a vast populace is familiar with these paintings which are a benchmark in *Sikh Calendar art* in true spirit and expression.

The credit goes to Punjab and Sind Bank for utilizing the services of popular Punjabi artists who have the understanding and creative acumen to portray *Sikh art*, culture, heritage, traditions and history. The artists chosen for painting these works have done a creditable job with sincerity and dedication prominent amongst them are Kirpal Singh, Master Gurdit Singh, Devender Singh, Bodhraj, Amolak Singh and Mehar Singh.<sup>274</sup> The Bank also provided opportunity to other equally talented artists though they may not be considered well known to achieve a variety in stylization and expand the scope of Pan-Punjab contribution in producing paintings of considerable artistic merit. Thus some paintings provide a breath of fresh air in their own distinctive presentation done on themes which are not in the main stream *Sikh art* themes. A shining example of this trend is semi-abstract paintings by Devender Singh, attempted for the first time on ‘*Baramaha Tukhari Chhant Mahala-1* [Guru Nanak’s twelve month hymn in Raga Tukhari (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib- 1108/09*)]’<sup>275</sup> theme,

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273 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.11

274 Ibid, p.8

275 **Kaur, Gunindar;** 2004, *Barah Maha*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.284-288

which are full of vibrancy and present a brilliant example of contemporary *Sikh art*. They were also well received and printed in large numbers in the form of calendars in 1972 A.D.<sup>276</sup>

The themes of the paintings contained in this book have selected to give emphasis on the reformatory content and welfare of mankind. Through the events from Sikh history which illustrate and establish the facts relating to the lives of Sikh Gurus, Saints and even humble Sikh followers who have been instrumental in propagating the message of Guru Nanak Dev which dwells on humility, truthfulness and love for all mankind<sup>277</sup> and also the main message of *Kirat Karo Naam Japo Wand Chhako*<sup>278</sup> - Dignity of Labour being of paramount importance is followed by always remembering the Name of the Almighty and sharing of whatever one has with others is highlighted for example ‘Guru Nanak Dev curing a leper during his first *Udasi*<sup>279</sup> (Missionary Travel)’ at Goindwal, Amritsar District, Punjab<sup>280</sup>; ‘Guru Nanak alongwith his companion Mardana visiting Bhai Lalo’s house, who was a carpenter by profession and lived at Saidpur, present-day town of Eminabad in Gujranwala district, Pakistan’<sup>281</sup>; ‘Guru Angad distributing small booklets in *Gurmukhi*<sup>282</sup> (name of the script used in writing primarily Punjabi) alphabet among his devotees’<sup>283</sup>; ‘Mata Khiwi, wife of Guru Angad Dev preparing *langar* (community kitchen) for the *Sangat* (followers)’<sup>284</sup>; ‘Guru Amar Das appointing women to conduct Sikh missionary and parish

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276 **Menon, Rathi A.**; June 21, 1998, *The hand that gives form to Sikh History*, Indian Express

277 **Anand, Mulk Raj**; 1995, *In Praise of Painting of Pity and Love of Sikh Tradition*. In K.S. Bains, Ed. *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.15

278 **Cole, W. Owen**; 2004, *Nam Japna, Kirat Karna, Vand Chhakana*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.162-163

279 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.9

280 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.16-17

281 **Singh, Gurnek**; 2004, *Bhai Lalo*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.561

282 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.418-419

283 See reference no.241

284 See reference no.188

work'<sup>285</sup>; 'Guru Amar Das giving bath to Prema Chaudhri- a leper and restoring him to good health'<sup>286</sup>; 'Guru Amar Das forbidding the practice of *Sati*<sup>287</sup> (practice of burning of wife at the pyre of husband) and conferring equal status on men and women'<sup>288</sup>; 'Guru Arjan Dev helping the villagers in digging six-channel Persian Wheel (*Chhcharta*)'<sup>289</sup>; 'Guru Arjan Dev serving the lepers at Tarn Taran, Punjab and building a leper's home there near the sacred *sarovar* (holy tank) of Gurdwara Tarn Taran Sahib'<sup>290</sup>; '*Bandi Chhor*<sup>291</sup> (Liberator Benign) Guru Hargobind'- As the tyranny of the Mughals had increased day by day and non-Muslims had to undergo great atrocities in following their faith that they were compelled to take to arms. This annoyed emperor Jahangir who ordered arrest of the Guru Hargobind in the Gwalior fort. But soon he realised his mistake and ordered Guru's release. Guru Sahib refused to accept this offer till fifty-two innocent Rajas were also freed alongwith him. Instructions were issued that whosoever holds the Gurus dress will be freed. Guru Sahib wore a special robe with fifty-two strings attached to it. Each Raja held one string and walked into freedom in 1617<sup>292</sup>; 'Healing touch of Guru Harkrishan Sahib'- when Guru Sahib visited Delhi, the city was in the grip of an epidemic. He went all over the city in narrow lanes and gave succour to all in distress without any discrimination of caste, creed and religion. His very presence and the divine look would rid the patients of their sufferings<sup>293</sup>. Sikh theologian and an eminent poet 'Bhai Nand Lal has been shown in one of the paintings engaged in serving

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285 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.28

286 Ibid, p.29

287 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.149

288 See reference no.56, p.89

289 **Singh, Gurnek;** 2004, *Gurdwara Chheharta Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.459

290 See reference no.57

291 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, P.894

292 See reference no.68

293 See reference no.170

*langar* (community kitchen) amongst the *Sangat* (followers)<sup>294</sup>. An extraordinary painting by Amolak Singh shows ‘Guru Gobind Singh teaching his handicapped or blind disciples the art of playing musical instruments like *Tabla*, *Saranda*, *Rabab* and *Taus*’ in order to make them able to participate in spreading the message of *Khalsa Panth* (a religious path representing the whole system of precept and practice laid down by the Sikh Gurus).<sup>295</sup>

Paintings done with a lyrical and fabulously creative verve have been included in this remarkable collection dwelling upon the lives of Saints, *Sufis* and Bhagats whose *Bani* (religious and spiritual hymns) have been respectfully placed in ‘Sri Guru Granth Sahib’.<sup>296</sup> The tone and tenor of these fascinating paintings is spiritual and full of divinity and harmony and there is an aura of peace and tranquility in the palette with soothing and soft hues. These paintings instantly capture the imagination of a viewer and leave an indelible mark on one’s mind. The paintings capture the images of ‘Baba Sheikh Farid (1175-1265)’- a *Sufi*<sup>297</sup> mystic and teacher who is also known to be the first recorded poet in the Punjabi language. His one hundred twelve *slokas*<sup>298</sup> (couplets) and four *sabdās*<sup>299</sup> (hymns) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>300</sup>; ‘Bhagat Dhanna (b.1415)’- a medieval saint whose three *sabdās* (hymns) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>301</sup>; ‘Bhagat Trilochan (b.1265)’- a saint-poet and was a learned scholar well-versed in the Puranic lore and Indian philosophical thought. His four *sabdās* (hymns) are

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294 See reference no.155

295 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.77

296 **Sambhi, Piara Singh;** 2004, *Bani*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.276-277

297 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.224

298 Ibid, p.172

299 Ibid, p.156

300 **Talib, Gurbachan Singh;** 2004, *Shaikh Farid*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.11-13

301 **Bahri, Hardev;** 2004, *Bhagat Dhanna*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.567

included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>302</sup>; ‘Swami Ramanand (1300-1410)’- a pioneer of Bhakti Movement in North India whose one *sabda* (hymn) is included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>303</sup>; ‘Bhagat Kabir (1398-1494)’- a revolutionary saint-poet of Bhakti Movement whose two hundred twenty-seven *padas*<sup>304</sup> (a couplet composed of two-lined poetic composition) and two hundred thirty-seven *salokas* (couplets) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>305</sup>; ‘Bhagat Namdev (1270-1350)’- a saint from Maharashtra who composed poetry of fervent devotion in Marathi as well as Hindi. His sixty-one *sabd*s (hymns) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>306</sup>; ‘Bhagat Ravidas (b. 15<sup>th</sup> century)’- a poet and mystic who adopted Swami Ramananda as his Guru. His forty *sabd*s (hymns) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>307</sup>, in highly pleasing and expressive forms complete with scenic backgrounds, flora and fauna and the compositions are of superlative quality, which speak volumes of the aesthetic caliber of the artists. These tastefully illustrated paintings narrate the anecdotes related to a particular Saint, Bhagat or a *Sufi*. It is interesting to know that paintings on the subjects such as ‘Bibi Rajni- a devoted wife’- she was a noble woman and was firm in her faith and devotion. She derived much solace from serving wholeheartedly her husband who was a leper. Eventually her leper husband was cured of his illness by a dip in the sacred pool at Amritsar<sup>308</sup>; ‘Baba Budha (1506-1631)’- the most venerated primal figure of early Sikhism and was the first high-

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302 **Singh, Taran**; 2004, *Trilochan*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.365-366

303 **Tomar, Ram Singh**; 2004, *Ramananda*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.447

304 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.740

305 **Scott, David C.**; 2004, *Kabir*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.403-405

306 **Moon, Penderal**; 2004, *Namdev*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.161-162

307 **Bahri, Hardev**; 2004, *Ravidas*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.493-494

308 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.97

priest of the Golden Temple at Amritsar<sup>309</sup>; ‘Bhai Banno (1558-1645)’- a prominent Sikh contemporary of Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind. He rendered diligent service during the construction of Sri Harimandar Sahib at Amritsar under Guru Arjan<sup>310</sup>; ‘Bhai Kanhaiya: Forerunner of Red Cross (1648-1718)’- the founder of the *Sevapanthi* or *Addanshahi*<sup>311</sup> sect of the Sikhs. He used to serve drinking water to the wounded and the thirsty Turk soldiers alongwith the Sikh soldiers irrespective of whether they are foes or friends- Sikhs or Muslims<sup>312</sup>; ‘Bhai Tara Singh Van (d.1725)’- an eighteenth century Sikh martyr and a devout Sikh who served the Sikhs even at the cost of his life. *Langar* (community kitchen) was always available at his residence. He also served the injured unmindful of men and animals. Even his entire family was found serving the needy and the down-trodden<sup>313</sup>; ‘Bhai Buddha’- he exemplified the spirit of selfless service by breaking the doors of his house to use them as firewood to prepare *langar* (community kitchen) for the *sangat* (followers). He did this when it was raining heavily and firewood could not be procured to cook food for the *langar* (community kitchen)<sup>314</sup>, which had rarely been attempted by the artists find a place of pride in this wonderful collection.<sup>315</sup> A scene of *Kar Sewa* (voluntary work of dredging or removing by manual labour sedimentary mud and garbage, collected at the bottom of a sarovar, the sacred tank) at Amritsar by Devender Singh explicitly captures the enthusiasm and religious fervour amongst thousands of devotees (*Kar Sewaks*) who are performing the sacred task of

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- 309 **Randhawa, Gurdip Singh**; 2004, *Baba Buddha*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.399-400
- 310 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Bhai Banno*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.279
- 311 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.50
- 312 **Padam, Piara Singh**; 2004, *Bhai Kanhaiya*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.423-424
- 313 **Singh, Bhagat**; 2004, *Bhai Tara Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.310-311
- 314 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.101
- 315 *Ibid*, p.92-101



cleansing the *Sarovar*<sup>316</sup> (the sacred tank) at Sri Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar.<sup>317</sup> The scene has inspirational value to describe the high place of service in Sikhism. Paying a glowing tribute to Saints, Sufis and Bhagats, this collection also carries excellent portraits of ‘Baba Sheikh Farid (1175-1265)’- a *Sufi* mystic and teacher who is also known to be the first recorded poet in the Punjabi language. His one hundred twelve *salokas* (couplets) and four *sabd*s (hymns) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>318</sup>; ‘Bhagat Ravidas (b. 15<sup>th</sup> century)’- a poet and mystic who adopted Swami Ramananda as his Guru. His forty *sabd*s (hymns) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>319</sup>; ‘Bhagat Pipa (b.1425)’- a saint who was born at Gangaraun, Jhalawar district, Rajasthan whose one *sabda* (hymn) is included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib. He was a prince who renounced his throne in search of spiritual solace<sup>320</sup>; ‘Sheikh Bikhan (1480-1573)’- a medieval Indian saint whose two *sabd*s (hymns) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>321</sup>; ‘Bhagat Parmanand (b.1483)’- was a Maharashtrian saint-poet whose one *sabda* (hymn) is included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>322</sup>; ‘Bhagat Namdev (1270-1350)’- a saint from Maharashtra who composed poetry of fervent devotion in Marathi as well as Hindi. His sixty-one *sabd*s (hymns) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>323</sup>; ‘Sian Mian Mir (1550-1635)’- a well known *Sufi* saint who laid the foundation-stone of Sri Harimandar

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316 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.170

317 **Singh, Bhai Kirpal**; 2004, *Kar Sewa*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.445-447

318 See reference no.300

319 See reference no.307

320 **Bahri, Hardev**; 2004, *Pipa*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.342

321 **Singh, Taran**; 2004, *Bhikhan*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.355-356

322 **Singh, Taran**; 2004, *Parmanand*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.302-303

323 See reference no.306

Sahib in the midst of the sacred pool at Amritsar in 1558<sup>324</sup>; ‘Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636)’ - he was much honoured in Sikh learning and piety, was a leading figure in early Sikhism who enjoyed the patronage of Guru Arjan under whose supervision he inscribed the first copy of the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>325</sup>. A variety of calendars have been brought out by the Public Relation Department of Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi, using these illuminating paintings which are in great demand due to the fact that these calendars offer a visual inspiration and a sense of dedication in propagation of ideals of Sikhism in expressive stylization and virtual emancipation from mental shackles.

In the today’s world the contribution of corporates towards the promotion of art, music and culture is of immense value due to their economic grit and the well known largest corporation associated with agriculture marketing ‘Markfed’ in Punjab has set up a high benchmark for itself to promote art, culture and heritage of Punjab. True to its ideals this corporation has made valuable contribution in commissioning the artists to produce paintings on the themes related to Sikh history, heritage, art and culture and the result is the creation of wonderful works done by artists on the above mentioned themes. In their collection the artists engaged for producing these fascinating paintings are Kirpal Singh, Jarnail Singh and Devender Singh. As these paintings have an eye-catching appeal due to vibrant colours and popular themes they had been easily adapted as attractive calendars. These calendars are distributed free of cost mainly by this corporation yet they are in great demand as they are religiously collected by the art lovers all over the globe. Keeping in the same spirit the management of Bank of Punjab had their own fair share of propagation of *Sikh Calendar art*. They found a novel way to collect paintings on *Sikh art* and Sikh

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324 **Faruqui, Z.H.**; 2004, *Hazrat Mian Mir*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.82-83

325 **Jaggi, Rattan Singh**; 2004, *Bhai Gurdas*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.138-139

themes by inviting artists to participate in their annual art exhibitions where thousands of artists participated. The Bank organized exhibitions of the selected works done on a certain theme and awarded the artists with handsome amounts. Every year the Bank came out with a beautiful calendar comprising of award winning paintings and the calendars were distributed free of cost for the sake of promotion and propagation of *Sikh Calendar art*. These calendars were printed on glossy art paper were a connoisseur's item. This way the Bank of Punjab has done a commendable job in generating an interest in general public about the Sikh ethos and values on one hand and on the other hand the rich, robust and vibrant cultural heritage of Punjab got highlighted.

A premier source of *Sikh Calendar art* Government Museum and Art Gallery at Chandigarh owes its existence to the partition of the country in August, 1947 A.D. Going back to the history of this museum, before the partition in 1947, the collection of art objects, paintings, sculptures and decorative arts was housed in the Central Museum at Lahore, the then capital of Punjab. On April 10, 1948 A.D., the division of collection took place by which 60% of objects were retained by Pakistan and the remaining 40% collection consisting mainly of Gandhara Sculptures and Indian Miniature Paintings fell in the share of India. Received in the month of April 1949 A.D., this collection was first housed in Amritsar then Shimla, Patiala and finally it shifted to Chandigarh. Of the various multi-dimensional museums in India, the Government Museum and Art Gallery at Chandigarh occupies a very distinctive position. The museum is situated in the heart of the Chandigarh city planned by Le Corbusier. The museum building is an attraction in view of the fact that Le Corbusier himself designed it. This museum was inaugurated on May 6, 1968 A.D. under the initiative and active support of late Dr. M.S. Randhawa, renowned connoisseur and patron of art and the then Chief Commissioner of Chandigarh. Later a few other buildings were added in view of the growing need of the museum's

expansion. The site where the museum is situated is surrounded by selective trees adding grandeur to its campus. The vast expanse of the courtyard of the museum is dotted with some contemporary sculptures suitable for environmental display. The museum has four wings of which the largest and the most imposing is doubtless the building of the Art Gallery. Other wings constitute the Natural History Museum, Chandigarh Architecture Museum and National Gallery of Portraits.<sup>326</sup>

Besides the large precious collection of Miniature Paintings relating to Sikh realm and *Sikh art* and Pahari Miniatures, a special section has been devoted to paintings by Sikh and Punjabi painters namely Sobha Singh, Kirpal Singh, S.G. Thakur Singh, Jaswant Singh, Jarnail Singh and K.C. Aryan. These entire incredible paintings project an overall view of the creative magnitude with which these inimitable works have been acquired under the supervision of late Dr. M.S. Randhawa who very discerningly selected these specimens of myriad *Sikh art* keeping in mind the thematic content and variety of styles. In this rare collection each artist has its own distinctive style and representational work of art.<sup>327</sup> The painting of a 'Nihang' by K.C. Aryan<sup>328</sup> in contemporary semi-abstract style is a refreshing departure and paintings by Jaswant Singh done on the theme of '*Raga & Raginis*'<sup>329</sup> speak volumes of the high standard of surrealistic presentation of *Ragas* in bewitching hues and tones which have the quality to enthrall and mesmerize the viewer. These paintings are done in oil on canvas medium in 1966-67 A.D.<sup>330</sup> representing *Raga Bhairav*, *Raga Deepak*,

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326 **Bhattacharya, Dr. D.C.**; April 2003, *The Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh-A Handy Guide* (Introduction), Publisher: The Director, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Sector-10, Chandigarh, The Government Press, Union Territory, Chandigarh, p. 1-8

327 **Khanna, Poonam** (Curator); February 23, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Sector-10, Chandigarh.

328 **Nihang** (Acc. No.3073) *painting* by K.C.Aryan, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.

329 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.1027-1028

330 **Chitrakar, Ajajib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.92

*Raga Megh, Raga Hindol, Raga Shri, Raga Malkauns, Raga Vasant, Raga Gaurmalhar, Raga Bageshwari, Raga Bhupali, Ragini Bhairavi, Ragini Dhanashri and Ragini Bhairaveen.*<sup>331</sup>

The masterpieces displayed in this section are two large paintings by Jaswant Singh in his surrealistic style on the theme of ‘Guru Nanak - the Devotee’ (1966) and ‘Guru Nanak- the Pilgrim’ (1966).<sup>332</sup> These paintings are a rare treat to the eye and have been attempted in complete abandon in a poetic and symbolic excellence. No other painting of Guru Nanak Dev has been done in similar style and expression. The painting by Sobha Singh titled ‘*Eko Simro Nanaka*’ (1968)<sup>333</sup> has an air of divine power due to spiritual and ethereal idiom. The other landmark painting by Sobha Singh envisions ‘Guru Gobind Singh on horseback and falcon perched on his gloved hand’ (1967)<sup>334</sup> presents a true picture of a warrior with a glint of determination in his eyes and an air of resolve on his face. This fabulous iconic painting is the subject matter of one of the best specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* immensely popular and it has been printed in lacs. A laudable effort by this museum is the reproduction and sale of prints of such paintings at its counters. This museum also houses works by S.G. Thakur Singh whose contribution in painting nature and surroundings is unmatched and who is both prolific and versatile in capturing people, places and historical

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331 **Raga & Raginis (Acc. No. 3492 to 3503 and 3780)**; *paintings* by Jaswant Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.

332 **Guru Nanak- the Devotee (Acc. No. 3310) and Guru Nanak- the Pilgrim’ (Acc. No. 3311)**, *paintings* by Jaswant Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh), published by Dr. M.S. Randhawa, 1971, *Portraits of Guru Nanak by contemporary artists, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.4-6.

333 **Eko Simro Nanaka** (Acc. No. 3567) , *painting* by Sobha Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh) published by Urmi Kessar, June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.118.

334 **Guru Gobind Singh on horseback (Acc. No. 3504)**, *painting* by Sobha Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh), published by K.S Bains, 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.78.

monuments.<sup>335</sup> A large body of his works includes paintings in oil on canvas, water-colours, sketches etc. establishing him as ‘John Constable of India’.<sup>336</sup> A painting of ‘The Golden Temple’ (1933)<sup>337</sup> done in his own individualistic style has a special impressionistic flavour and it radiates divinity in the atmosphere. The other works by the artist are ‘Evening in Kullu Valley’ (1961)<sup>338</sup>, ‘In the Valley of Gods’ (1960)<sup>339</sup>, ‘Veil’ (1961)<sup>340</sup>, ‘Garhwal Belle’ (1966)<sup>341</sup>, ‘After Sunrise’ (1961)<sup>342</sup>, ‘Morning Dip’ (1967)<sup>343</sup>, ‘The Devotional Tune’ (1967)<sup>344</sup>, ‘After the Bath’ (2<sup>nd</sup> reproduction, 1924)<sup>345</sup> and ‘Paradise of the Poor’ (1967)<sup>346</sup>. Presenting a flavour of valour and bravery are paintings by Kirpal Singh namely portraits of ‘Baba Deep Singh Shaheed (1682-1757) dated 1970’<sup>347</sup> founder of the *Shahid Misl* or principality as well as of the *Damdami Taksal* or Damdama

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- 335 **Khanna, Poonam** (Curator); February 23, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Sector-10, Chandigarh.
- 336 **Bhatti, S.S.**; May 1, 2011, *Art under Attack*, The Tribune.
- 337 **The Golden Temple**, *painting* by S.G. Thakur Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh), published by Krishna Chaitanya, 1951, *The Art of S.G. Thakur Singh, Roopalekha*, Vol.22, No.2, AIFACS, New Delhi, P.23
- 338 **Evening in Kullu Valley** (Acc. No. 2835), *painting* by S.G. Thakur Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh), published by Urmi Kessar, June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. New Insights into Sikh Art, Marg Publications, p.131
- 339 **In the Valley of Gods** (Acc. No. 2836), *painting* by S.G. Thakur Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.
- 340 **Veil** (Acc. No. 2837), *painting* by S.G. Thakur Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.
- 341 **Garhwal Belle** (Acc. No. 3295), *painting* by S.G. Thakur Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.
- 342 **After Sunrise** (Acc. No. 3365), *painting* by S.G. Thakur Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.
- 343 **Morning Dip** (Acc. No. 3757), *painting* by S.G. Thakur Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.
- 344 **The Devotional Tune** (Acc. No. 3758), *painting* by S.G. Thakur Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh), published by Urmi Kessar, June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. New Insights into Sikh Art, Marg Publications, p.128
- 345 **After the Bath, 2nd reproduction** (Acc. No. 3757), *painting* by S.G. Thakur Singh, (original *painting* is in the collection of H.H. Maharaja of Patiala), Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.
- 346 **Paradise of the Poor** (Acc. No. 3760), *painting* by S.G. Thakur Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.
- 347 **Baba Deep Singh Shaheed** (Acc. No. 3750), *painting* by Kirpal Singh Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.

School of Sikh learning<sup>348</sup>; ‘Bhai Bidhi Chand Chhina (d.1640) dated 1970’<sup>349</sup> a brave Sikh warrior, cleverly escaped out with the two horses- ‘Dilbagh’ and ‘Gulbagh’ by jumping over the high wall of the fort of Nawab of Lahore into the river Ravi<sup>350</sup>; ‘Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) dated 1963’<sup>351</sup> - pioneer of Khalsa Rule and popularly known as Sher-e-Punjab, i.e. the Lion of Punjab<sup>352</sup>; ‘Hari Singh Nalwa (1791-1837) dated 1963’<sup>353</sup> - a celebrated General of the Khalsa forces of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>354</sup>; ‘Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia (1723-1803) dated 1966’<sup>355</sup> - founder of the *Ramgharia Misl* or chiefship and prominent military leader of the Sikhs<sup>356</sup>. These paintings have been done in bold and powerful strokes which stand testimony to the strength of character and resolve on the faces of these Sikh warriors thereby paying a tribute to the struggles and hardships through which they had to pass in the service of Sikhism. In the same series, three wonderfully composed paintings done by Kirpal Singh are battle scenes illustrating the marshal and patriotic traditions of Sikhs. He is an expert in the narration of Sikh history and wars and had the required expertise and artistic calibre to depict these scenes in emotive parlance. His study of costumes, weaponry and moment of characters is superbly natural. Jarnail Singh’s work has his individual mild and decorative style even when he portrays a war scene. One notable painting in this collection is the ‘Portrait of Hari Singh

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348 See reference no.78

349 **Bhai Bidhi Chand Chhina** (Acc. No. 3751), *painting* by Kirpal Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.

350 See reference no.61

351 **Maharaja Ranjit Singh** (Acc. No. 3187), *painting* by Kirpal Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.

352 See reference no.86.

353 **Hari Singh Nalwa** (Acc. No. 3186), *painting* by Kirpal Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.

354 See reference no.105.

355 **Jassa Singh Ramgarhia** (Acc. No. 3691), *painting* by Kirpal Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.

356 See reference no.80.

Nalwa (1791-1837),<sup>357</sup> a celebrated General of the Khalsa forces of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.<sup>358</sup>

The Government Museum and Art Gallery at Chandigarh is indebted to Shri Rajesh Kohli, Art Consultant, New Delhi and Member Art Acquisition Committee, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh who has very kindly donated his large collection of *Sikh Calendar art* to this museum. His collection comprises of fifty-four Sikh Calendars printed in printing and publishing houses at Nai Sarak, Chandni Chowk at Delhi pertaining to last decade of twentieth century. These rare works have portrayed some unusual themes concerning *Sikh art* in a variety of styles in lithography technique. A few of these paintings have been done by Hindu artists. These Sikh calendars are not visible in the market nowadays but they used to be very popular during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>359</sup> The characteristics and elements of true *Sikh Calendar art* are amply visible in these calendars which have extremely intricate and ornamental geometrical frames, bright colours, densely populated figurative compositions concentrating on profile and additional intent on the depiction of jewelry and richness of costumes. Theme and stylization is on the lines of Trans-India preferences and the splendour of divinity and spirituality enriches these eye-catching works. At a glance one can visualize the inner creative strength of these calendars due to the emphasis given on compact and cohesive division of the space and compositions with a lingering pleasant impact on the viewer.

With an aim to promote art and cultural heritage of Punjab, the Punjabi University at Patiala envisioned an ambitious project of setting up a Museum and Art Gallery in 1972 A.D. in its campus during the tenure of Shri. Kirpal Singh, the then Vice-Chancellor of the university and the museum was inaugurated by

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357 **Hari Singh Nalwa** (Acc. No.2010.10.3), *painting* by Jarnail Singh, Government Museum and Art Gallery, sector-10, Chandigarh.

358 See reference no.105

359 **Khanna, Poonam** (Curator); *Through Personal Interview*, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Sector-10, Chandigarh. February 23, 2010



former Chief Minister of Punjab, Giani Zail Singh. In pursuance of its prime aim this museum had been organizing Artist Workshops, Camps and Exhibitions from time to time and has provided the much needed platform to the artists to showcase their creative and artistic talents by participating in such activities. During the organizing of the Indian Science Congress in 1996 A.D. at Punjabi University, Patiala, the Museum and Art Gallery was got renovated and additional four galleries were provided in an extensive expansion exercise. This additional space has been useful in housing large number of object d' art and works of craft and heritage. The main gallery is round in shape resembles a Buddhist Stupa and works of noted Punjabi artists are displayed here. The other two galleries are adorned with rare objects of Punjabi folk art and culture. The third gallery is earmarked for exhibitions and art activities and the fourth section contains the paintings on Sikh history, heritage and culture. Besides some remarkable handicraft items, paintings done by artists Kirpal Singh, G.S. Bansal, M. Bodhraj, Jarnail Singh, Nirmal Singh, Baljit Singh and Phulan Rani generate interest due to their remarkable depiction of Sikh history and the legendary Sikh personalities who had impacted the course of history of Punjab in a big way during the last few centuries .<sup>360</sup>

The portrait of 'Bhai Kahn Singh (1861-1938) dated 1980'- a celebrated scholar and encyclopaedist<sup>361</sup>, by Sobha Singh is an impeachable study in portraiture with masterly technical skills and the poetic spirit has been captured in photographic realism. It enlists the overall ambience with a balanced composition juxtaposing books and a bouquet of flowers in the background in soft and mellow tones.<sup>362</sup> Famous artist Kirpal Singh had done two paintings

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360 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.3

361 **Singh, Satyindra;** 2004, *Kahn Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.409-410

362 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.112

titled 'Kama Ghata Maru dated 1973'<sup>363</sup> - a Japanese tramp-steamer, renamed Guru Nanak Jahaz, launched from Hongkong by Baba Gurdit Singh (1860-1954), an adventurous Sikh businessman, to take a batch of Indian emigrants to Canada<sup>364</sup>; 'Namdhari Kuka Movement (Malerkotla) dated 1973'<sup>365</sup> at the beginning of 1872, a group of *Kukas* (Sikh reformist sect) planned to plunder the armoury at Malerkotla (Punjab), the capital of a princely state. On the way, they attacked the house of the Sikh chief of Malaud to rob it of arms and horses which they needed for their assault on Malerkotla. At Malerkotla, the *Kukas* (Sikh reformist sect) more than a hundred strong, were challenged by police as they scaled the city wall on the morning of 15 January, 1872 to enter the treasury. In the quarrel, that followed eight policemen and seven *Kukas* (Sikh reformist sect) lost their lives<sup>366</sup>; in soulful rendering and these paintings evoke patriotism. Artist Jarnail Singh's contribution to this museum is in the form of two pleasing paintings titled 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh on elephant (1780-1839) dated 1985'<sup>367</sup> - a pioneer of Khalsa Rule and popularly known as Sher-e-Punjab, i.e. the Lion of Punjab<sup>368</sup>; 'Charkha Katdi Mutiyar dated 1985'<sup>369</sup> - a maiden on spinning wheel. The later painting which portrays the cultural tradition of Punjab in a very effective style is the subject material for many popular *Sikh Calendar art* paintings. Noted portrait artist of Punjab Sardar G.S. Bansal has painted two

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363 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.96

364 See reference no.99

365 **Ministry of HRD, Department of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi;** 1998, *Handlist of Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.7

366 See reference no.93

367 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.90

368 See reference no.86.

369 **Ministry of HRD, Department of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi;** 1998, *Handlist of Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.6

‘Portraits of Shaheed Bhagat Singh (1907-1931) dated 1973’<sup>370</sup>- a Sikh revolutionary and martyr who played an important role in struggle for India’s Independence<sup>371</sup>; ‘Rattan Singh Babbar Akali dated 1973’<sup>372</sup> which deserve mention. Large replicas of the wall paintings of Akal Takht at Amritsar by artist Nirmal Singh deserve special attention due to his excellence in execution and meticulous eye for detail and design.<sup>373</sup> These stylized Mural-type works present scenes from the lives of Sikh Gurus glorifying the splendour of supreme temporal authority of Sikhs. Costumes and headgears of the characters present a true picture of the era and have been painted after due research and authentication.

Set in a beautifully landscaped campus of Punjabi University, Patiala, the Guru Gobind Singh Bhawan’s foundation was laid on 27 December, 1967 A.D. by the then President of India Dr. Zakir Hussain. The Bhawan is dedicated to the memory of the great Guru Gobind Singh. The Bhawan, apart from reflecting aesthetically the spirit of Guru Gobind Singh’s life and teachings, expresses symbolically the ideas of the five major religions of the world. The architecture of the Bhawan is unique and unparalleled. The Bhawan is a five petalled structure in the midst of a water pool. The layout of this building is symmetrical and offers a uniform view, signifying the equality of all religions. The pentagon shaped central dome roofed with five gigantic elongated arches rising sky wards and five small arches providing entrance to the hall. An electric flame is mounted at the top of the dome symbolizing purity of the soul and its eternity. The five identical constituent wings, designed in the style of boats floating on water are allotted to

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370 **Ministry of HRD, Department of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi**; 1998, *Handlist of Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.6-7

371 See reference no.95

372 **Ministry of HRD, Department of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi**; 1998, *Handlist of Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.6

373. Ibid, p.10-12

five major religions in the chronological order of their historical manifestation- Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism. Use has been made of the number “five” which has special sanctity in our religious traditions, especially Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam.<sup>374</sup>

To commemorate 3<sup>rd</sup> Birth Centenary of Guru Gobind Singh in 1967 A.D. famous Sikh artists Sobha Singh and Kirpal Singh were commissioned to paint large paintings on the life of Guru Gobind Singh for displaying them in this imposing building. Six oil on canvas paintings done by Kirpal Singh in the genre of mural painting portray ‘The Darbar of Guru Gobind Singh at Sri Damdama Sahib, Talvandi Sabo in 1706<sup>375</sup>’; ‘Battle scene of Anandgarh Fort (May 1705)’- on the order of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, a battle was fought between the hill monarchs and their Mughal allies- the Governor of Lahore alongwith the *Faujdar* (Army Chief/General) of Sirhind and the Sikhs at Anandpur, Ropar district, Punjab<sup>376</sup>; ‘Guru Gobind Singh crossing the Sirsa river on December, 1704’<sup>377</sup>; ‘Battle of Bhangani fought between the hill Rajas and Guru Gobind Singh on 18 September, 1688 at Bhangani, Sirmaur district, Himachal Pradesh’<sup>378</sup>; ‘Battle of Chamkaur Sahib’ where Sahibzada Ajit Singh sacrificed his life alongwith his younger brother Sahibzada Jujhar Singh. The brave sons of Guru Gobind Singh have been shown surrounded by the Mughals in a pitched battle on 7 December, 1705 A.D.<sup>379</sup>; ‘Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru

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374 **Pannu, Dr. Harpal Singh** (Eminent Religious Scholar); August 12, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, Department of Religious Studies, Guru Gobind Singh Bhawan, Punjabi University, Patiala

375 See reference no.214

376 **Singh, Ganda**; 2004, *Guru Gobind Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.90

377 **Daljeet, Dr.**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.60

378 See reference no.145

379 See reference no.156

visiting Bahadurgarh Fort near Patiala, Punjab on 14 June, 1675<sup>380</sup>. A lone painting in this collection is a 'Portrait of Guru Amar Das (1479-1574)<sup>381</sup>- the third Sikh Guru (prophet or teacher of Sikh faith) by artist Sobha Singh.<sup>382</sup> The Sikh history in these monumental paintings has come alive with the masterly strokes of Kirpal Singh and these paintings have the capacity to enhance the overall ambience of this significant place. These artworks possess a rare visual narrative quality to illustrate the events related to the times of Guru Gobind Singh. They leave an overpowering impact on the viewer due to their virtuosity and perceived technical skill. The paintings reverberate with the resonance of resolve on the faces of the Sikh warriors engaged in eradicating the tyrants and the oppressors thereby establishing the reign of truthfulness, freedom and self-esteem of mankind. Kirpal Singh is at his best when depicting the time period through authentic study of dresses or costumes. In his paintings the colours have the smell of the soil and rustic flavour. The overall impact of these paintings is spellbinding. The portrait of Guru Amar Das by Sobha Singh housed here is a shining example of deft handling and highlights the dexterity in capturing life-like portraits.<sup>383</sup>

Dr. Karan Singh erstwhile Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir is a well known Art connoisseur and Art collector, credit goes to him and his wife Shrimati Yasho Rajya Lakhmi for setting up a 'Trust' called 'Hari-Tara Charitable Trust' in 1970 A.D. for the promotion of art and culture. This Trust which has set up a broad spectrum of educational, cultural, literary and philanthropic activities is instrumental in establishing the 'Amar Mahal Museum

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380 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Bahadurgarh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.350-351

381 See reference no.56, p.87

382 **Pannu, Dr. Harpal Singh** (Eminent Religious Scholar); August 12, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, Department of Religious Studies, Guru Gobind Singh Bhawan, Punjabi University, Patiala.

383 **Guru Gobind Singh Bhawan, Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab**, *Through Personal Visit*, dated 11 August, 2010

and Library’ in the nineteenth century building Amar Mahal. This Museum was inaugurated by Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi on Baisakhi day 13 April, 1975 A.D.<sup>384</sup> Dr. Karan Singh provided a boost to the art of Sobha Singh and besides being his close friend, was a great admirer of his painting. He acquired the masterpiece ‘Sohni Mahiwal’ a large painting done by Sobha Singh in 1954 A.D. which became an iconic expression of Sobha Singh’s deep love for legendary lovers of Punjab. The reproduction of this painting appealed to masses and classes alike and became a best selling print/calendar as his friend Dr. Karan Singh allowed him to retain the copyright of this painting. Sobha Singh’s art inspired Dr. Karan Singh to such an extent that he opened a special section in recognition of Sobha Singh’s art in the Amar Mahal Museum.<sup>385</sup> The ‘Sobha Singh Gallery’ of this Museum at Jammu has a fabulous collection of *Sikh art* especially the ‘Portrait of Guru Nanak’ in meditative mood contemplating with his eyes closed and draped in the light of mystical charm and divinity. The spectacularly imaginative versions of ‘Goddess Saraswati’, ‘Goddess Durga’ and ‘*Kalki Avatar*’ endowed with lyrical charm and soothing palate of soft and mellow hues. The imagery borders on surrealistic stance in these paintings in dream-like presentation.<sup>386</sup> Paying tribute to his mentor Sobha Singh, artist Satnam Singh has painted a portrait of Sobha Singh in his studio in highly realistic style which too is included in the collection of this gallery. In the other prominent section called “*Dashavatar* Gallery’ of this museum, eleven oil on canvas paintings done by Jaswant Singh, a well known surrealist deserves a special mention due to enchanting and captivating narration of *Dashavatars*

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384 **The Hari-Tara Charitable Trust, Jammu;** n.d., *The Amar Mahal Museum & Library* (Catalogue), Amar Mahal Museum & Library, Jammu, Design by Narendra, Assisted by Sandeep, Photos by Naresh Sharma, Creative Offset, Jammu, p.3

385 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.266

386 **The Hari-Tara Charitable Trust, Jammu;** n.d., *The Amar Mahal Museum & Library* (Catalogue), Amar Mahal Museum & Library, Jammu, Design by Narendra, Assisted by Sandeep, Photos by Naresh Sharma, Creative Offset, Jammu, p.8-11

(incarnations) of God Vishnu. Being a multipurpose museum, Amar Mahal Museum and Library is not only for the viewing and entertainment of the learned and the curious, but also for the general use and benefit of the public.<sup>387</sup>

The Indian Academy of Fine Arts popularly known as “Thakur Singh Art Gallery” at Amritsar has been pursuing the cause of fine arts in the north-west region. This 83 year old premier institution, is one of the very few in this country to be recognized by the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. This magnificent academy was established in 1928 A.D. by the legendary Master Gurdit Singh to promote art and culture. In 1932 A.D. S.G. Thakur Singh joined the academy and took over the charge as president. This institution has seen enormous contribution by renowned painters of *Sikh art* like Sobha Singh, S.G. Thakur Singh, Master Gurdit Singh, G.S. Sohan Singh and Hari Singh, who had “slogged to make it one of the greatest art galleries in the country”. While discussing the valuable contribution of this academy it is worth mentioning here that the above mentioned artists were known for their own specific genres. Sobha Singh earned the title of “People’s Painter” through his exquisite iconic portraits of the Sikh Gurus. S.G. Thakur Singh, as a landscape painter, was the ‘John Constable of India’. Both were conferred with the ‘*Padamshri*’ for their contribution to art. Thakur Singh was also nominated Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) when Punjab Vidhan Sabha had the bicameral system. Master Gurdit Singh painted portraits of celebrities with great virtuosity. G.S. Sohan Singh and Hari Singh had their studios in busy commercial streets of Amritsar, where they painted in full public view of the passersby. This exposure was akin to what modern-day art workshops provide to curious onlookers for informal education in creativity. Since its establishment in 1928 A.D., the Indian Academy of Fine Arts has been visited by dignitaries such as the Presidents of

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387     **The Amar Mahal Museum & Library, Jammu, *Through Personal Visit*, dated 16 November, 2010**

India like Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who laid down the foundation stone of the main building of the academy on 13 April, 1961 A.D., Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Dr. Zakir Hussain, Dr. V.V. Giri, Giani Zail Singh; Prime Minister of India: Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Mrs. Indira Gandhi; and Chief Minister of Punjab: Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon, Sardar Beant Singh, Captain Amarinder Singh and Sardar Prakash Singh Badal.<sup>388</sup>

The Indian Academy of Fine Arts is a storehouse of remarkably evocative and impressive works of art by the stalwarts of *Sikh art* on popular cultural themes of Punjab depicting *melas/fairs*, scenes from life and portraits of the chieftains of Sikh misls. Besides a large collection of paintings done by eminent artists of Post-Partition Punjab era, there are works of contemporary painters as this academy has been successfully organizing a number of workshops and artists camps here in their premises. Another feature in promotion of art by this academy is the grand ‘Annual All India Exhibition of Art’ which receives a tremendous response from the artists and art lovers. They also bring about some publications and colourful brochures of works comprising of paintings displayed in this gallery.

Paintings related to *Sikh art* which are of enormous artistic merit and which present a historic perspective in the history of this popular art gallery include works which deserve honourable mention. ‘A Boy playing Banjo Drums’ by G.S. Sohan Singh and the other engaging painting is titled ‘*Mela Punjab Da*’ (a fair in Punjab), which is draped in joyous colours and people engaged in merriment, ladies and children drenched in gleeful excitement. The painting has all the ingredients of a high calibre exposition with sound composition and pulsating dancing figures, beggars and vendors. An excellent work in realistic genre portrays an elderly Sikh gentleman engaged in writing on a *Takhti*<sup>389</sup>

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388 **Bhatti, S.S.**; May 1, 2011, *Art under Attack*, The Tribune.

389 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.571



(wooden writing-board) with a *kalam*<sup>390</sup> (a reed pen), seated crossed legged and a *kaida* (booklet) is lying in front. His shadow on the wall captures the soft winter sunlight which illuminates his clothes and the folds of his turban are reminiscent of the style of turban worn in those pre-partition days. Though the subject is very simple but the posture of the figure and the bright sunshine makes it a fabulously alluring work which oozes an aesthetic charm and calmness.<sup>391</sup>

Presenting a page from the cultural life of Punjab is an eye-catching work titled ‘The Snake Charmers’ with their *beens*<sup>392</sup> (a piped musical instrument) and the cobra in a cased basket by Master Gurdit Singh. The brushwork is flamboyant and the colour palate dispels a rustic flavour. This powerful depiction of snake charmers commonly known as *Saperas*<sup>393</sup> in Punjab is an engrossing study of the common subject. The other paintings by this master artist done on Sikh themes having monumental dimensions are ‘Guru Nanak Dev alongwith his companion Mardana visiting Bhai Lalo’s house, who was a carpenter by profession and lived at Saidpur, present-day town of Eminabad in Gujranwala district, Pakistan’<sup>394</sup>; ‘Portrait of Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539)’- the founder of Sikh religion and the first of a succession of Ten Sikh Gurus (prophet or teachers)<sup>395</sup>; ‘Portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675)’- the ninth Sikh Guru (prophet or teacher of Sikh faith)<sup>396</sup>; ‘Portrait of Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708)’- the tenth Sikh Guru (prophet or teacher of Sikh faith)<sup>397</sup>; ‘Portrait of Diwan Mokham Chand (1750-1814)’- a renowned Sikh army General during

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390 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.309

391 **Thakur Singh Art Gallery** (now known as **Indian Academy of Fine Arts**), Amritsar, *Through Personal Visit* dated 15 June 2011.

392 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.878

393. Ibid, p.155

394 See reference no.281

395 **Dawe, David G.**; 2004, *Guru Nanak*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.165-183

396 See reference no.132

397 See reference no.127

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign<sup>398</sup>; 'Saka Panja Sahib (30 October, 1922)'- on hearing that the Sikhs arrested at Guru Ka Bagh were being taken to Naushera Jail at Attock, Pakistan Punjab, in a train, the Sikh devotees of Panja Sahib, Attock district, Pakistan Punjab, decided to serve them refreshments on the way under the leadership of Bhai Pratap Singh and Bhai Karam Singh. Hundreds of followers lay on the railway track to stop the train for providing *langar* (community kitchen) to the arrested Sikhs but the train stopped only after cutting both of them into pieces under its wheels<sup>399</sup>; 'Portrait of Faqir Aziz ud-Din (1780-1845)'- a physician, diplomat and foreign minister at the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>400</sup>; 'Portrait of Faqir Nur ud-Din (d.1852)'- the youngest brother of Faqir Aziz ud-Din and a prominent Muslim courtier serving the Sikh sovereign Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>401</sup>; 'Bhai Hakikat Rai 1724-1742)'- a devout Sikh and a martyr<sup>402</sup>; 'The Golden Temple at Amritsar (Punjab)'- the most famous sacred shrine of the Sikhs<sup>403</sup>. These paintings cast a spell on the onlooker and their magical grace lingers on. This academy had another artistic treasure in the form of sublime paintings by the great painter Hari Singh done on popular Sikh themes. These paintings are glowing in the light of divinity and ethereal charm and they possess the power of immersing the viewer in the nectar of piousness and religious ecstasy. These works have all the elements attributed to true specimens of *Sikh Calendar art*. The prominent paintings in this collection are 'Guru Nanak Dev in seated posture (1469-1539)'- the founder of Sikh religion and the first of a succession of Ten Sikh Gurus (prophet or teachers)<sup>404</sup>;

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398 **Gupta, Hari Ram**; 2004, *Diwan Muhkam Chand*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.128-129

399 See reference no.54

400 **Aijazuddin, F.S.**; 2004, *Faqir Aziz ud-Din*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.229-231

401 **Aijazuddin, F.S.**; 2004, *Faqir Nur ud-Din*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.245-246

402 **Singh, Bhagat**; 2004, *Haqiqat Rai*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.224-225

403 See reference no.194

404 See reference no.395

‘Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539) with his two companions Bala (1466-1544)- the *chauri* (fly-whisk) bearer<sup>405</sup> and Mardana (1459-1534)- the *rabab* (rebeck) player<sup>406</sup>; ‘*Bandi Chhor* (Liberator Benign) Guru Hargobind’- As the tyranny of the Mughals had increased day by day and non-Muslims had to undergo great atrocities in following their faith that they were compelled to take to arms. This annoyed emperor Jahangir who ordered arrest of the Guru Hargobind in the Gwalior fort. But soon he realised his mistake and ordered Guru’s release. Guru Sahib refused to accept this offer till fifty-two innocent Rajas were also freed alongwith him. Instructions were issued that whosoever holds the Gurus dress will be freed. Guru Sahib wore a special robe with fifty-two strings attached to it. Each Raja held one string and walked into freedom in 1617<sup>407</sup>; ‘Portrait of Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708)’- the tenth Sikh Guru (prophet or teacher of Sikh faith)<sup>408</sup>; ‘The Golden Temple at Amritsar (Punjab)’- the most famous sacred shrine of the Sikhs<sup>409</sup>; ‘Ghats of Benaras’- the holiest place of Hindu pilgrimage<sup>410</sup>; ‘Sohni engrossed in deep thought holding an earthen pitcher’. Hari Singh had a fascination for painting buildings and landscapes to photographic realism.<sup>411</sup>

Paintings in water-colours, oil colours and sketches form the part of a rich collection by S.G. Thakur Singh on myriad themes which establishes him as a versatile and prolific painter of immense intensity and masterly disposition. Each work is a testimony to the creative genius of this artist whose fame and name crossed many a boundaries. He had deep commitment, dedication and clear

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405 **Singh, Gurnek**; 2004, *Bhai Bala*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.261-262

406 **Singh, Satbir**; 2004, *Bhai Mardana*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.52-54

407 See reference no.68

408 See reference no.127

409 See Harimandar reference no.194

410 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, P.838

411 **Thakur Singh Art Gallery** (now known as **Indian Academy of Fine Arts**), Amritsar, *Through Personal Visit*, dated 15 June 2011.

perception about his art and painted each work with a sound conviction which is a rare quality. His brushstroke had the magic Midas touch. He became a legend during his life-time and was fondly addressed as 'John Constable of India' who captured alive fleeting movements of Indian life and vistas with a great dexterity. The contribution of this gallery in promoting art and culture of Punjab has been tremendous and it has nurtured the true spirit of all encompassing artistic, creative urges and values of Punjab.<sup>412</sup>

A real collector's item, a multicoloured 'Souvenir' titled "Indian Art" brought out by the Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar in 1953 A.D. to commemorate the Silver Jubilee Exhibition of the Academy which was inaugurated by Rashtrapati Dr. Rajendra Prasad, is a useful source of *Sikh Calendar art*, which carries messages from Vice President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru. The works published in this catalogue represent a classical era in the field of art when romanticism and realism was at the pinnacle. Masterly paintings by S.G. Thakur Singh, G.S. Sohan Singh, Sobha Singh, K.C. Aryan, H. Mozumdar, G.S. Virdee, N.M. Kirtikar, V.S. Gurjar, M. Gurbachan Singh and Phulan Rani are representative works which abound in academic realism and classical deposition. The calendars of these well known paintings were in great rage and besides being items of art connoisseurs' prized collections, these found place in business establishments also. The signature style paintings of these artists are 'After Bath' and 'Tear Drops' (Taj Mahal in moonlit night) by S.G. Thakur Singh; 'Music and Poetry' by Sobha Singh; 'Creator's Art' by G.S. Sohan Singh; 'A *Punjaban* drawing the water' by K.C. Aryan; 'Twin Sisters Day and Night' by Phulan Rani; 'Head Study' by N.M. Kirtikar; 'Glimpses of Jehlum River (Kashmir)' by G.S. Virdee; 'Whatever you say (pastel)' by V.S. Gurjar; 'Telling Eyes' by H. Mozumdar and 'Snow peaks' by M. Gurbachan Singh. Dr. M.S. Randhawa's article on 'Kangra

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412     **Bhatti, S.S.;** May 1, 2011, *Art under Attack*, The Tribune.

School of Painting' depicts 'Rama and Sita united' alongwith an enlightening write-up.<sup>413</sup>

“Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties” by S.G. Thakur Singh, is a wonderful collection of reproductions of his paintings compiled in an eye-catching cover, presents a glossary of his works which are in permanent collection of discerning collectors all over India and is a useful source for the study of his paintings. His effort to compile and publish this book was highly appreciated by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore in 1929A.D. and Nicholas Roerich in 1944 A.D.<sup>414</sup> The architectural jewels and monuments captured in this book in his inimitable poetic expression takes one down the memory lane. This marvelous collection comprises of ‘The Sacred Godavari at Nasik’ (Collection: S. Malook Singh Bedi, Calcutta), ‘Sea Beach at Chaupati, Bombay’ (Collection: Maharaja of Porbunder), ‘The Vishram Ghat at Mathura’ (Collection: H. H. The Maharaja of Udaipur), ‘A Glimpse of the Taj’ (Collection: Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Allahabad), ‘Au Revoir- Sunset on the Hooghly River’ (Collection: H. H. The Maharaja of Alwar), ‘A Street Scene at Jodhpur’ (Collection: Shri G.D. Birla, Calcutta)’, ‘Sunrise’ (Collection: Rai D.N. Ballav Bahadur, Calcutta), ‘The Golden Temple at Amritsar’ (Collection: Mr. Nopper of West & Watch Co., Bombay), ‘Aurora- Early Dawn on Madras Beach’ (Collection: H. H. The Maharaja of Patiala), ‘The Qutab at Delhi’ (Collection: Col. W.J. Simpson, Scotland), ‘East Gate of Sanchi Stupa’ (Collection: H. H. Nawab of Bhopal), ‘Dasaswamedh Ghat at Benaras’ (Collection: Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Allahabad), ‘Tear Drops’ (Collection: Sir A. Rahim, Calcutta), ‘Srinagar Kashmir’ (Private Collection), ‘The Minakshi Temple at Madurai’ (Collection: H. H. The Maharaja of Udaipur), ‘In the

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413 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; October 30, 1953, *Indian Art Souvenir*, Amritsar, p. 5-15

414 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.5-6

Neighbourhood of Dal Lake at Kashmir' (Private Collection), 'Victoria Memorial Hall at Calcutta' (Collection: H. H. The Maharaja of Raigarh), 'Approach to Srinagar' (Collection: S. Gurdial Singh Kohli, Amritsar), 'Manikarnika Ghat at Benares' (Collection: H. H. The Maharaja of Udaipur), 'Parting Day- Sunset on the Malabar Coast' (Collection: Rai D.N. Ballav Bahadur, Calcutta), 'The Taj ever-fresh in Beauty' (Collection: H. H. Nawab of Bhopal), 'A Lake in Kashmir' (Collection: L. Harikrishan Lal), 'Valley of Ladakh in the Evening-light' (Collection: Shri C.P.N. Singh, Governor Punjab), 'The Palm Avenue- Botanical Gardens, Calcutta' (Collection: Indian Press Ltd., Allahabad) and 'Parting Kiss- Sikkim' (Collection: Hon'ble Shri Buta Singh, Amritsar).<sup>415</sup> It is refreshing to find in this great artist's brush stresses on the old and eternal values of beauty as he believed that unless art becomes an integral part of common man's life, artistic and cultural ethos cannot be raised unless there is sustained participation of a common man in all endeavours of cultural and artistic mission. S.G. Thakur Singh worked ceaselessly to achieve this lofty endeavour throughout his life.

"Paintings of Indian Womanhood" by S.G. Thakur Singh, provides a systematic cataloguing of his paintings on the theme of Indian Womanhood. The subject of this book was very dear to his heart and pays a glowing tribute to the timeless beauty of women from various regions and states in their typical costumes and ornaments in myriad moods painted straight from life in classical idiom as S.G. Thakur Singh believed in going direct to nature for subjects or inspiration but never exploited nature in its wild exuberance of superfluous abundance. He opined that art is nature methodized. This is why there is in his work an eternal freshness of appeal, a deep intuitive understanding and a breadth of vision- all balanced by perfect technique. For him art was the language of the

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415 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.9-57

heart and it must go straight to the heart in order to be effective. It must overwhelm its beholder, be a child or a philosopher, a barbarian or an art connoisseur. This book is a celebration of portrait painting and presents a comparison between a commissioned portrait and an idyllic portrait done by an artist in his virtuous element.<sup>416</sup> This book is undoubtedly worthy collection of paintings consolidating the fact that he was a true genius and a man of many facets. Such publications have a very coveted place in the history of art as they are a true source to scholars and art lovers alike. Some of the fascinating calendars in limited editions have been reproduced of the paintings compiled in this book.

Saint Artist Sobha Singh in pursuit of peace and tranquility settled in the idyllic surroundings of village ‘Andretta’, a few kilometers from Palampur, district Kangra, Himachal Pradesh in 1947 A.D. and established a small studio cum residence where he lived and painted in complete solace and peaceful environs relishing the bounties of nature which provided him a food for thought and here he was able to create some of his finest works which are known all over the world. After his death, the residence cum studio where he lived and worked ceaselessly was converted into an ‘Art Gallery’ or ‘Museum’ and was named as “Sobha Singh Art Gallery” where the gist of his philosophy ‘**Grow More Good**’ has been inscribed in bold concrete letters personifying his deep desire for peace and pious life. This museum was further registered into a ‘Trust’ known as ‘Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society’ by his daughter Bibi Gurcharan Kaur in 1986 A.D. This art gallery possesses more than fifty original works by the great master and reserves the right for publishing and sale of reproductions of these

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416 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.3-5

paintings.<sup>417</sup> Some of the rare paintings done here are full of philosophical stance and of contemplative nature. The pristine environs of this place provided a fresh breath of life and Sobha Singh attempted some unusual compositions and immersed himself in capturing the subjects in rather spiritual manifestations. He was charmed by the innocence and beauty of the local inhabitants who lived here and this inspired him to paint 'Kangra Bride' and 'Gaddi Woman' apart from a few lyrical landscapes and portraits of *Sohni* in Heaven, Art is Language of the Heart, *Heer Ranjha* and a series on Sikh Gurus, Saints and Leaders painted in symbolical parlance. This museum is a premier source of *Sikh Calendar art* as the works done by Sobha Singh have been reproduced in great numbers and find place in most of the homes.<sup>418</sup>

The first publication of Sobha Singh's painting titled "*Naam Khumari Nanaka*" was printed in London in 1935 A.D. Times of India Press, Bombay was the next publishing house to publish the prints of his painting "*Sohni Mahiwal*" in 1954 A.D. followed by Prasad Press, *Chandamama* building, Madras in 1971 A.D. Later on the Trust 'Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society' exclusively reserved their right to produce the reproductions of Sobha Singh's work and most of the multi-coloured offset printed calendars and prints are printed by this trust till now from Mehta Offset Press, Delhi which had shifted its base from Lahore to Delhi after the partition in 1947 A.D. According to Shiv Nath Mehta, the Proprietor of Mehta Offset Press, Delhi there is an ever-growing demand of calendars of three main paintings of Sobha Singh which have been reproduced in lacs, these paintings are 'Portrait of Guru Nanak Dev', 'Portrait of Guru Gobind Singh' and '*Sohni Mahiwal*'. Other popular calendars in demand are 'Portrait of

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417 **Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh**; 2008, *S. Sobha Singh Life-Art-Philosophy*, Dr. Hirday Paul Singh, Secretary General, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.43

418 **Sobha Singh Art Gallery, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh**, *Through Personal Visit*, dated 30 September, 2010.



Guru Tegh Bahadur’, ‘Kangra Bride, ‘*Gaddi Woman*’ and ‘*Heer Ranjha*’. Government of Punjab in recognition of Sobha Singh’s creative genius brought out a beautiful calendar in 1986 A.D. under the directions of Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Surjit Singh Barnala, who is an ardent lover of his art. It is an amazing fact that calendar of a painting titled ‘Guru Nanak Dev with hand raised in blessings’ was published in the year 1969 A.D. by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar and an estimated five lacs copies of this calendar were sold in a short span of time making it all-time favourite calendar of *Sikh art*.<sup>419</sup>

The surviving family members of artist G.S. Sohan Singh in an endeavour to promote, preserve and popularize his art initiated on-line sale of prints of his paintings at [w.w.w.artheritage.com](http://w.w.w.artheritage.com) and formulated ‘G.S. Sohan Singh Artist Memorial Trust’ in 1999 A.D. for preservation and presentation of his major contribution to our cultural heritage. Rare calendars and reproductions of his paintings can be acquired in offset and digital printing on canvas as well as art paper in glossy and matt formats.<sup>420</sup> This has enabled his admirers to have an access to the earliest paintings which are not in circulation anymore. In recent times there is a renewed interest in his work especially by Sikh NRIs and his works are adorning the houses all over the globe. Gurdwaras established in many countries form bulk of the purchasers due to the intense quality of his paintings. Another source to access his art is a book published by G.S. Sohan Singh titled ‘Revealing the art of G.S. Sohan Singh’ which carries a large number of coloured plates relating to his famous paintings.<sup>421</sup>

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419 **Kaur, Bibi Gurcharan** (Daughter of S. Sobha Singh, Legendary Punjabi Artist); October 2, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, S. Sobha Singh Art Gallery, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

420 **Talwar, Rashmi**; March 16, 2001, *Tribute to renowned artist*, The Tribune.

421 **Verma, P.**; n.d., *Revealing the art of G.S. Sohan Singh*, Produced by G.S. Sohan Singh artist, 27A, Braham Buta Market, near Sarai Guru Ram Dass, Amritsar, Blocks by Surinder Singh & Co, Amritsar, Punjabee Press & Tej Press, Amritsar, p.5-10

Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh possesses some good specimens of *Sikh Calendar art*, amongst the prominent works are paintings by Mehar Singh, who is a renowned portrait painter and has served as ‘President’ of Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh. He settled in Chandigarh after shifting from New Delhi where he had a flourishing studio in creative and commercial painting.<sup>422</sup> Besides having a large number of oil on canvas portraits of Sikh personalities, there are a few paintings of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and other members of his family painted in magnificently majestic splendour in rich and vibrant tones capturing the ambience of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s court. Mehar Singh’s portraits of Guru Gobind Singh are also noteworthy which abound in elements of *calendar art*.<sup>423</sup> He being the disciple of Sobha Singh has imbibed many of his mentor’s qualities in handling the canvases in capturing details in extremely realistic style. These are the good examples of portraiture in *Sikh art*.<sup>424</sup>

J.Lockwood Kipling, Principal of the Mayo School of Art in Lahore (1875-93 A.D.) and also Curator of the Central Museum was the first person to recognize the potential of *Sikh Calendar art* after having a deep study of its elements, contents and stylization; he had created a mammoth collection of prints of *Sikh Calendar art*. He analyzed the deep perceptions and concepts which make these calendars an extremely unique form of art which was both a chronicle narration of Sikh history and a symbolical visualization of the Sikh ethos and religious manifestations. The album comprised of 196 woodcut prints, paintings and drawings in pen and pencil together with 37 loose pages of paintings, calligraphic drawings and outline pen drawings. Most items are

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422 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.51-52

423 **Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi**, Rose Garden, sector-16/A, Chandigarh, *Through Personal Visit*, dated 22 December, 2009

424 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.51

individual prints, produced in such places as Lahore and sold in the bazaars and religious fairs of North India. The collection was made by J.Lockwood Kipling during his years in Lahore and was presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London by his son Rudhyard Kipling in 1917 A.D. The principal value of the collection is the essentially ephemeral nature of prints. Each of the prints included in J.Lockwood Kipling’s collection has been catalogued by the Victoria and Albert Museum as I.M.2 ( )-1917, with the serial number of each individual print with details of origin.<sup>425</sup> It is a *mélange* of themes such as ‘The Ten Sikh Gurus (prophets or teachers of Sikh faith)<sup>426</sup> with Bala (1466-1544)- the *chauri* (fly-whisk) bearer<sup>427</sup>, and Mardana (1459-1534)- the *rabab* (rebeck) player<sup>428</sup> and a figure seated beside a horse’<sup>429</sup>; ‘Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) with courtiers’<sup>430</sup> - a pioneer of Khalsa Rule and popularly known as Sher-e-Punjab, i.e. the Lion of Punjab<sup>431</sup>; ‘Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) hunting’<sup>432</sup>- the tenth Sikh Guru (prophet or teacher of Sikh faith)<sup>433</sup>; ‘Scenes from a fair (*mela*) near Amritsar’<sup>434</sup>; ‘Bhagat Kabir (1398-1494) with his wife’<sup>435</sup> - a revolutionary saint-poet of Bhakti Movement whose two hundred twenty-seven *padas* (a couplet composed of two-lined poetic composition) and two hundred thirty-seven *salokas* (couplets) are

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- 425 **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.20-21  
426 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh;** 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, P.614  
427 See reference no.405  
428 See reference no.406  
429 **The Ten Sikh Gurus with Bala, Mardana and a figure seated beside a horse** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (11)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.  
430 **Ranjit Singh with courtiers** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (16)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.  
431 See reference no.86  
432 **Guru Gobind Singh hunting** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (21)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.  
433 See reference no.127, p.88-93  
434 **Scenes from a fair (mela) near Amritsar** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (23)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.  
435 **Bhagat Kabir with his wife** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (26)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>436</sup>; ‘The story Dhanna, the Bhagat (b.1415)’<sup>437</sup> - a medieval saint whose three *sabdas* (hymns) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>438</sup>; ‘Guru Nanak hearing *kirtan*<sup>439</sup> (singing the scriptural compositions in traditional measures) in the presence of his two sons- Sri Chand (1494-1629)<sup>440</sup> and Lakhmi Das (1497-1555)<sup>441</sup>, four attendants and Bhai Lalo<sup>442</sup> - a carpenter by profession and lived at Saidpur, present-day town of Eminabad in Gujranwala district, Pakistan’<sup>443</sup>; ‘Guru Nanak (1469-1539) with his two companions Bala (1466-1544)<sup>444</sup>- the *chauri* (fly-whisk) bearer and Mardana (1459-1534)<sup>445</sup>- the *rabab* (rebeck) player’<sup>446</sup>; ‘Guru Nanak accompanied by Mardana and Bala riding on a monster fish’<sup>447</sup>; ‘Guru Nanak discoursing with Gorakhnath<sup>448</sup>, one of the Gurus (prophets or teachers) of yogis of Nath<sup>449</sup> sect and other *Siddhs*<sup>450</sup> (sages capable of performing

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436 See reference no.305

437 **The Dhanna, the Bhagat** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (30)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

438 See reference no.301

439 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, P.332

440 **Singh, Gurnek**; 2004, *Baba Sri Chand*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.234

441 **Singh, Gurnek**; 2004, *Baba Lakhmi Das*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.553

442 See reference no.281

443 **Guru Nanak hearing kirtan in the presence of his two sons, four attendants and Bhai Lalo** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (33)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

444 See reference no.405

445 See reference no.406

446 **Guru Nanak with Bala and Mardana** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (36)- 1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

447 **Guru Nanak accompanied by Mardana and Bala riding on a monster fish** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (38)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

448 **Nabha, Bhai Kahn Singh**; 2011, *Gurshabd Ratnakar Mahan Kosh-Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature (Punjabi)*, Eighth Edition, Department of Languages, Punjab, p.691

449 Ibid, p.431

450 Ibid, p.195-196

miracles)<sup>451</sup>; ‘Scenes from the life of Bhagat Namdev (1270-1350)’<sup>452</sup>- a saint from Maharashtra who composed poetry of fervent devotion in Marathi as well as Hindi. His sixty-one *sabdas* (hymns) are included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib<sup>453</sup>; ‘Twelve Heroes of the Sikhs’<sup>454</sup>- Maharaja Sher Singh (1807-1843)- son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>455</sup>, Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839)- pioneer of Khalsa Rule and popularly known as Sher-e-Punjab, i.e. the Lion of Punjab<sup>456</sup>, Maharaja Dalip Singh (1838-1893)’- the youngest son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the last Sikh sovereign of the Punjab<sup>457</sup>, Raja Dhian Singh (1796-1843)- served as prime minister in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>458</sup>, Raja Gulab Singh (1792-1857)- an influential courtier of the Sikh State of Lahore who was created as the Raja of Jammu by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1822<sup>459</sup>, Rani Jindan (1817-1863)’- wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>460</sup>, Chattar Singh Attariwala (d.1855)- the commander and provincial governor under Maharaja Duleep Singh- son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>461</sup>, Sher Singh Attarivala (d.1858)- son of Chattar Singh Attariwala and the provincial governor under Maharaja Duleep Singh<sup>462</sup>, Raja Dina Nath (1795-1857)- the civil administrator and the conusellor of considerable influence and the head of the civil and finance

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- 451 **Guru Nanak discoursing with Gorakhnath and other Siddhs** Acc. No. I.M.2 (40)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 452 **Scenes from the life of Bhagat Namdev** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (43)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 453 See reference no.306
- 454 **Twelve Heroes of the Sikhs** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (47)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 455 See reference no.257
- 456 See reference no.86
- 457 See reference no.87
- 458 **Vigne, G.T.**; 1840, *A Personal Narrative of a Visit to Ghuzni, Kabul and Afghanistan*, London, p.249-250
- 459 **Aijazuddin, F.S**; 1979, *Sikh Portraits by European Artists*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p.102
- 460 See reference no.270
- 461 **Singh, Ganda**; 2004, *Chatar Singh Attarivala*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.447-448
- 462 **Singh, Ganda**; 2004, *Sher Singh Attarivala*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.107

office at the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>463</sup>, Diwan Mul Raj (1814-1851)- the governor of Multan<sup>464</sup>, Dost Muhamad Khan (1791-1863)- ruler of Kabul and Qandahar who received the support of the Sikhs at the time of the treaty made at Peshawar with the British governor-general, by which the independence of Afghanistan was recognized<sup>465</sup>, Akali Phula Singh (1761-1833)- a commander of Akal Takht (a primary seat of Sikh religious authority and centre altar for Sikh political assembly), a Sikh hero and an eminent religious figure of the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh<sup>466</sup>; ‘Golden Temple at Amritsar (Punjab)’<sup>467</sup>- the most famous sacred shrine of the Sikhs<sup>468</sup>; ‘Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839)’<sup>469</sup>- pioneer of Khalsa Rule and popularly known as Sher-e-Punjab, i.e. the Lion of Punjab<sup>470</sup>; ‘Panoramic view of Lahore from the north with Maharaja Ranjit Singh and attendants in foreground’<sup>471</sup>; ‘Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) on horseback’<sup>472</sup>- the tenth Sikh Guru (prophet or teacher of Sikh faith)<sup>473</sup>; ‘Guru Gobind Singh initiating the first five members of the Khalsa and one of his wives Mata Jitoji casting soluble sweets into the water’<sup>474</sup>- on the auspicious day of Baisakhi at Anandpur Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh chose five beloved ones (*Panj Pyaras*) from the congregation who are ready to sacrifice their lives and

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- 463 **Aijazuddin, F.S.**; 1979, *Sikh Portraits by European Artists*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p.106
- 464 See reference no.271
- 465 **Bhatia, S.S.**; 2004, *Amir Dost Muhammad Khan*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.597-598
- 466 See reference no.102
- 467 **Golden Temple** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (50)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 468 See reference no.194
- 469 **Maharaja Ranjit Singh** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (63)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 470 See reference no.86
- 471 **Panoramic view of Lahore from the north with Maharaja Ranjit Singh and attendants in foreground** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (87)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 472 **Guru Gobind Singh on horseback** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (128)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
- 473 See reference no.127
- 474 **Guru Gobind Singh initiating the first five members of the Khalsa and one of his wives Mata Jitoji casting soluble sweets into the water** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (179)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

administered *Amrit* (Nectar) and in turn they were asked to administer *Amrit* (Nectar) to the Guru thereby underlining the equality amongst the disciples and the Guru and also established *Khalsa Panth* in 1699<sup>475</sup> and ‘Guru Nanak with Bala and Mardana in Mecca’<sup>476</sup> while asleep Guru Nanak’s feet unconsciously turned towards Ka’aba, the holy shrine at Mecca in west Asia. A Qazi who came to pray felt offended. He protested against Guru Nanak’s show of disrespect to God’s house. Quietly came Nanak’s answer, “*Please turn my feet to the direction where the all pervading God is not present*”. Qazi was bewildered to see Ka’aba wherever he turned Guru Nanak’s feet<sup>477</sup>. A noteworthy revelation is that Bhai Gujjar Singh, Proprietor of the Faiz Printing Press near Akal Bunga in Amritsar had provided the details in each print, the title, the date of publications and the number of copies actually printed.<sup>478</sup> This collection is infact formed the foundation stone of *Sikh Calendar art* and inspired innumerable artists to proceed further by adding innovative and more aesthetic appealing styles and subject matter. These line drawing earlier calendars had the role to popularize basic concepts regarding the Sikh religion fundamentally. These compositions were followed by later generation artists who turned them into two-dimensional and three-dimensional paintings in varied mediums and expression. No doubt these fabulous prints preformed the act of a blue print in *Sikh Calendar art*.

Australian by birth and now a naturalized Indian citizen, Patricia Uberoi married to a Sikh gentleman, was so fascinated with *Sikh Calendar art* that she thought it to be a sacred act to painstakingly collect rare specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* during the last three to four decades. She studied these Sikh calendars and delved deep into demystifying their strange mystic and outward

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475 See reference no.184

476 **Guru Nanak with Bala and Mardana in Mecca** (Acc. No. I.M.2 (161)-1917), *calendar print*, Lockwood Kipling collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

477 **Gill, Ranjit Singh**; 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.60

478 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.20

charm. Her deep interest in the subject has established her as an expert in this field and she possesses a large body of such fascinating and appealing Sikh calendars. She has written a few revealing and informative articles on *Sikh Calendar art* and had organized a number of exhibitions of old Sikh calendars and popularize this genre of art through T.V. talk shows and exhibitions. Her indepth study has been appreciated by Sikhs all over the world due to its immense academic value.<sup>479</sup>

The above mentioned sources of *Sikh Calendar art* are not an end in themselves as *Sikh Calendar art* is in the process of evolving itself continuously with the passing of times and it is acquiring all the dimensions of technical advancements in print and virtual media. Now there are innumerable sites on the internet started by Diaspora of Sikhs settled in distant lands around the globe who are genuinely interested in promotion of *Sikh Calendar art* being a unique form of *Sikh Popular art* which can be accessed by any person at the click of the mouse. The popularity of *Sikh Calendar art* can be gauged from the fact that even small towns and rural areas in Punjab are aware of this genre of *Sikh art* and are engaged in enriching it with their creative contributions.

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479 **Raote, Rishi**; September 30, 2007, *Indira-Durga, girlie ones, and baby gods*, Business Standard, New Delhi.



To unravel the artistic expression underneath the apparent visual veneer and to touch the soul and essence of symbolism stylised in features of a specific work of art- requires rational, truthful and concentrated investigation in an effort to demystify the undercurrents involved in shaping the final object d' art bringing forth the historic perspectives, social aspects and aesthetic modulations, employed in solidifying and substantiating the creative enigma. Further emphasis is required in gauging the artistic mastery, skilful comprehension and poetic imagery born out of unbiased historic perceptions laced with thoughtful narration in lucid and vivid dissemination. The features, details and mannerism need a sincere attention as they are as relevant as the content itself of a creative product, defining their role and purpose in particular situation visa-a-vis chronological and religious manifestation. These features may lead the investigator to understand the very elements of matter and mind, that is matter and metaphysics which makes a work of art reverberate with aesthetic and creative energies, thereby ascertaining the standard of artistic excellence achieved by a particular artist. In a way, the features are precisely an indicator of the visual vocabulary used by an artist sculpted by his skilful visualisation in executing a masterpiece which abounds in artistic rudiments, improvisation in compositions rich in personal expressions.

**The main features in *Sikh Calendar art* have a special meaning, importance and purpose.** To convey and decode a particular painting in context of its historical facet and religious stance moulded in textual visualisation stipulated a powerful revolutionary approach to bring forth the reformatory perceptions of Sikh religion and its propagation thus felicitating the spread of fundamentals of humanistic aspirations in Sikhism.

From the initial period pertaining to the prevalence of illustrated *Janam Sakhis* some typical features and elements have graced our intellectual poise to look beyond these simplistic yet appealing illustrations for their subterranean

meanings. Here, the key objective of the artist in principle was to set in chronological order the events in religious context which bore an enormous impact on the growing number of followers. A discerning analysis of these illustrated works would reveal that the basic features and their main artistic thrust was bordering on the simple line rendered in bright colours and the figures were generally stiff looking devoid of realistic mannerism. They were stylised in such a way that the final product was decorative yet not very aesthetically charged. The text and its narration remains the prime interest in these works.

To go a step further to understand the main features in these earlier works of *Sikh art* wherein the subject was mostly events from the life of Guru Nanak Dev, his early childhood and the *Udasis* (Missionary Travels) undertaken by him. The persona of Guru Nanak Dev painted in these works had certain specific features, which were later on elaborated upon and accessorised. Here, Guru Nanak Dev is presented in many variations and the basic features associated with him were *Saili* (Plate-172), *Topi*(Plate-173), *Rosary*, long *Jama* (shirt) (Plate-174), *Tilaka* (Plate-175), *Nimbus* (Plate-176), *Simarini*, (Plate-177) a benign smile and the face turned slightly to right or to left. From his *Topi* seems to radiate a circle of light, something like a divine aura symbolising his enlightened state. In *Janam Sakhi* illustrations, a cap worn by Guru Nanak is an essentiality painted vividly, as conical, close fitting and sometimes his best-known *Qalandari*.(Plate-178) A shawl or *Chaddar*(Plate-179) on his shoulder was depicted to enhance dignity of his bearing. It is sometimes replaced by a *Gudari* (Plate-180) symbolical of Kabir's all assimilating bearing, humility, all embracing, all pervading expanses of his life and mission.<sup>1</sup>

It will be convenient to study the development of features in Sikh painting pertaining to the first Sikh Guru- Guru Nanak Dev in periodical development.

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1 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.119

The first phase was more or less dominated by the *Pahari* tradition. At the end of this phase, European influences began to make their presence felt and this factor ushered in a period of transition in which the older tradition gradually yielded the pride of place to the new so called modern tradition. The third phase witnessed a dominance of the western techniques and a nationalistic reaction against its too mundane an approach towards its adoption in *Sikh art*. The response communicates itself in revising the idealism of the previous tradition as a counter-poise to the realism of the western tradition popular during the nineteenth century and before.<sup>2</sup>

The artists depicted Guru Nanak Dev as a man of great dynamism, always engaged in some activity or other in the first phase. This is because of the fact that their paintings were concerned primarily with illustrations of important events of Nanak's life. He was portrayed as a sturdy looking man having a dynamic personality clad in a loose mantle (*Jama*) reaching down to the ankles, lending the air of grandeur to his persona, with a cloth-band tied around the waist to underline the attributes of vitality of a person on the move. The dignified character of the Guru's position was projected by implementing various procedures such as rarely depicted frontal or three-quarter view style whereas the practice prevalent was to depict the other figures facing either right or left. To enhance his coveted position, he was often shown sitting on a piece of carpet, or on a piece of furniture or a sheet of cloth spread out on a bedecked floor. Generally, his seat was located under the umbrella of a tree and often an attendant was made to stand just behind with a fly-whisk (*Chauri*) held aloft over the Guru's head; and on certain other occasions a kind of halo was drawn around his head. A rosary, a black string of some length called *Saili* usually worn by *Sadhus* or *Sants*, hung around his neck and on the front side reached down to the

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2 **Singh, Dr. Fauja**; March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.136

navel, or in the diagonal manner passed over the right shoulder and under the left arm-pit or the vice versa. His forehead bore a broad *tilak* mark and one of his hands held a string of beads, *Mala (Simarini)* and was busy counting the beads (an Indian mode of worship). A *Bairagan* (Plate-181) (saint's stick) yet another symbol of distinction was also displayed.<sup>3</sup>

Specific articles of dress too distinguished Guru Nanak Dev from the rest of the people shown in the paintings mainly his cap was perceived as a symbol of his divinity. Though in his childhood, he was often shown wearing the turban and the cap was worn only occasionally. But from the time he proclaimed his mission, his head-gear, almost invariably, was a cap of a distinctive type. This cap appeared to be like a crown in shape (more or less a *Mukat* usually worn by Hindu deities) made of a single piece with a type of a little dome in the centre. The cap comprised of a compact pattern with some visibly marked divisions in front, projecting upward giving the cap a greater resemblance of the Hindu *Mukat*. Some of the paintings depict the Guru in a few other designs of caps, such as a close-fitting cap or a conical cap but such designs are exceptions rather than the rule. The use of a *Chaddar* (shawl) thrown over the back and the shoulders is occasionally considered to with a view to reinforcing to the dignified bearing of the Guru. Birds and animals have been depicted in the foreground with a view to specify the Guru's divine spell on them in a few paintings.<sup>4</sup>

The prominent phases of Guru Nanak's life from his early childhood years as an infant and a toddler to adolescent days, youth and middle age then as an old man have been featured with changes in physical appearance, his beard by its form, size and colour helps us to assess the gradual growth of his age. Notable changes are apparent in the case of headgears and costumes worn by him.

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3     **Singh, Dr. Fauja**; March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.136

4     Ibid, p.137

With the establishment of the Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh helped in further enhancing and enriching the earlier tradition of painting, pertaining to the Gurus and Guler-Kangra style with ample aesthetic substance added multi-dimensional charm to these works without interfering with the content matter owing to the sensitive issue of religious perceptions. Masterly use of the symbols and features, which were already popular and revered in the *Janam Sakhi* illustrations, received a touch of appealing artistic augmentation. There are fine specimens of portraits of Guru Nanak showing him sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of one or two people. The paintings of the Khalsa period were of a finer execution than those of the preceding period. They have tastefully decorated margins (*Hashias*) and fascinating stylisation. During this period, elements such as a wooden *Takht* with a *Takia* (Plate-182) (big cylindrical pillow) on one side supporting the back painted with decorative and floral patterns was introduced to project the much exalted and revered position of Guru Nanak Dev.<sup>5</sup>

During the closing years of nineteenth century, a marked departure at this stage shows an absolute change in narration and depiction adopted by some artists especially Lahora Singh, whose portraits and paintings of Guru Nanak illustrate the more memorable events of Guru Nanak's life in typical Punjabi atmosphere and flavour and do not reveal any distinct legacy of the earlier tradition. The main feature of these paintings is the acquisition of some technical skills in rendering which abounds in a certain proficiency in portraying in realistic and three-dimensional effects complete with shadows, linear and colour perspectives with ascent on draping the characters in proper Punjabi dresses such as the female characters in their Punjabi *Ghagaras* (long skirts) with short shirts (Plate-183), *Salwar* (female trousers), *Kameez* (*Kurtis*) and *Dupattas* (female

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5 **Singh, Dr. Fauja**; March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.139

head-cover) (Plate-184) and the male characters in their long shirts (*Jama*), tight fitting *Pyjamas* (Plate-185), scarfs (cloth bands tied around the waists and the outer wrappings), *Chaddars* (shawls) combined with the landscape emphasizing the Punjabi character of the life during this period. In spite of all these changes, Guru Nanak's *Mukat* on the head still remained a permanent feature. Rendering skills acquired from Europeans enabled Punjabi artists to have a remarkable control over painting details of drapery as per the body contours in light and shade and use of tonal values and creation of depth added realistic excellence. Here capturing of moods, gestures and postures of different characters made moving and expressive visual narration of a story. A keen eye for detail and understanding of body proportions and highlighting of the central character displayed loads of artistic acumen achieved by the artists. Thus the paintings of Lahora Singh represent a marked stage in the emergence of the modern tradition in the art of the Punjab.<sup>6</sup>

Amongst the symbols which were replaced or discarded in paintings related to Guru Nanak Dev gradually we see a vanishing of *Tilak* from his forehead and the cap being replaced by a *Pugree* (Plate-186) (Turban) during his adulthood. The absence of the *Tilak* mark is an indicator of a new trend in the thinking of the late nineteenth century Sikhs. A similar mingling of different influences may be noticed in the aspects of architecture and costumes. Besides the old Mughal architecture and costumes several elements suggesting the presence of Punjabi and Sikh influence were given credence. A noticeable feature in *Sikh art* is the continuation of style of Mughal turbans in Sikh masses and the same are visible in most of the paintings during this period.<sup>7</sup>

Following this period, there was a smouldering urge in the minds of the leading lights of Sikh faith engaged in propagation of their religion to revive,

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6 **Singh, Dr. Fauja**; March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.140

7 *Ibid*, p.142

reform and energise the early Sikh powerful ascent in religious thought and ethos carrying along the new impressions and visions provided by western influences of science and rationalism. As a result of the new ferment a new outlook on life emerged which had the tendency of rejecting the mythical and the supernatural in the creed.

The artists of the third or modern phase were the product of the new outlook thus created. The western impact gave them realism, and the Indian heritage idealism, so that their works of art represent a balanced combination of both the elements. The western influence explains the absence of supernaturalism and mythology, and the stress on expressionism in their works, whereas the presence of religious idealism in them is explained by the continuity of the indigenous tradition. The old picture of Guru Nanak Dev with his favourite companions, Bala and Mardana is now removed from its *Janam Sakhi* moorings and is separately stressing the idea of communal harmony so dear to the Guru's heart.<sup>8</sup>

Another broad change which appeared in Sikh painting was the portrayal of individual portraits of Guru Nanak and in this context excellent works were produced by legendary painters of *Sikh art* as Sobha Singh, Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh, G.S.Sohan Singh and Mohinder Singh marking the direct emergence of *Sikh Calendar art* wherein the typical features which travelled with the time, were more poignantly painted and preserved. Guru Nanak's portraits especially by Sobha Singh have no reference to any historical situation and are prominently concerned with bringing out such spiritual qualities of the Master as the poise of self-realisation, ecstasy of meditation, glow of contemplation and intensity of divine love. Kirpal Singh's portraits on the other hand are usually related to some historical situation or another. They depict Guru Nanak as a tireless world teacher, overtowering in stature with well-defined limbs having the

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8      **McLeod, W.H;** 1980, *Early Sikh Traditions: A Study of the janam-sakhis*, Oxford, p.172-73

play of a spiritual radiance, missionary zeal and mental poise on his face. Jaswant Singh's work is an attempt to portray the sub-conscious and thus bears the mark of surrealism. Detail, natural backgrounds, landscape and perspective with ascent on decorative element set G.S.Sohan Singh apart as an artist of distinguished standing.

Passing through the process of reformatory filtration freezing new perceptions and religious manifestations the *Sikh Calendar art* chose to portray Guru Nanak Dev in a style which was far from the earlier mythical version depicted in the *Janam Sakhi* illustrations and the features which were admired and adopted in this genre were complete replacement of the Guru's cap by a straight turban showing no angle in front; disappearance of *Tilak* mark and *Bairagan*; full view face in most of the cases; continued presence of the Halo, *Saili* and the *Mala* (Plate-187) and longer and constantly white beard depicting old age as a sign of spiritual wisdom bringing Guru Nanak into closer accord with the Khalsa ideal of uncut hair while the whiteness strengthens the image of a venerable sage.<sup>9</sup>

Close on heels a major feature attained is the remarkable proficiency in painting techniques achieved by the artists where elements of art and aesthetics are abundantly visible and there is a sea change in the colour palette which emphasized a soothing and subtle impact on the audience of *Sikh Calendar art* raising these paintings to the ethereal level with profound presence of spirituality, calm and poise.

The common use of the *Abhaya mudra* (Plate-188) (do not fear gesture), symbol widely used in *Popular art* throughout India further strengthened the newly acquired projected image of Guru Nanak in these works and a flowing white beard and hand raised in blessing propagated a general expression of

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9 **Singh, Dr. Fauja**; March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.144



benevolence presenting a distinct impression of the first Guru. Here he emerges as Baba Nanak the Teacher, the Guru; who supremely bestows peace of mind and spiritual enlightenment. Another change serves to enhance Guru Nanak's spirituality is that all the earlier tradition could supply is retained in the *Saili* and ubiquitous *Mala*. Rarely does the Guru's raised hand lack his rosary and consistently there is at least one shown encircling his turban. The complement is provided by drawing the Guru's eyes in a particular way. The half-closed eyes, is a presumption to represent spiritual ecstasy and the divine intoxication of mystical meditation. Nanak the Teacher of spiritual wisdom has also become Nanak the Mystic.<sup>10</sup>

A significant change is heralded by the veining away of symbols associated with asceticism, specifically those that indicate a Nath *Yogi* connection. It is a reflection in a way to describe the diminishing of the Nath Tradition in modern times and its subsequent withdrawal from popular awareness. Though the Nath *Yogis* (or *Siddhs* as they are called in the *Janam Sakhis*) wielded a substantial influence during Nanak's own life-time, an influence which is evidently visible in his own works and some later versions were influenced by their perceptions too.<sup>11</sup> This influence, though declining, was still prevalent in the late nineteenth century; its presence can still be easily observed in the prints and lithographed *Janam Sakhis* of that period depicting Baba Nanak still holding discourses with *Siddhs* and using artefacts, which entail a Nath identity.<sup>12</sup> But from now on however, the absence of a caged parrot (Plate-189) and *Yogis* crutch is a marked departure and no illustrator seemed to be interested in the describing how Baba Nanak humbled the greatest *Siddhs* in discourse and in miracle-matches. The *Lota* (Plate-190), a utensil related to *Yogis* has changed its shape and appears only sporadically. Now the patched cloak

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10     **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.41-42

11     **McLeod, W.H;** 1980, *Early Sikh Traditions: A Study of the janam-sakhis*, Oxford, p.66-70

12     Ibid, p.56

of the *Yogi* has become a colourful shawl and even the clog sandals (*Padukas*) (Plate-191) show signs of giving way to ordinary Punjabi *Juti*. (Plate-192) Nanak is no longer the Great *Yogi*. The role has ceased to be meaningful in the late twentieth century and has accordingly been discarded. The change in Guru Nanak's head-gear in the form of turban became more prominent with the *Yogi* image on the wane. This shift in head-gear was already in transition mode in the late twentieth century thereafter the cap and *Mukat* tradition was completely forsaken. But the turban which was shown in these Sikh calendars did not resemble with the standard turban styles of twentieth century, which has an inverted 'V' across the forehead. Nanak's turban tied straight across his forehead was considered sign of simplicity and spiritual veneration.<sup>13</sup> Though Nanak's clothing is the same as shown in nineteenth century works. He continues to wear a long shirt (*Jama*) with a sash (*Kamarband*) (Plate-193) tied around his waist and sometimes extended over his left shoulder. The display of expensive looking shawl on his shoulders is widespread now in latest Sikh calendars, he is shown wearing a tight fitting *Pyjamas* underneath the *Jama*.

In a partial downturn Guru Nanak's two companions Bala and Mardana which were always present in earlier works, there is a trend now to either give these figures a miss altogether or sometimes a few subordinate figures or artefacts are clubbed in the composition without giving much importance on these characters. Thus in a way these *Sikh Calendar art* prints are meant to be categorised as solo portraits of Guru Nanak with a full or half figure presentation. Bala and Mardana with their assigned artefacts as Bala with peacock-feather *Chauri* (Plate-194) and Mardana with his *Rabab* (Plate-195) are only depicted when the calendars are referring to *Janam Sakhi* type narrations. The subject matter which depicts three of them in popular Sikh calendars however was very much appreciated as this scene signified the communal brotherhood being the main

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13      **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.42

plank of Sikhism where the presence of Mardana-the Muslim and Bala-the Hindu while Guru Nanak personified both.<sup>14</sup> It was not an intentional or well thought of proposition to depict the threesome together to showcase the thought behind promotion of communal accord but it is a wise classification by the modern eyes to think of this composition as of harmonious substance.

In a typical new feature in modern day *Sikh Calendar art* prints is the absence of Bala and Mardana when a specific calendar is so designed to carry the Ten Sikh Gurus conclave. Their complete banishment is framed either to declutter the composition or concentrate on the essential legendary presence of other Sikh Gurus or they are removed from the integrated group as each Guru has been set in his own frame laying stress on their divine authority and lineage. Another feature indicates that this was done keeping in mind the impossibility of their being present together during the lives of all the Sikh Gurus. A striking feature which is of utmost significance in Ten Sikh Gurus group portrait presents them with same faces though the beards and garments have some variations underlining the fundamental Sikh doctrine that same divine spirit (Guru) successively inhabited ten separate bodies. The same facial identity expresses this spirit.<sup>15</sup> Though some people may think artists were not well versed in painting individual portraits of Sikh Gurus but this was not the fact and the artists sure had some fundamental aspects pertaining to iconographic features in mind while painting the Gurus with same features.

Yet a feature which was associated in all Sikh calendars is the benign presence of the sacred scripture Sri Guru Granth Sahib which was to be regarded as the eternal Sikh Guru after passing away of the tenth Sikh Guru- Guru Gobind Singh. As the tenth Guru had impelled the gathered community- the Guru Panth that no living person would act as a Sikh Guru except this Holy Scripture for all

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14 **McLeod, W.H;** 1980, *Early Sikh Traditions: A Study of the janam-sakhis*, Oxford, p.172-73

15 **McLeod, W.H;** 1968, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Oxford, p.196-199

purposes of spiritual and religious guidance.<sup>16</sup> Though the Sikh calendars depicting Ten Sikh Gurus presented a difficult task to artists to juxtapose all Sikh Gurus with elaborately designed frames, geometric compositions and floral patterns. The artist due to the reverence to the last Guru enshrined in the scripture- Sri Guru Granth Sahib without fear of compositional congestion and overcrowding accommodated Sri Guru Granth Sahib at the appropriate place. The inscription of “Ik-Onkar Satnam” is also adjusted suitably giving credence to its meaning.

A notable feature in group portraits of Ten Sikh Gurus is the change in attire as the first five Sikh Gurus all replicate the style associated with Guru Nanak, the only difference being a slight modernizing of the shape of the turban right from the second Guru onwards. In other respects they follow the first Master’s example, each wearing a rosary in his turban and a prayerful *Seili* around his neck. All of them wear simple robes with scarves (*Parna*) (Plate-196) surmounted on their shoulders as humble servants.<sup>17</sup>

The sixth Guru’s attire is however different from the first five Sikh Gurus. As in earlier calendars, Guru Hargobind’s decision to take up arms are easily represented by the addition of bow and arrows, uniform and plume due to Panth’s experience of persecution and victimization. The same militant resistance was further enhanced in the portraits of Guru Gobind Singh by adding at least one steel quoit (*Chakkar*) (Plate-197) to his turban. Sometimes the falcon is missing in the bust type (head and shoulders format) oval portraits of the sixth and the tenth Sikh Guru due to the reason that it was difficult to adjust it on the wrist in such compositions, which could interfere with the main focus on the face. Both the Gurus stand out clearly as military leaders, faithfully reflecting the traditional interpretation of their respective roles.

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16     **McLeod, W.H;** 1984, *Textual Source for the Study of Sikhism*, Manchester, p.37-38

17     **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.44

The remaining three Sikh Gurus are ambivalent. Some artists align them all with the militant style of the sixth and the tenth Guru. Others revert to the 'spiritual' mode of the first five Gurus while yet others project an uneasy combination of these two roles.

The change which is thus portrayed in apparel and accessories represents more than a move from the exclusively spiritual to the manifestly militant. In popular tradition the Gurus come to be known as 'kings' (*Patasah* or *Padsah*) and this conferring of royal authority also finds expression in the portraits of the later Gurus.<sup>18</sup> Their dresses are shown ornately embroidered, the plumes surmount diadems as strings of pearls appear around their necks. However some calendars also depicted fourth Guru Ram Das manifestly royal with gorgeous robes, a splendid throne, embroidered *Takia* and explicit *Chhatri* (Plate-198) or regal umbrella.

In general terms all Ten Sikh Gurus are addressed as '*Padsah*' by the Sikh devotees. But the corresponding iconography towards this direction is believed to have started with fourth or sixth Sikh Guru to tenth Sikh Guru.

Yet in the real sense of the word the term '*Padsah*' is suitably attributed to Guru Gobind Singh due to the reason that he emerged as a most valiant warrior and heroic leader who inspired and changed the course of Sikh history forever and his accomplishments as a statesman, poet, writer, soldier and majestic all inspiring spiritual and temporal revolutionary had no match. Portraying Guru Gobind Singh as a royal king is perhaps too far fetched a thought harboured by his followers in order to show the most coveted place he is placed at due to his heroic as well as qualities of head and heart as he forbade such references in his discourses for himself. But at the heart of the matter Guru Gobind Singh is worshipped as a mighty warrior and Lord of the Khalsa akin to the majestic

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18 **Dilgeer, Dr. Harjinder Singh;** 1997, *The Sikh Reference Book*, The Sikh Educational Trust, Canada, p.60

status of a king and he is portrayed in all royal finery projecting sword, dagger, bow and arrow (Plate-199), spear, *Katar* (Plate-200) (scissor dagger), steel quoit and round shield (Plate-201) as such objects only belong to a protector, a ruler and a warlord and hence the idea of addressing him as true '*Padsah*' is justified. The other features associated with this parlance is that the falcon is shown perched on his wrist, the Guru himself is commonly mounted on a horse and in some Sikh calendars has been depicted standing by a cannon and there is an image of fort in the background. There is a presence of pennants, battlements and troops behind and around Guru Gobind Singh's full-length portraits. He is also referred as '*Kalgidhar Padsah*' literally meaning He is the king with the plume (*Kalgi*) (Plate-202) bedecked in his turban decorated with bands of pearls and precious stones.

The image of Guru Gobind Singh which at present is profusely painted in the Sikh calendars may have its source in traditions but the modern day projection is distinctive in the lushness and luxuriance of visual presentation of portraying him as royal and majestic personality coupled with an aura of spiritual strength on his face to prescribe to his much loved images as 'Saint Soldier'. A deeper inspection would reveal that sword and daggers are not mere pieces of steel but they are intricately carved and decorated with finely embossed hilts and richly embroidered scabbards. The hilts had symbolic images of lions and tigers sculpted in jade and precious metals signifying the fact that these were the ornaments of a royal king and a mighty warrior.

A thought provoking feature which leads us to Guru Gobind Singh's colourful attire with ostentatiously magnificent embroidery work seems to be worn only by a royal personality and accessories such as belts (*Kamarband*), armlets, bracelets and grand pieces of jewellery lay stress on his royal stature. The horse which he rides is usually white or blue and is adorned with a richness matching its Master's array.

The actual dress which Guru Gobind Singh wears typically comprises a standard range of items. Like Guru Nanak he wears a *Jama* but one of a distinctively different cut. The Guru Gobind Singh's *Jama* is usually shorter, sometimes more a tunic than a robe. It typically has a high collar and is often fastened at the side in the shape of an '*Angrakha*'.<sup>(Plate-203)</sup> The garment is usually decorated with rich embroidery and brocade borders. Various colours are used, with saffron slightly more popular, than red, pink or green. Contrasting colours are used for the sash tied around his waist. Beneath his *Jama* the Guru wears a tight fitting white *Pyjama* and elegantly decorated slippers (*Juti*) with gold and silver thread work. His turban is distinctively conical with a loose end hanging from its peak.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to that the other ornamental features present in Sikh calendars related to tenth Sikh Guru are various ornaments such as a buckled belt and an ornate shoulder-strap alongwith one pearl necklace but commonly several strings are shown. The resplendent plume in the turban is also shown accompanied either by a jewelled aigrette or an ornate version of the Khalsa emblem (the steel quoit surmounted by a two-edged sword and flanked by curved swords). The Guru's beard is usually shown as slightly forked and the tips of his moustache are invariably turned up.<sup>20</sup> He always carries weapons and if the circumstances are appropriate he will also have his falcon. Occasionally a *Chhatri* is provided. A richly embroidered velvet or brocade gown appears in many latest versions of portraits of the Guru.

In contrast to Baba Nanak's portraits, the portraits of Guru Gobind Singh besides having divinity shown as royal authority, military power and ostentatious affluence and grandeur. The portraits of these two Gurus are distinctively indicative of the concept of 'Miri and Piri' established by Guru Hargobind Sahib.

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19     **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.45

20     Ibid, p.46

In this sense the contemporary iconography matches the traditional interpretation of the Panth's development from Guru Nanak's stress on inward meditation to Guru Gobind Singh's founding of the militant Khalsa. A query which concerns analytical investigation of *Sikh Calendar art* especially in context of Guru Gobind Singh requires to understand the presentation of gorgeous and sumptuous image projected in today's calendar. It is perhaps due to the technological advancement in printing which has enabled the artists to decorate these portraits elaborately to convert them into fabulously decorative and overwhelmingly appealing appearance seeped in visual richness yet oozing a specific spiritual charm with a mesmerising and spellbinding effect.

The emergence of the feature to explain this status is the regent history of Sikh kings and princes especially from royal house of Patiala who attired themselves in magnificent and fashionable costumes befitting their profound affluence having richly decorated palaces and thrones projected a spell of majestic ambience.<sup>21</sup> These royal figures may have attracted the attention of the artists and eked their imagination to incorporate such royal and regal splendour while painting the costumes of Guru Gobind Singh. The richness of expensive looking clothes and other accessories associated with royalty is the covert manifestation of an image, which is amply appreciated and adored by the masses in the event of depiction of Guru Gobind Singh. This means that the iconography associated with Guru Gobind Singh is in fact the distinctively Sikh expression of a much larger phenomenon portrayed in dazzling grand scale.

In Sikh calendars Guru Gobind Singh has been shown standing or sitting against the backdrop of snow-capped pristine mountains and sometimes a lake or a waterfall is shown cascading through the rich foliage and dense forests added a charm of its own because most of the events related to the tenth Guru happened to have been unfolded in such surroundings. A scene of Kailash Parbat and the

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21      **McLeod, W.H;** 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.46



valley of flowers where Gurdwara Hemkunt Sahib is situated is infact near a glacier and Guru Sahib is fabled to have worshipped there in his previous life.(Plate-204) Other scenic harmonious backgrounds depict Guru Sahib seated on the banks of river Godavari at Nanded. In yet another calendar Guru Sahib is featured as squatting on the banks of river Yamuna at Paonta Sahib where he established his abode. He is either shown crossing a mighty river with furiously rising waves mounted on a horseback denoting his internal storm and a resolve to stand against the evil and the tyrant.(Plate-205)

From Guru Angad Dev to Guru Arjan Dev who carried forward the saintly task of preaching the doctrines of Guru Nanak Dev basically are dressed as simple pious holy men attired in long shirt (*Jama*) over a tight fitting *Pyjama* wearing a straight turban (*Pugree*) in white or pale tones with a *Siropa* (Plate-206) type cloth around their neck and sometimes a shawl is shown spread on the back and the shoulders. A circle of divine light is depicted behind their heads. A sash (*Kamarband*) is tied around their waist and they are holding a *Simarini* (rosary) in their hands. There is no depiction of weapons such as sword, *Katar* (dagger) but they were shown reclining against a round cylindrical pillow (*Takia*). There is spiritual glow on their faces and their eyes lost in deep thought and contemplation.

Due to the brutal atrocities and tortures committed on the disciples following the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, a feature which is witnessed here, is the militarisation of the followers of Sikh faith under Guru Hargobind who felt the need to protect their faith which was only possible with taking of arms in self protection as the oppressors during this period were not only tyrant and intolerant of other faiths but demonstrated their anger in gruesome fashion perpetuating horrible and inhuman acts on unarmed and simple folks. From now we see Guru Hargobind featured as a saint and a valiant warrior fully armed with two swords of 'Miri and Piri' kindling the flame of violent resistance and his attires are that

of a smart soldier wearing impressive bright clothes and occasional pieces of ornaments sometimes a plume is also placed on his turban. This is a major departure from the earlier saintly image of the Gurus.

Though the seventh and eighth Sikh Gurus-Guru Har Rai and Guru Harkishan were not completely engaged in fighting their oppressors are shown wearing a plume and necklaces of white pearls. They served the humanity in their own way and were the torchbearers of true Sikh ideals.

The most common symbols and artefacts visible in the modern day Sikh calendars are projection of divine light in a circular form (Plate-207) which is present at the back of the head of all Sikh Gurus as a mark of sanctity and it is also visible in two prominent personalities namely Baba Buddha and Baba Deep Singh to place them in revered positions. The design of the halo is sometimes in misty form in soft light colours but it has been elaborately designed and ornate in many calendars showing sun like rays radiating from the circles. In some calendars this halo symbol has been decorated in sequins, *sitare* and *chamki* (glitter).

Nearly all the Sikh calendars carry extensive use of the 'Ik-Onkar' (Plate-208) symbol in various artistic forms some in geometrical and stylised calligraphic forms and sometimes it is depicted just as a flame of light in semi-abstract form. This symbol comprises of the first two characters recorded in the Adi Granth, a short-hand version of the term expressing the unity of Akal Purakh underlining the fact that God is one Supreme Being and He is omnipresent. "Mul Mantar" by Guru Nanak Dev, which is the primary or fundamental creed of Sikh faith, begins with this symbol is the cornerstone of the Sikh faith. The Guru Granth Sahib is an exposition of that One Reality, an explanation of how that

One Reality relates to the world and also how each of us personally relate to it.<sup>22</sup> Thus its significance is measured in both spiritual and universal intellect.

The symbol of 'Ik-Onkar' is considered so auspicious that it is used on almost all occasions for initiating or undertaking new works on letters, first page of the books, marriage cards, visiting cards, invitation cards and its metallic versions are used on the turbans and in necklaces. Religious buildings appropriately and respectfully displayed this symbol in concrete and marble structures. Infact 'Ik-Onkar' is the most solidified, compact and most visible Sikh symbol with its talismanic qualities it kindles in our hearts the feelings full of good omens and a realisation that we are being surrounded by the power of the almighty.

In *Sikh Calendar art*, 'Ik-Onkar' represents the Divine Name, fundamental doctrine of Gurmat.<sup>23</sup> It is shown as a superscription at the top of a picture, a sun or star in the sky (symbolising a burst of spiritual enlightenment), the source of divine power in the palm of the Guru's hand, a spiritual breastplate, embroidery on a garment or the cloth wrapping of the Guru Granth Sahib (*Rumala*) (Plate-209), a decorative badge or pendant, smoke from a fire or flame from a lamp, the hilt of a sword and the frame for an inset picture. Some artists have ventured to improvise it in myriad designs giving this symbol a shape of a lamp or a candle stand. Its presence in the necklaces of Gurus on the diamonds and pearls gives it an exalted place of unfathomed respect.

In a visually interesting Sikh calendar, an artist has used this symbol in a very imaginative way showing it as a rudder (*patwaar*) of a ship wherein people irrespective of caste, creed and religious affinities are shown crossing the rough river of life. The rudders in the form of 'Ik-Onkar' carry the persona of Ten Sikh Gurus surrounded by intricate floral designs, which present a high voltage of

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22 **Shankar, Vijay.N and Kaur, Harminder;** 2005, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib- A Universal Scripture for Mankind*, Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, Haryana, p.113

23 **McLeod, W.H;** 1968, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Oxford, p.196

artistic and aesthetic charm.<sup>(Plate-210)</sup> This symbol due to its religious significance is inscribed on a *Rakhi* in an emotionally moving Sikh calendar celebrating the pure love of a brother and sister. <sup>(Plate-211)</sup> The prominence of this particular symbol in modern *Sikh Calendar art* iconography contrasts with its rarity in nineteenth century prints and murals. Its current popularity is due to a revolution in printing technologies, which prints countless Sikh calendars and souvenirs thus making it an omnipresent object of faith.

Sikhism did not approve of idol worship, but held in deity like reverence objects known to have remained associated with their Gurus or formed part of spiritual sanctity, elevating them to status of timeless, formless entity. These things, by virtue of their association with the Gurus or Panth, moved a Sikh emotionally generating in him a feeling of devotion towards his Gurus and a commitment towards his Panth. The presence of a Khalsa symbol (*Khanda Kirpan*) <sup>(Plate-212)</sup> in contemporary Sikh calendars is explicitly used due to its importance as emblem and a mark of Sikh sovereignty and martial prowess (Sikh Panth). This symbol comprises a steel quoit (*Chakkar*) with a vertical two-edged sword (*Khanda*) <sup>(Plate-213)</sup> flanked by two small curved swords (*Kirpan*).<sup>24</sup> <sup>(Plate-214)</sup> ‘*Khanda*’ the two edged weapon symbolised an instrument, which transformed by its touch simple water into nectar and a simple folk into the purest one.<sup>25</sup> Its importance gained a new height during Guru Gobind Singh’s time, when at the time of creation of Khalsa it was used to prepare the Amrit, due to which it is called ‘*Khande Ki Pahul*’ - rites of two edged dagger.<sup>26</sup> Since then ‘*Khanda*’ was not a mere weapon but an essential organ of baptizing to Khalsa.<sup>27</sup> The two

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24 **Dilgeer, Dr. Harjinder Singh;** 1997, *The Sikh Reference Book*, The Sikh Educational Trust, Canada, p.56

25 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.114-115

26 **Singh, Dr. Paramvir;** 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.31

27 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.115

edged '*Khanda*' also symbolise the twin concepts of 'Miri' and 'Piri' (Temporal and Spiritual power).<sup>28</sup> '*Khanda*'- a simple weapon was transformed into a spiritual instrument of sectarian baptism and had become the symbol of guided strength and resolute mind. This '*Khanda*' was later made to crown the Nishan Sahib and with a couple of *Kirpans*, to serve now for three hundred years as Panth's emblem.<sup>29</sup> The two curved swords incorporated in this Khalsa emblem are symbolic of a weapon, which cuts ignorance from its roots, and one perceives the transcendental knowledge. As God is the one who destroys ignorance, thus '*Kirpan*' symbolises God himself and addressed as 'Sri Sahib'. '*Kirpan*' as a weapon can be used in both offence as well as defence. Apart from this, it reveals the free entity of the Sikhs and signifies that Sikhs cannot become slave of anyone. Its use must be for upholding righteousness and justice. '*Kirpan*' literally means a weapon used for self-esteem, but in the form of *Kirpa* or grace, not in the form of tyranny.<sup>30</sup> When perched on waist with upward handle it requires mind to hold it and with its downward blade it aims at cleansing and purifying the earth.<sup>31</sup> These three elements of the Khalsa emblem are encircled in a '*Chakkar*' (Plate-215) a steel quoit, which is a metaphor for eternity and symbolises an infinite God.<sup>32</sup>

This Khalsa emblem appears frequently in *Sikh Calendar prints*, usually in association with Guru Gobind Singh (founder of the Khalsa). It is worn as a badge on his turban (Plate-216) or belt, emblazoned on the flag of the Khalsa (*Nisan*) or added to the margin as an appropriate decoration for a calendar depicting the

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28 **Singh, Dr. Paramvir**; 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.31

29 **Daljeet, Dr**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.115

30 **Singh, Dr. Paramvir**; 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.16

31 **Daljeet, Dr**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.115

32 **Singh, Dr. Paramvir**; 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.31

Lord of the Khalsa. A galloping horse of Guru Gobind Singh carried this emblem on the decorative chest piece worn around the horse's neck. (Plate-217) This symbol is also embroidered on an Adi Granth (*Rumala*). As the component parts so clearly indicate, the symbol expresses militancy. This involves defence of the Panth against oppressors and also in a more general sense, the protection of righteousness from the assaults of the evil. War is not fought for its own sake. It is fought as *Dharamyudh*, as a battle waged on behalf of truth and justice.

In Sikh calendars, portraits devoted to Guru Gobind Singh and other valiant warriors of the Panth are shown displaying this Khalsa emblem as badges on their turbans, armlets, worn in necklaces, and on chest-plates and found on arrow caskets. It is also inscribed on the Nishan Sahibs being carried by Panj Pyaras during the Gurpurab processions. It is painted on margins and decorative frames of the calendars giving it a metallic tint preferably in golden shades and is surmounted on religious artefacts in ornamental versions giving it richness due to its valued place in Khalsa Panth. Sometimes it is the central piece accompanied by two flags of 'Miri' and 'Piri' with *Khandas* placed on top erected near the Gurdwaras giving it sumptuously enhanced exposition. The mere presence of this Khalsa emblem inscribed on Panth's saffron flags being carried during battles had a very emphatic task of reinforcing the soldier's resolve to defeat the enemy as a fight under this flag was always a fight for justice and the flags with this insignia presented a regal and powerful assemblage of do or die dedicated soldiers.

A feature most respectfully displayed in Sikh calendars is of course the installation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. (Plate-218) The Guru Granth Sahib is a great and endless sea of devotion to the Divine and in that sea the hymns of the Sikh Gurus and the *Bhagats* are powerful waves that carry the minds and

souls of devotees.<sup>33</sup> Besides being most modern scripture it is endowed with the *Bani* or hymns of a diverse section of society making it the most secular religious scripture which is revered as a living Guru by the Sikhs true to tenth Guru's directions "Guru manyo Granth". The Sri Guru Granth Sahib in Sikh calendars always appears with garlands and embroidered mantle (*Rumalas*) and usually with the traditional canopy (*Chandni*).<sup>(Plate-219)</sup> Given the veneration traditionally bestowed on the sacred scripture the incidence of the Guru Granth Sahib in modern *Sikh Calendar art* prints is surprisingly low perhaps due to the fact that some people may not be able to accord the due respect it deserves as the calendars are sometimes carelessly and haphazardly displayed in improper places due to the ignorance and casual attitude.

In Sikh calendars '*Karah Prasad*'<sup>(Plate-220)</sup> is usually shown placed near Sri Guru Granth Sahib and has a significant place in Sikh tradition. It is distributed in the Sangat after offering it to the Akal Purakh. There is a tradition of preparing it in the Gurdwaras daily and in the Sikh houses on the days of Gurburab or some special occasions. The '*Karah Prasad*' offered before Guru Sahib is considered the blessings of the Guru. For preparing '*Karah Prasad*', five contents- wheat flour, pure sugar, clarified butter, water and fire is used and the method of preparing it has been described in the '*Sikh Rehat Maryada*'.<sup>34</sup> Only the '*Karah Prasad*', which has been prepared or got prepared according to the prescribed method, is acceptable in the congregation. In addition, the person who doles out the '*Karah Prasad*' among the congregation should do so without any discrimination based on personal regard or spite.<sup>35</sup> '*Karah Prasad*' is one of the main regular features of *Sikh Calendar art* from the late nineteenth century.

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33 **Shankar, Vijay.N and Kaur, Harminder;** 2005, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib- A Universal Scripture for Mankind*, Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, Haryana, p.113

34 **Singh, Taran;** 2004, *Karah Prasad*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.432-433

35 **Singh, Dr. Paramvir;** 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.27

As regarding the depiction of Gurdwaras in Sikh calendars the prime place goes to Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar (Plate-221) being the holiest of the holy shrines of Sikhs. In various compositional variations Sri Harimandir Sahib finds a central and prominent place in calendars. In some instances, one or more Gurdwaras appear as insets. Such Gurdwaras bear an overt relationship to the Guru who dominates the picture or to the incident, which it portrays. For example a Sikh calendar illustrates the birth and childhood of Guru Nanak appropriately includes Gurdwara Janam-Asthan, the temple that marks his actual birth place in Nankana Sahib. Similarly a sequence portraying the devoted service of Guru Amar Das concludes with a picture of Gurdwara Baoli Sahib in Goindwal. In *Sikh Calendar art* the image of the Golden Temple dominates confirming the supremacy of this particular shrine in the popular imagination.

A few calendars are available which depict the presence of all five Takhts- Sri Akal Takht Sahib, Amritsar; Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib, Patna Sahib; Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib; Takht Sri Hazur Sahib, Nanded; Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Sabo ki Talwandi and Golden Temple together. Though the Takhts hold their own significance as a seat of authority combining both the temporal as well as eternal.<sup>36</sup> Another factor why Golden Temple is more popular as compared to other Gurdwaras and its widespread publication in calendars it offers a feast to the eye with its unique gold covered structure and a pool of nectar around it enhances its visual magnificence and radiates a splendour, which evokes unique spiritually elevated emotions amongst the devotees.

The holy inscription “Satnam Waheguru” (Plate-222) finds a respectful presence in nearly all Sikh calendars as this is the central Sikh concept of True Nam (or the Name), which is to be seen on almost every leaf of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Satnam or Name Adoration is a central concept of the religious philosophy of the Gurus and characteristically it is as simple as it is profound

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36     **McLeod, W.H;** 1995, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, The Scarecrow Press, London, p.206



starting with the idea of a monotheistic God or One Reality. It is both the message and the messenger of Truth, the Primal Guru, the Enlightener. The True Nam is a sound; the Name connects at once to that which we want to reach.<sup>37</sup> According to scholar G.S.Talib, the Name “ is the only visible form of the creator available to the devotees; Being a sound it is itself abstract, immaterial and formless”. In Sikh Practice, “the supreme Name of the creator is “Ik Onkar”. Parallel to it is Satnam (Eternal, holy presence).<sup>38</sup>

Alongside Satnam, equally visible word Waheguru denotes as the Gurmantar for a Sikh. It is the invocatory formula received from the Guru. It is that term, significant of the Supreme Being, which the Guru confides to the Sikhs to meditate on. The word Waheguru has been the Gurmantar for the Sikhs from the very beginning.<sup>39</sup> Satnam Waheguru is found in Sikh calendars as a superscription; as embroidery on garments, Sri Guru Granth Sahib mantles (*Rumalas*), and the sail of a symbolic ship and as engraving on the links in one of the tenth Guru’s necklaces. It is projected in a number of styles in calligraphic forms in ascent on floral as well as geometrical designs to decorate these holy words.

Another important feature is the depiction of ‘Nishan Sahib’ (Plate-223) in Sikh calendars which is installed at a high level site in every Gurdwara. As matter of religious injunction, it must be hoisted at every building of the Gurdwara. It is a symbol of sovereignty for the Sikhs. The cloth of the flag is either of saffron or of bluish grey colour. On top of the flag post, there is either a spearhead or a ‘*Khanda*’. The ‘Nishan Sahib’ is made of cotton or silk cloth and is triangular in shape. This saffron flag was hoisted, for the first time in 1606 A.D at Sri Akal Takht Sahib. A pole of timber or metal supports the ‘Nishan

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37 **Shankar, Vijay.N and Kaur, Harminder**; 2005, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib- A Universal Scripture for Mankind*, Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, Haryana, p.114

38 *Ibid*, p.123

39 **Singh, Dr. Paramvir**; 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.18

Sahib' having '*Khanda Kirpan*' embroidered or printed on it. This 'Nishan Sahib' is referred to in the daily prayer (*Ardas*) of the Sikhs asking for its eternity.<sup>40</sup> This feature relating to Panth and Khalsa is drawn in calendars either in front of a Gurdwara or as a design element balance a composition portraying a particular historical place or an event pertaining to Sikh history or Guru's life.

While talking about the dominance of two main colours in Sikh calendars that is blue and saffron crystallised in earlier iconographic compositions. There is also an abundance of red, maroon, deep green and deep blue shades specially shown in the costumes of important figures and in relatively later calendars there is a touch of natural colours subdued shades of grey, white, pale, blue and light green for attires of common people composed in these compositions. But deep blue, white and saffron are colours related to the Khalsa Panth and Nihangs belonging to various Dals. Blue colour was chosen to express oneness with Akal Purakh and is a sign of infinity. Saffron colour is associated with sacrifice and carries a deep meaning of a resolute soul wholly devoted to the cause of eradication of evil and is considered as a colour of revolution according to Indian ethos and traditions. Yet white colour is an expression of purity, piousness, peace and saintliness having abundance of simplicity and calm.

Light coloured turbans and *Jamas* (long shirts) are worn even today in rustic Punjab as they also act as radiating agents against bright sunlight as clothes of dark colours hamper the mobility of people due to absorption of unbearable excessive heat. In recent Sikh calendars where there is depiction of crowds engaged in specific activities pertaining to a particular scene people are shown mostly in light coloured attires. But the prime figures, saints, warriors, kings or Gurus are shown in appropriate colourful costumes so that they stand out against the crowd lending a focal attention to maximise an artistic charm to the

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40 **Kerr, Ian J.;** 2004, *Harimandar*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.239-248

composition highlighting the required thrust on the central characters. In addition to this, landscapes in natural and realistic manner have been attempted by the artists, to augment the aesthetic appeal and make a picture look like a page from the real history. Trees especially Kikar(Plate-224), Pipal(Plate-225), Banyan(Plate-226) and other native trees have meticulously been painted in their true colours which stand a testimony to the keen observance of the artists while depicting a particular place in a rural setting. There is a remarkable control over the choice of colour palette, which has accorded a mercurial aesthetical character, and a class of its own to these contemporary calendars. The essence of something Sikh and Khalsa is evident due to skilful narrative and proficiency in proper characterisation in compositional arrangements loaded with Sikh paraphernalia.

A relative feature which attracts the eye in these calendars is of the understanding of Sikh architecture or the shape of rural structures, houses made of small bricks or of mud walls with typical wooden doors and street scenes. The facial cuts and features of the Punjabi people and their skin tones have been keenly observed and painted in masterly strokes. This depiction of Punjabi flavour is the result of enormous study and a deep sense of visualisation, which has successfully captured the fleeting time period in these calendars. Houses of rich people and other structures have not been painted in elaborate decorative styles yet they speak volumes of the straight forward approach without ascent on exaggeration and there is no unnecessary urge to depict them in over decorative styles.

It is observed that the artists have invested their considerable amount of time in the study of the attires or costumes worn by the Mughals, which were quite different in shapes, sizes, curves and patterns. Headgears relating to the Mughals and Pathan soldiers engaged in battlefields with Sikhs have been painted in a precise and correct manner. It is not very difficult to spot the difference in the styles of their beards and moustaches of these invaders and

oppressors shown engaged in turbulent and tumultuous war scenes with the Sikhs.

Yet another feature which has been used by some artists while painting scenes of gruesome torture and violence against the innocent Sikh disciples is the dramatization and exaggeration of facial gestures pertaining to project cruelty on the faces of Mughals bordering on crude ugly faces which looked demonic with extraordinary painted huge and red eyes and overtly heavy arms and muscles holding large and heavy weapons like swords, axes, spears, hammers and hot iron spikes.

An overwhelmingly noticeable feature in these calendars is that the artists have painted an aura of calm and peaceful disposition on the faces of Sikh followers being brutally martyred by horrible looking executioners. The peaceful state of mind depicted on these Sikh martyrs clearly demonstrates the height of spiritual strength and an unshakable belief in the almighty aptly justifying the dictum- '*Tera Bhana Meetha Lage*' meaning 'Thy Will is sweet'.

Means of transport and agricultural implements are among the other spheres of life frozen in these Sikh calendars. Walking on foot was the commonest mode of travelling in those times. People from different strata of society used horses (Plate-227), bullock-carts (Plate-228), chariots and palanquins (Plate-229) (*Dolis*) as means of transport according to their need and economic conditions. The carts and chariots were usually drawn by horses and oxen for heavy transport. Horses and palanquins were much in demand for individual travelling. Palanquins were generally meant for ladies and men of very high status. As regards agriculture, these calendars furnish us with a good peep into the mode and implements of cultivation, the working of the Persian wheel, the grazing of cattle by young boys and general life in the countryside. From them we also learn something about the animals such as cows, buffaloes, goats, camels, sheep and even occasional elephants being tamed by the people for

various tasks. There was a tradition of carrying the goods on head from one place to another, which is still visible in rural areas of Punjab connected with the daily chores of agriculture. From these calendars various species of birds, animals, plants and trees peep out in confirmation of their presence in those times in specific regions.<sup>41</sup>

Women shown in these calendars with their heads covered with heavy *Dupattas* and *Chaddars* wearing *Kurtis*, *Ghaghras*, *Salwar Kameez* and are generally not wearing any heavy jewellery firstly because they used to lead simple and solemn lives and secondly there was a general fear and anxiety that prevailed due to perpetual invasions by the Mughal, Afghan and Turkish invaders and looters in Punjab being the gateway to India. The ornaments, which were most popular with them, seem to be the earrings.<sup>42</sup> Sainly people are shown wearing wooden clogs (*Padukas*) while ordinary people are generally depicted as bare footed. The common footwear was the *Desi Juti* (Plate-230) (country shoe), though the better off classes made use of costly slippers laced with gold and silver thread embroidery. Ordinary children painted in these calendars had very little clothing on their bodies, but those hailing from good families used to put on long shirts or cloaks with tight *Pyjamas* underneath and covered their heads either with caps or with turbans. The Brahmins were dressed differently from the other people and could easily be recognised as such from the manner of their dress. They put on a *Dhoti* and a *Pugree* and carried a piece of cloth (*Parna* in popular language) over their shoulders.(Plate-231) Excepting the head, the upper part of their body had nothing or except the sacred thread (*Janeu*).<sup>43</sup>

There is also a reference in these calendars to a variety of caps worn by people belonging to various religious sects. The caps were mostly in vogue

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41 **Singh, Dr. Fauja**; March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.151-152

42 Ibid, p.148-149

43 Ibid, p.150

among the diverse Hindu religious orders of the *Sants*, *Siddhs*, *Yogis* etc. Among the Muslim religious orders, the '*Dastar*' (Plate-232) (large sized *Pugree*) was more in vogue than the cap. This was why the *Ulema* were called '*Dastarbandan*' and the Sayads who tied their turbans around '*Kulas*' (conical caps) were known as '*Kulas-Daran*'. The rulers and the chiefs generally used the *Pugree*. Among the vast population of people too, the *Pugree* was worn by those popular persons who were more respected than the others. The cap was usually worn by ordinary folks who were not able to afford expensive turbans. Both the caps and the turbans had several designs as is evident in the Sikh calendars. Babar and members of several Muslim religious orders are shown here in large-sized turbans, some of them tied the turbans around '*Kulas*' (conical caps). The more common pattern, however was a small-sized turban tied in the Rajput-Mughal style. The chiefs had plumes, usually of Heron's feathers, tucked in to indicate their special status. The designs of the *Pugree* changed with the passage of time and we find a wide difference between the earlier *Pugrees* and those of the twentieth century. The cap offered even a greater variety of designs. There were close-fitting caps of the *Yogis*. The *Siddhs* another well-known order of the Hindu Hermits, put on conical caps with high tops generally known as '*Qalandari*'.<sup>44</sup>

It is very interesting to note that these calendars have set in chorological order Sikh history, cultural traditions and a daily way of life of common people and through this mirror we assimilate a plethora of undercurrents of historical significance and social manifestations. The figures painted are so life-like and moving in these calendars that we come across all emotions such as anger, joy, sorrow, amazement, disbelief, kindness, affection which have been painted in eloquent and lucid manner and one can easily gauge the mood of the moment.

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44 **Singh, Dr. Fauja**; March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.149

An appropriate and calculated use of the skies, clouds, storms, and sunshine has lent added aesthetic value and expression to these artistic compositions, which have the quality to attract and enthrall the onlooker.

These Sikh calendars testify that *Pandhas* or Brahmins were assigned the task of spreading education besides healing the people from ailments both physical and mental with their knowledge of Ayurvedic system of medicine. Similarly Maulvis were not supposed to teach in a school but were also understood to have curing powers through their proficiency in the *Unani Hikmat*. A glimpse of this tradition is present in some rare calendars.<sup>45</sup>

The artists have recorded the use of richly embroidered drapery especially in red, green and maroon velvets and the presence of canopy (*Chandni*) provide a vivid cluster of tinsel, garlands and coloured textiles and in the similar fashion rugs, carpets and other spreads have been painted in the scenes to portray royalty and riches accompanied by intricately carved wooden furniture with inlay work such as *Takhts* (Plate-233), thrones and foot-rests (Plate-234) covered with a soft pillow which usually had golden or silver tinsels. Interiors of '*Shamiyanas*' (temporary camping fabric structures) have also been decorated with the display of pieces of weaponry- shields, crossed spears and swords mounted on the walls. In some cases layers of beautiful bead-strings have been used to form temporary curtains. These settings also have occasional metallic, brass or silver Persian style utensils like *Surahis* and lamps, which presented an atmosphere of enhanced ambience due to their intricate and ornamental designs and shapes. Depiction of iron bowl (*Bata*) (Plate-235) an article usually carried by Nihangs is a sacred utensil to the Sikh soldiers as Guru Gobind Singh had prepared the first Amrit in such a utensil (*Bata Sahib*) for baptism of Panj Pyaras on the auspicious day of the birth of Khalsa.

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45 **Singh, Dr. Fauja**; March 1969, *A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak*, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.151

Guru Gobind Singh, at the time of creation of Khalsa with 'Khande Bate di Pahul', ordered everybody to wear five Kakars to initiate as Khalsa.<sup>46</sup> These five Kakars, known as symbol of Khalsa, beginning with the alphabet 'K', are essential for every baptised Sikh. The set of these five symbols present the distinctive features of the Khalsa, which set them off from the followers of any other religious faith. These attributes had otherwise too a deeper significance and guided a Sikh's life from his head to toe. These are 'Kes' (Plate-236) (long uncut hair), 'Kangha' (Plate-237) (comb), 'Kara' (Plate-238) (iron bracelet), 'Kachhahera' (Plate-239) (shorts reaching up to the knees) and 'Kirpan' (Plate-240) (sword).<sup>47</sup> 'Kes' or unshorn hair is the stamp of the Guru. A Sikh believes them to be a treasure blessed upon by the Guru. One having 'Kes' has been symbolised as a cosmic being, who has been described as "Sohane nak jin lamre vala"-having beautiful nose and unshorn hair, in Gurbani. Guru Gobind Singh created Khalsa in the image of this cosmic being. The unshorn hair indicates living in Guru's Will and Sikh has to preserve the form blessed upon him by the Lord. The turban added to head's physical height, held it high and by its spiral shape led mind to incline upward to ever-greater heights. 'Kangha' or comb is to be kept in the hair to keep the hair clean while combing and saving them from matted condition. Matted hair symbolises renunciation of the world, which is contrary to the Sikh tradition.<sup>48</sup> The comb, 'Kangha' weeded out evil and undesirable.<sup>49</sup> 'Kara', which adorned generally on the right wrist, is made of iron. 'Kara' testimonies the fact that Sikh do not believe in superstitions or false beliefs and lives in the Guru's Will. Every Khalsa is enjoined to wear a 'Kachhahera', a pair of specially designed shorts, symbolises the high conduct of

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46 **Singh, Khushwant**; 1984, *The Sikhs*, Lustre Press Pvt. Ltd., Varanasi, p.15

47 **Neki, Jaswant Singh**; 2004, *Five Symbols*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.35-39

48 **Singh, Dr. Paramvir**; 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.18

49 **Daljeet, Dr**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.115



the individual wearing it. It is of tight fitting and covers the thighs up to the knees. '*Kachhahera*' stands to negate the concept of nudity prevalent in Indian asceticism. It restricts a Sikh to adhere to the social norms as a balanced social being. In the Sikh religion, '*Kirpan*' or sword is a weapon which is primarily used for self-protection rather than to attack somebody without reason.<sup>50</sup> We come across these symbols and features in many calendars being the key elements of Sikh faith understanding their conceptual meaning which helps in defining the Sikh characters (Khalsa) projected in the calendars while narrating a particular episode from Sikh history. Their visual projection also gives a distinctive appearance to the calendars on Sikh themes and their repeated depiction has been instrumental in propagating the Sikh faith, ethos and traditions.

Sikh calendars of war scenes generally show '*Nagara*' (Plate-241) mounted on horsebacks or elephants. '*Nagara*' is believed to be a thunderous musical instrument of war. It is used in the battlefield to indicate the beginning of the war. Its use could be traced to the celebration of festivals. Guru Gobind Singh prepared a drum, which was called '*Ranjit Nagara*' or '*drum of victory*' and had used it at the times of wars. The Nihang Singhs, while moving from one place to another, play a '*Nagara*' ahead of their caravan to announce to the people of their arrival. '*Nagara*' is used in Gurdwaras on some special occasions and at the time of *Ardas*.<sup>51</sup> Similarly a large brass musical instrument known as '*Ransingha*' (Plate-242) is a 'S' shaped, huge windpipe which is blown by the warriors leading the troops to announce the arrival of a procession and also at the same time to boost the courage and moral of the warriors thereby scaring away the enemies with its roaring sounds followed by loud war cries of '*Bole Sau*

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50 **Singh, Dr. Paramvir;** 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.16

51 **Singha, H.S.;** 2000, *The encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Hemkunt Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.150

Nihal Sat Sri Akal'. A stringed musical instrument called 'Rabab' is also shown in many Sikh calendars specially the ones related to Guru Nanak Dev where his constant companion Mardana is shown playing this musical instrument. (Plate-243) Other musical instruments shown in calendars which were popularised by Guru Gobind Singh for his sightless disciples such as 'Tabla' (Plate-244), 'Saranda' (Plate-245), and 'Taus' (Plate-246) in order to enable them to contribute to the Sikh faith in their own capacity as music is an integral part of *Shabad* and *Bani* recitation enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib which has been set on *ragas* of Indian classical music.<sup>52</sup>

'Dhad' (Plate-247) is an ancient musical instrument in the shape of a tabor (Damru), which is played with the finger's strokes of the hands. The person playing this instrument is called a *Dhadi* or a bard. The use of 'Dhad' and 'Sarangi' (Plate-248) is still popular even today as 'Dhad Sargis' or the balladeers narrate the tales from the pages of Sikh history of valour and bravery of Sikh martyrs, warriors and Gurus in their own inimitable and zestful style, which is capable of uplifting the emotions of the masses to a rare plateau of enthusiasm. They are usually seen performing in all large religious congregations, melas and festivals. This is their musical tribute to the inspirational aspect of Sikh religion of which the history is replete with lofty ideals of service and sacrifice. Many contemporary calendars showcase this element in quite appealing form thereby registering their valuable contribution towards the propagation of Sikh history as these *Dhadis* are capable of establishing a direct contact with the masses while they perform on the stage in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and have a rare capacity to move the gathered devotees. Their long association with the Sikh religion goes back to the times when Guru Hargobind ordained the *Dhadis* to sing ballads in front of the Akal Takht in order to produce zeal and enthusiasm

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52      **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.77

for victory in wars in the hearts of the Sikhs. Abdulla and Nattha were the main minstrels of Guru Sahib's time.<sup>53</sup>

A feature worth notice in the Sikh calendars is the inscription and description of a particular person or a group of persons, their names and designations/titles and the purpose for their congregation at a particular place either a religious place or a palace are mentioned in *Gurmukhi* script. This practice was even evident in earliest woodcuts and Sikh calendars. A place of pride is also reserved in the calendars for religious couplets or *Bani* from the Holy Scripture to impress upon the devout to understand and follow the essence of wisdom enshrined in the couplet. Sometimes these couplets are used as an indication to highlight the sanctity of an event, person or place. The practice of labelling the characters helps in tracing the gist of anecdotes featured in the calendars and to summarise the long episode in few precise stanzas.

In a number of contemporary calendars painted for the propagation of Sikh way of life, artists have attempted to illustrate the most popular Sikh martial art known as '*Gatka*' (Plate-249), which is a significant sports activity of Khalsa. '*Gatka*' is practiced amongst the Sikhs especially the Baptised ones as it keeps them physically fit and strong, and provides excellence in the art of warfare. For the purpose of practice by the youngsters a long stick instead of a sword is used and wooden or metal shield is provided to save themselves from the attack later on proper swords, spears and *chakkaries* are used. Guru Hargobind started competitions of '*Gatka*' and physical activities in front of the Akal Takht so that the Sikhs may achieve expertise in warfare. The playing of '*Gatka*' builds a feeling of self-confidence, enthusiasm and alertness among the Sikhs and it is

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53 **Giani, Pratap Singh**; 2004, *Dhadi*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.563-564

ceremoniously played in front of the Sikh religious processions.<sup>54</sup> Nihang Singhs as known as ‘Guru ki Fauj’ seriously practice this martial sport along with performing of marvellous and miraculous feats on their horses on the day of *Hola Mohalla* at Anandpur Sahib or wherever their *Deras* are situated.<sup>55</sup> Depiction of martial traits, weapons and unique types of turbans and dresses of Nihangs have attracted the attention of many artists who have ventured to showcase the exotic scenes in Sikh calendars.

Having identified the main features prevalent in *Sikh Calendar art* which remained in constant use during the past century or so as they project the essence of Sikhism, Sikh way of life, their religious practices and objects which are of immense sanctity and sacred value and the ceremonies associated with the Sikhs enable us to have a brief idea of the visual presentation which has been portrayed by the artists in their myriad styles and techniques using their artistic skills and aesthetic faculties to describe prominent episodes from Sikh history. It is essential for an artist of any denomination to achieve an insight into the understanding of these features to depict the moral, social and historical perceptions contained in them while depicting the philosophical and religious background of an event and it is also an absolute requirement for the artist to have a fair knowledge of the features related to Sikhism in order to present in a truthful way the plethora of ideals through their optimum use in an exercise to retain the content and flavour of the related subject. Identification of accurate features related to Sikhism and *Sikh art* is all the more important and pertinent for a person who is not well versed with these objects and practices. Features depicted correctly and appropriately in specific situations and compositions add to the authenticity thus the inner meaning contained in a particular feature should

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54 **Singh, Dr. Paramvir**; 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.30

55 **Singha, H.S.**; 2000, *The encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Hemkunt Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.76

also be given due thought so that the inner soul of the subject matter comes alive in a realistic and befitting manner which will initiate the audience in mobilising a thought process to understand the ethos involved in evolving a particular feature. The task requires immense patience and dedication both in terms of deep study and understanding of the main features. The textural narrative in these calendars can only be explained and illustrated properly if due consideration is devoted to the symbolic essence and its objective is well defined through deep visualisation and control over the rendering techniques. At no point the basic importance of a feature could be sacrificed otherwise the final product in this case a Sikh calendar will be devoid of the true Sikh flavour and ambience associated with it. Here the main task for an artist engaged in the painting of Sikh calendars is to acquaint himself with the eminence of features in order to retain their form and content to preserve and augment the thought process in the formation of these features in exact visual resemblance and their latent manifestations.

As these features are the culmination of long and deep philosophical and spiritual quest which was undertaken by the Great Sikh Gurus and other Sikh luminaries who are adored as torchbearers of Sikh ethics generated these features after long spells of meditative contemplations and having exemplary personal moral values. Hence it is natural that these symbols are so revered by the Sikhs as they represent the soul of the Khalsa Panth. Most of the features of the *Sikh Calendar art* are respectfully addressed as ‘Sahibs’ due to their immensely holy character such as Nishan Sahib (Khalsa flag), Sri Sahib (Plate-250) (Sword), Chaur Sahib (Plate-251) (Holy fly-whisk), Khanda Sahib (Two-edged sword), Bata Sahib (Iron Bowl), Manji Sahib (Plate-252) (Charpoy), Takht Sahib (Throne), Pidha Sahib (Pidhi) and Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Adi Granth) etc. as they are considered an embodiment of the true spirit of Khalsa. Knowledge of these features in totality together with their meaning and their outer visual form can enable a person to differentiate between the separate genre of *Sikh Calendar art* from the

calendars related to other sects and religions both for scholars as well as the laymen engaged in the study of *Sikh Calendar art*.

It is an extremely important component of research to delve deep into the psyche, developed by a specific artist, due to the various factors and elements such as his lifestyle, family background, domestic atmosphere, professional exposure and development of his art, sources of his inspiration and motivation. In this direction, a mentor of the artist and the caliber he possesses also plays a transforming role. **The study of lives of artists, who carved a niche for themselves in the genre of *Sikh Calendar art*, reveals the undercurrents of emotions and feelings which contributed to their initiation into this form of art, their respective stages of progress in achieving creative and professional excellence, deserves utmost delicate yet probing attention.** Another important factor which is aptly vital in the field of art, is the magnitude of exposure which impacts the art of a particular artist, laying a stress upon the stylization as well as the profundity of his/her final product. It is worth mentioning here that keen interest in history and religion, the importance of theological studies which normally trigger the stimulation of sustained contact with the company of persons and groups, who have dedicated their lives in pursuit of divine path and spiritual sojourns. These factors have undoubtedly shaped the destiny of artists who undertook the arduous voyage of pursuing the depiction of scenes and episodes of Sikh history, culture and heritage. **A detailed study of the lives of such painters will reveal that most of them possessed a poetic and philosophical bent of mind and an attitude which was without shackles of narrow mentality, had an overpowering view of a peaceful world which reveled in humanism and believed in the fraternity of mankind.** Such magnificent qualities of human nature raises the level of thought processes and provides a grasp on the ground level, ultimately resulting in equipping the artist with fine sensibilities and a sense of elation and spiritual ecstasy. **The end result of attaining these pre-requisites for the creation of a spellbinding works of**

**art is essential and is amply rewarding in the shape of countless admirers whose lives are affected with such noble creations.**

Traveling back in time to have a peep in the lives and art of Sikh painters, whose works reign the hearts of countless individuals, is in itself a sacred and revealing excursion and akin to a pilgrimage. **To touch the lives of artists which are drenched in the perspiration of dedication, persistent and unrelenting endeavours is an inspirational exercise. The gist of their lives revolves around directing their mental and physical energies in pursuit of creating such masterpieces which are visual tributes to the ideals of Sikhism.** It is undoubtedly the philosophy behind the Sikh religion which was the main source of inspiration for these pioneers of *Sikh Calendar art*, as a mere glimpse on their main works establishes the fact that they considered it a sacred task to paint a picture which oozes an aura of Guru Nanak's divinity and spirituality and Guru Gobind Singh's valour and resolve which turned him to *Sant Sipahi* (Saint Soldier). The man who followed these ideals in true spirit and who was eulogized as '**Saint Artist**' due to his benign personality and believed in the idiom "Grow More Good" is none other than **Sardar Sobha Singh** (Plate-253), whose entire life is the story of a crusader who embarked upon a journey of discovering the essence of Sikhism through his art. The iconic images of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh created by this apostle of peace are etched upon the hearts and minds of lovers of *Sikh Calendar art*. The imagery employed in these revealing and mesmerizing works is rooted in the soil of spiritualism, non-violence, peaceful co-existence and universal brotherhood. The idyllic surroundings at Andretta, district Kangra, Himachal Pradesh where he lived and worked, abundantly nurtured his intellect into the blossoming of his inner sensibilities and contemplation. The result of bouts of meditative stances had provided him capabilities to create astounding masterpieces in the solace of towering Dhauladhar mountains where gentle blows of breeze whispered in his ears the



mantra of a pious life, as preached by Guru Nanak Dev, other Sikh Gurus and saints.<sup>1</sup> He dedicated his life in creating works full of eternal bliss and scenes of violence and wars never excited him as he abhorred mindless chaos and turmoil in this world. He once remarked that “*He painted his paintings in milk and not in blood*”.<sup>2</sup>

Artist Sobha Singh was born on November 29, 1901 A.D. at Sri Hargobindpur, district Gurdaspur, Punjab. His father Sardar Deva Singh was a surveyor in Battalion 22 of the Indian Army and was a trained cavalier and a talented painter. His mother Bibi Achhran Devi was a delicate, charming and soft spoken lady, who passed away in 1906 after a prolonged illness when the Sobha Singh was hardly five years old. Bibi Lakshmi Devi, sister of Sobha Singh, who was twelve years elder to the artist showered love and affection on child Sobha Singh and compensated for her mother’s love. He lived in Lahore with his sister. After four years stay at Lahore, the family shifted to Amritsar. They stayed in ‘Kambohwan Wali Gali’ near Jallianwala Bagh. The stay at Amritsar was an important milestone in the life span of the artist. After the death of his father in 1917, Sobha Singh shifted to Amritsar and learnt scale drawing from his brother-in-law Sardar Mangal Singh. Sobha Singh had formal education upto class fifth only. He had his schooling at Sri Hargobindpur (Ist to 3<sup>rd</sup> class), Gurdaspur (4<sup>th</sup> class) and Sri Hargobindpur (5<sup>th</sup> class).<sup>3</sup>

A turning point in his life was the joining of A.I. Industrial School, Amritsar in 1915, where he received a ten months course in art and craft. He served in Amritsar cantonment for a short time in 1918 A.D. He joined British Indian Army as a fourth grade draughtsman in September 1919 and proceeded to

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1 **Kapoor, Dr. B.L.**; 1987, *Grow More Good*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.55-56

2 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.**; November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

3 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.259-260

Iraq on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1919 A.D. Here he stayed for four years. Zaman Ali, a senior draughtsman and a colleague was the closest friend of Sobha Singh at Baghdad. During his stay at Baghdad, Sobha Singh learnt English language and attended music sessions. He was in good books of his officers. For his skill and disciplined routine, he was promoted to the rank of Head Draughtsman and was appointed as surveyor. He adopted drawing and painting as a hobby in the Army. In fact, Sobha Singh was a born artist and had inherited painting from his father and aesthetic sense from his mother. He showed natural inclination towards drawing and painting from his very childhood. He approached no teacher to learn painting. He returned from Baghdad in 1923, left the army and decided to live as an artist. He got married on Baisakhi of 1923 with Bibi Inder Kaur, daughter of Sardar Ram Singh, a contractor of Gurdaspur. In 1923, he established his studio named 'Subhash Studio' at Phawarewala Chowk, Amritsar. As he was a great admirer of freedom fighter Netaji Subhash Chander Bose, he named his art studio after his name.<sup>4</sup> Working at this studio, the big opportunity to paint commissioned works came from Sardar Hira Singh 'Dard', who approached him for some paintings for magazine 'Phulwari' in 1924 A.D. Due to his remarkable work, he attracted many eminent persons. The first amongst them was Pandit Mangat Ram, a renowned violinist who accepted him as a 'Guru' and became the first disciple of Sobha Singh.<sup>5</sup>

A rare meeting of minds in 1925 A.D., Novelist Nanak Singh shared his deep feelings and philosophy about life with the artist and they became good friends. Their mutual love for nature extorted them to undertake many journeys together, to explore the bounties of nature and facing hardships of life with a

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4 **Vaidya, K.L.;** Ed. 2001, *S. Sobha Singh- Life and Contribution to Indian Art*, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.1-2

5 **Gargi, Balwant;** 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.15

renewed vision.<sup>6</sup> Equipped with sizable proficiency in his profession and his love for achieving new goals, he shifted his base to Lahore in 1926 and set up an art studio called 'Echo School of Art' at Kachehry Road, near Anarkali Bazaar, Lahore.<sup>7</sup> Here he attained the reputation of a successful commercial artist and was flooded with assignments and produced some of his best works.<sup>8</sup> He painted many book covers and sketches for magazines such as 'Chand' in 1928 and 'Karak'.<sup>9</sup> In 1928, he met Giani Kartar Singh 'Hitkari', father of Amrita Pritam, the famous Punjabi Poetess and writer and their friendship continued life long. He met Dr. Mohinder Singh Randhawa (I.C.S) for the first time in 1929 at Lahore.<sup>10</sup>

In pursuit of greener pastures after establishing himself as one of the leading commercial artist, Sobha Singh shifted to Delhi in 1930. Here he established an art studio in Connaught Circus and was residing in Karol Bagh area. He started portrait painting in a big way. From 1933, Sobha Singh painted posters for the Indian Railways, Post and Telegraphs Department, as also paintings for the Maharajas of the Indian Princely states.<sup>11</sup> In 1935, two of his paintings found place in the London Illustrated News, Annual Number. The paintings of 'Sohni Mahiwal' and 'The Devil' were first time painted in Delhi alongwith the paintings of 'The Dawn' and 'Last Resort'. It was at Delhi that Sobha Singh met Colonel Tate, Chief Publicity Officer of Railway Board. The

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- 6 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.261
- 7 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.**; November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading
- 8 **Singh, Shamsheer**; 1987, *Sobha Singh Artist*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.27
- 9 **Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh**; 2008, *S. Sobha Singh Life-Art-Philosophy*, Dr. Hirday Paul Singh, Secretary General, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.41
- 10 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.261
- 11 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.**; November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

acquaintance developed into deep friendship. The Colonel became an admirer of Sobha Singh and provided him due patronage at the government level till 1940, before he was transferred to Burma.<sup>12</sup>

Due to his temperament of a quiet person, the commercial hub of the Delhi city did not suit him much, as he always craved for a place where there is bounty of nature and the reign of peace and solace, where he could create works of everlasting artistic significance. In 1942 Sobha Singh visited Preet Nagar at the invitation of Sardar Gurbaksh Singh (Preet Lari). He liked the place and shifted to Preet Nagar and stayed there for three years. Here he developed close friendly relations with many of the scholars, writers, poets and journalists who frequented Preet Nagar.<sup>13</sup> At Preet Nagar, Sobha Singh experimented with various forms of creative arts and showed his talents in poetry, story writing, sculpture and architectural designing. His most significant contribution during his stay at Preet Nagar was the completion of the 'Sohni Mahiwal' (original left behind in Pakistan at the time of Partition of India in 1947). Besides, some of his famous paintings of the Gurus were also painted here.<sup>14</sup>

He was spellbound with the scenic beauty of Kangra valley which he visited in 1942 and made up his mind to settle in the lap of nature. During the year 1945, he was offered the job of a 'Head Artist' in the Publicity Office of the Indian Army at Simla and he lived there briefly for over a period of eight months.<sup>15</sup> Not satisfied with the shape of his career, he again made up his mind to pack his bags and shifted to Lahore in 1946, where he founded a larger two-

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12 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.262

13 **Gargi, Balwant**; 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.16

14 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.263

15 **Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh**; 2008, *S. Sobha Singh Life-Art-Philosophy*, Dr. Hirday Paul Singh, Secretary General, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.42

storeyed studio above the famous Mehta Art Press on Circular Road.<sup>16</sup> Here he got an opportunity to work as an ‘Art Director’ for a film titled ‘But Tarash’. During this period, he met actor Prithvi Raj Kapoor. Their friendship developed into deep understanding and Prithvi Raj Kapoor used to visit the artist at Andretta almost every year. There is a life size bust of Prithvi Raj Kapoor which was sculpted by Sobha Singh which still adorns his studio at Andretta.<sup>17</sup> He was injured in an accident near Pathankot while on his way to Manali, during the treatment he met Dr. Karam Singh Grewal, who became his life long friend and he used to watch him paint his legendary work ‘Sohni Mahiwal’. The artist was so engrossed in the creation of this masterpiece that his friend in a lighter vein used to remark that ‘*Who says Sohni belongs to Mahiwal- It actually belongs to my friend Sobha Singh.*’<sup>18</sup>

It was tragic that Sobha Singh had to leave Lahore in March 1947 as the date of India’s partition was approaching. He came empty-handed without his paintings and a large collection of books.<sup>19</sup> Amongst the things left behind, was the original painting of Sohni Mahiwal, who was his artistic muse and he could not forget this great loss, as it was difficult to recreate another painting like that. Later on, he painted on this theme thrice, one of these versions is in the collection of Air Force Authorities, the second painting is with Dr. Karan Singh, Erstwhile Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir and the third version lies in the Sobha Singh Art Gallery at Andretta. A sensitive artist Sobha Singh was disturbed by mass migration of Punjabis and the accompanying riots and violence that he

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16 **Khokhar, Dr. Kulwant Singh;** 2002, *Soul and Principles*, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Exports, Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar, p.14

17 **Rani, Dr. Saroj;** Ed. *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.17

18 **Khokhar, Dr. Kulwant Singh;** 2002, *Soul and Principles*, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Exports, Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar, p.20

19 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

yearned to permanently settled at Andretta forever.<sup>20</sup> His old friend Dr. M.S. Randhawa, I.C.S, Rehabilitation Commissioner, who was engaged in the rehabilitation of lacs of refugees from Pakistan, invited him to hold an exhibition of his paintings at Sirhind Club, Ambala so that he could get economically stabilized. During this exhibition, some of his paintings were acquired by Indian Air Force.<sup>21</sup>

Owing to financial difficulties, Sobha Singh tried his luck in film industry as an art director. But Dr. M.S. Randhawa called him back and saved the talents of this artist from the stereotyped art culture of the cinema world. The acquaintance developed into sincere friendship. Sobha Singh's chance meeting with Sardar Gurcharan Singh, an expert in Blue Pottery at Ambala resulted in Sardar Gurcharan Singh to shift his studio to Andretta.<sup>22</sup> In search of peace and solitude, Sobha Singh ultimately chose to settle at Andretta, a place surrounded by lush green forests and murmuring brooks and streams, with the presence of snow-clad Dhauladhar Mountains, providing the backdrop of a perfect picture of magnificent scenic charm. His settlement at Andretta was not without stress and strain. At first, he rented a hut from Norah Richards (Woodland Estates) in Andretta village.<sup>23</sup> After some time, he purchased a piece of land from a local peasant and then built his own cottage at the picturesque site on the foothills of the snowy peaks of the Shivalik range amidst green fields at Andretta. His beautiful house with a garden and a tank was built in two years and was completed in 1949 A.D.<sup>24</sup> This place was ideal for his meditation and proved to

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20 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.264

21 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

22 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.265

23 **Gargi, Balwant;** 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.18

24 **Khokhar, Dr. Kulwant Singh;** 2002, *Soul and Principles*, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Exports, Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar, p.14-15

be an abode of his heart's desires. Here, the manifestations of the mystic painter took shape in various forms of paintings, sculptures and portraits. It was here that he painted Guru Nanak (in various poses), Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh (in different poses), Sri Krishna, Sri Rama, Jesus Christ and Sheikh Farid. Besides, he also painted portraits of some famous National leaders and his friends as well as his self-portrait and the portraits of his wife and the portrait of Norah Richards.<sup>25</sup>

The *nom de terre* of Kangra valley, the milieu of the famous Pahari paintings had once again renovated in the sphere of art with Sobha Singh's settlement and the establishment of his Art Gallery at Andretta. Sobha Singh had brought India particularly Himachal Pradesh on the map of the Art World. The abode of the artist in Kangra valley had become a centre of tourist attraction.<sup>26</sup>

The Art Gallery of Sobha Singh is a pretty colourful *sejour* (habitation), a true home of an artist, who was tender, kind, humane and did not harbour any formalities and taboos. Throughout his life, Sobha Singh remained a devout Sikh with firm belief in the fundamental doctrines of Sikhism. Religion was his inspiration and Gurus his life-blood. This aspect is reflected in his paintings.<sup>27</sup> In 1949, he had first meeting with Yuvaraj Karan Singh of Jammu & Kashmir, which developed into a close association. The Yuvaraj acquired the famous painting of 'Sohni Mahiwal'. It was then the first photo-prints of 'Sohni Mahiwal' were sold in the market. Later on, many of the paintings of the artist found their way into the art collection of Dr. Karan Singh. The portraits of 'Maharani Tara Devi' (Queen-wife) of Maharaja Hari Singh, 'Yuvaraj Karan Singh' and 'Yuvarani Karan Singh' are special attractions of Sobha Singh's

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25 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

26 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.266

27 **Kanwal, Balbir Singh;** 1987, *The Spirit of Sobha Singh's Art*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of The Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.72-73

paintings preserved at Amar Mahal Museum, Jammu.<sup>28</sup> Dignitaries such as Dr. M.S. Randhawa, Development Commissioner, Punjab, kept on meeting him at Andretta due to his affectionate and friendly nature. In 1945, Dr. M.S. Randhawa lived with him at Andretta for over a month and they planned a book titled 'Folk Songs of Punjab' (*Lokgeet*).<sup>29</sup>

In 1965, he was appointed Member Executive Committee, Punjab Lalit Kala Academi. Sobha Singh attended Tri-centenary Celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh's birth at Chandigarh and presented a life-size painting of Guru Gobind Singh on this occasion on 14 January, 1967 A.D.<sup>30</sup> In 1969, his famous painting of 'Guru Nanak' (showing Guru Nanak's hand raised in blessings) was published by Shrimoni Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee on the occasion of the Quincentenary celebrations of Guru Nanak Dev. More than five lac copies of this painting have been sold so far.<sup>31</sup> A fellowship by Punjabi University, Patiala was also bestowed on him in recognition of his services to art especially *Sikh art* in 1970 A.D. In 1973, Dr. D.C. Pavate, Governor of Punjab visited 'Art Gallery' at Andretta and acquired the beautiful painting of 'Kangra Bride' (first copy) for his personal collection. The original painting was acquired by Lady Mountbatten earlier. Shri M.M. Chaudhri, Governor of Punjab visited Art Gallery at Andretta and purchased portraits of Pandit Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi for Raj Bhawan, Punjab on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1973 A.D.<sup>32</sup> The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting prepared a documentary film entitled 'Painter of the People' in September, 1973 on Sobha Singh. This film has been dubbed in almost all Indian languages.

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28 **Vaidya, K.L.;** Ed. 2001, *S. Sobha Singh- Life and Contribution to Indian Art*, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.12

29 **Vaidya, K.L.;** 1987, *Sardar Sobha Singh: An Artist in Kangra Valley*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.36

30 **Bhatti, S.S.;** 2004, *Sobha Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.222-223

31 **Gargi, Balwant;** 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.20

32 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, , p.267-268



Followed by many other awards and honours such as the honour of ‘State Artist’ was conferred on him by the Punjab government, yet another documentary on the life and work of the artist was made by the Punjab government.<sup>33</sup>

The ‘Quami Darpan’ weekly magazine dedicated a whole issue to all the aspects of his art and creative journey in 1974 A.D.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Karan Singh perhaps the greatest admirer of his work again organized a grand exhibition of his paintings at the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi in 1976, which was attended by a number of dignitaries and art connoisseurs.<sup>35</sup> After this exhibition, he visited Rome to see the works of the European masters in original as he was influenced by the magical and dramatic charm of their masterpieces. Punjab Art Council honoured this doyen of *Sikh art* with their highest honour.<sup>36</sup> He was decorated with ‘Padam Shree Award’ by the President of India in 1983 A.D.<sup>37</sup> As his fame and name crossed Indian boundaries and found admirers in far-flung nations, British Broadcasting Corporation, London, came forward to record a documentary on Sobha Singh in 1984 A.D. which dealt with his creative processes, his inner vision and essence of his art. As honours and awards were being showered from many quarters, Punjabi University, Patiala thought it befitting to confer the degree of Doctor of Literature *honour is causa* on this celebrated painter of Punjab in recognition of the artistic influence, he wielded in spreading the message of Sikhism through his paintings filled with divine

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33 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

34 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.268

35 **Shanta, Serbjeet Singh;** 1987, *First Exhibition of Sardar Sobha Singh's Art (1976)*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p. 57-58

36 **Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh;** 2008, *S. Sobha Singh Life-Art-Philosophy*, Dr. Hirday Paul Singh, Secretary General, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.43

37 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

message of the Gurus. Punjab had to suffer an irreparable creative loss as this great 'Saint Artist' passed away in August 1986, leaving behind a mass movement and a renaissance of *Sikh art*. He was immortalized by the monumental iconographic paintings which are adorned and admired in every Punjabi household. Ascetic, withdrawn, dedicated, soft-spoken, kind, gentle, full of honour and free from rancour, Sobha Singh remained isolated by choice and shunned publicity. With his tall (six feet) and slender figure, silken grey hair, penetrating eyes and flowing beard, Sobha Singh reminded one of an ancient Indian sage. Religious, philosophic and creative- he was indeed the 'Painter of the Divine'.<sup>38</sup>

Sobha Singh was one of those ascetics for whom painting was akin to meditation and a pious path to reach the Almighty. Throughout his life, he made it a point to feel and touch the divine aura of spiritualism and was naturally fascinated by the simple and truthful message of Guru Nanak Dev's gospel of 'One God' and 'Oneness of human family'. Through his meditative sessions, he contemplated and envisioned divine images of Guru Nanak. Thus his first and foremost artistic creation which received wide acclaim and appreciation, was the image of Guru Nanak which was based entirely on his perception and the ecstasy he experienced, while creating this image in ethereal verve and spirit.<sup>39</sup> Teachings of Guru Nanak shaped his vision and artistic journey and he created a series of Guru Nanak's images in the light of a benign entity.<sup>40</sup> It was with the 1937 **Nam Khumari Nanaka** (Plate-254), of which thousands of prints were sold, that Sobha Singh embarked on a search for a perceptible form for the Guru, which would become fixed in the minds of the Sikhs as the permanent and authentic image of the Guru. None of the prototypes which were available to him

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38 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.268-269

39 **Singh, Tejinder**; 1987, *The Concepts and Philosophy of Sobha Singh's Art*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.74-76

40 **Bhatti, S.S.**; December 5, 2010, *Master Artist*, The Tribune

– the *Janam Sakhi* model or the Italian one satisfied him. It became essential to him to create a ‘Personal’ image which would yet have the energy to evolve into a symbol of love, protection and rancour for which Guru Nanak stood in popular imagination. And so he created an image of a *Sadhaka*, simply dressed in a honey-yellow *choga*, eyes half-closed, rosary in hand, against a non-definable background, yet with face and hands closely defined, each line sharp and clear. This dialectic between the temporal and the spatial, between the worldly and the unworldly- was to remain his single most consistent motif in many renderings of Guru Nanak. Realizing that it was not possible to capture the essence of the Guru in a single image, he portrayed him as a preceptor- ‘Eko Simro Nanaka’ proclaiming after truth in a state of meditation; and in a series of three paintings, ‘My Meditations on Guru Nanak’ where the form and the formless, the *saguna* and the *nirguna* aspect of *Bhakti* become an ineluctable whole. For such an expansive interpretation, the technique and the form undergo a process of gentle modification as the eyes virtually close themselves in ecstasy and the colour becomes, in the final images, only an incandescence often serving as the halo itself.<sup>41</sup>

Amongst the earlier iconic portraits of **Guru Nanak Dev in Aashirwad pose** (Plate-255) in late 1950s gained widest popularity and acceptance and till today it is considered the most popular specimen of *Sikh Calendar art* and many editions of this painting have been reproduced by ‘Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society’, which exclusively reserved the rights of its reproduction.<sup>42</sup> It is an interesting fact that Guru Nanak’s hand painted in this masterpiece depicts the lines as analysed by renowned ‘Palmist Pandit Agnihotri’ of Hamirpur after studying the *Janam Patri* of Guru Nanak Dev.<sup>43</sup> This portrait portrays human

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41 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.122-124

42 **Bhatti, S.S.**; December 5, 2010, *Master Artist*, The Tribune

43 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.**; November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

emotions and conveys the abstract through concrete. Nanak's half-closed eyes are fixed at a point in the infinity and he wears two *simarinis* - one over his turban and the other is shown around his neck. There is a cloak covering his shoulders.

An epoch making large painting painted in 1976 which captured the imagination of millions of admirers is titled **Guru Nanak- Eko Simro Nanaka**(Plate-256) which depicts legend of Guru Nanak emerging out of waters and is a departure from the early depiction of the Guru. The artist has given it the look of oceanic depth and vastness to symbolize his enlightened emergence from the darkness of ignorance and riddles of this world to the realm of light and knowledge.<sup>44</sup> This painting is painted in the heavenly hues, takes the viewer to the realms of a sublime world, where the light of knowledge enlightens the atmosphere with mystic and divine charm. This is an image of the essence of this great preacher, who dispelled all worldly fears and projected euphoric landscape, where truth is the colour of skies and divinity is depicted in swirling light blue oceanic waves. The pale silken shawl wrapped around Nanak's body soothes the hearts and souls of mortals yearning for *nirvana* or salvation. Sobha Singh had reached at the pinnacle of his creativity and had achieved the power to depict even the whispers of soul, feeling it with touch of his soft brush and kind and mellow palette. Guru Nanak's eyes in this portrait are laden with the ecstasy of realization and a divine joy.

In prolonged meditative trances, Sobha Singh continued with discovering and rediscovering in his mind's eye the persona of Guru Nanak, which resulted in a new series titled **My Meditations on Guru Nanak** (Plate -257-258). The outcome of this creative journey gave us magnificent masterpieces portraying Guru Nanak in the idiom of a sage who was the epitome of spirituality and embodiment of the

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44 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.20

cosmic light. The flame of truth emerging from the space and there is no definite outline around his face signifying the belief that this image radiates with a glow of heavenly gleam. Guru Nanak's half-closed eyes are intoxicated with the realization of the supreme and ultimate power. The artistic achievements can only be experienced by no ordinary soul and the credit goes to Sobha Singh for gently solidifying a thought, which can easily escape from the brushstrokes of even a master. The unparalleled depiction of the divine can only be touched by an intellectual, whose head lies in the clouds and his feet are firmly entrenched in the soil of truth and dedication. Sobha Singh, a true seeker has tried to define the omnipresent cosmic power of the Almighty through the path shown by Guru Nanak Dev.

It is a striking revelation that all the iconic paintings of Guru Nanak have been done in *shanta rasa*, where peace is of paramount importance and his other masterpieces done on Guru Gobind Singh depict mainly *veer rasa*.<sup>45</sup> Some other paintings on **Guru Nanak alongwith Bala and Mardana** (Plate-259) ooze with mystic charm and cast a spell on the viewer, which lingers on for a long time sending the viewer on contemplative sojourn.

Sobha Singh also offered his energies towards eulogizing *Sant Sipahi* concept in portraits of **Guru Gobind Singh** (Plate-260) as a great Saint and a valiant warrior, who dedicated his entire life to protect the lives of down-trodden and picked up the sword to ward off the oppressors and tyrants, who stood in the way of peaceful existence and did not conform in the philosophy of freedom to preach and practice one's religion and faith. Sobha Singh has successfully captured the strength of character of tenth Sikh Guru and his deep resolve to establish a realm of equality of human race and to provide resistance to the perpetuation of mindless barbaric and inhuman oppression. He was so overwhelmed with the

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45      **Bhatti, S.S.;** December 5, 2010, *Master Artist*, The Tribune

sacrifices of the Guru that he channelised his creative faculty in understanding the inner vision of Guru Gobind Singh, who was a rare persona of spiritual as well as physical strength, demystifying the source of his valour and the magical influence he wielded on his followers. He deeply analysed the energies which went into the formation of a true Khalsa.<sup>46</sup> While painting the iconographic portrait of Guru Gobind Singh, he came across many versions of the Guru painted by the Sikh painters. But there was an ever-increasing forceful resurgence in his mind to capture the light of the resolve on Guru's face and the abundance of saintly composure which shaped the destiny of the Khalsa. '*Chiddion se mein baaj ladaun tabhi Gobind Singh naam kahaun*' –these words stirred an excitement and kindled a storm in Sobha Singh's heart, to be able to portray the moral power Guru Gobind Singh possessed. The earlier portraits of **Guru Gobind Singh painted in head to bust style** (Plate-261), were the pictures of a strong and youthful warrior with *chakkars* and *kalgi* on his turban, wearing royal robes bedecked with jewels and pearls, carrying the sling of his sword across his chest. The most important and captivating feature in this painting was the confidence shown in his eyes with a stern gaze focused on his goal. Soot black flowing beard and moustaches twisted upwards, present a valiant and powerful soldier. Here he is depicted in all finery and royal appearance. The bright colour palette amply justifies the disposition of a royal heroic crusader.

The later portraits of **Guru Gobind Singh saw the addition of falcon perched on his right gloved hand standing besides a horse** (Plate-262). Both these elements are attributed to his position as a protector and a saviour. He carries a bow and an arrow casket typical of a *ranyodha*. The city of Anandpur Sahib, where Guru Gobind Singh founded Khalsa Panth in 1699A.D. and erected a fort, was his abode for a short time as this was the city of joy and a place very dear to

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46 **Khokhar, Dr. Kulwant Singh**; 1995, *Sobha Singh Artist*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.64

Guru Gobind Singh, where he transformed the course of Sikh history. Sobha Singh has captured the magnificent ambience of this place in a very powerful large painting titled **Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur** (Plate-263), wherein the essence of the *ananda* means eternal bliss is skillfully depicted. Guru Gobind Singh is shown leaning against the portion of a fort's structure built in red stone. The reign of peace and tranquility has been expressed by employing elements such as flowering plants, two large peacocks leisurely moving around near a pair of pigeons. A white horse lazily grazes in the background and lush green foliage is surrounding a milk white structure of a Gurdwara. This is a picture of calm and poignant expression. There is an aura of soothing light behind his head which ultimately filters into an enigmatic mystical space. Soft and mellowed colours on Guru's face and costumes reflect a serene atmosphere. This masterpiece though projects Guru Gobind Singh in rich and splendid costumes yet he seems to be gazing in the space denoting that he is engrossed in introspection and contemplation. The composition engages the eye in powerful movement and all the elements in the painting are so beautifully juxtaposed that they lend an extraordinary balance to the painting. The hallmark of this painting projects that Sobha Singh had a keen eye for detail and a remarkable control over his brushwork.

Continuing with the theme for which he had a great reverence for the spiritual glow, he envisaged on the faces of the Gurus and their followers, who sacrificed their lives in the service of mankind, Sobha Singh harboured an unquenchable thirst to depict Guru Gobind Singh in truly larger than life persona. In the next painting, which emerged from his brush shows **Guru Gobind Singh riding a galloping horse** (Plate-264), accompanied by iconographic depiction of a white falcon perched on his gloved hand and reins of the horse tightly pulled up, describing the symbolism of complete control on the energies. The highlights on his face present an expression of deep resolve surrounded by dark thundering

clouds. This painting is a tribute to a warrior, who had made up his mind and is valiantly standing against all odds in the battlefield of life. Rough and rocky terrain amply illustrates the hardships of life. This superb painting by Sobha Singh was well received and it became an iconic calendar related to this Guru, as this painting is a celebration of a true Khalsa who fears no foes.

Sobha Singh's other remarkable paintings of **Guru Hargobind Sahib** (Plate-265), who founded the '*Miri*' (Temporal Power) and '*Piri*' (Spiritual Power) concept and armed his followers so that they may protect themselves against the forces of hatred and tyranny and presented impediments in the way of freedom of practice and preaching of their religion. Using rare symbolic elements, Sobha Singh painted a portrait of Guru Hargobind Singh, wherein he has depicted the hilt of a sword on one side and white swans and ducklings covering the area on the left side of the painting. Consolidation of this symbolism after a sustained thought process justifiably depicts the inner wisdom of '*Miri*' and '*Piri*'. Sobha Singh completely understood the importance of sacrifice in Sikhism and was inspired by this tradition as he remained immersed in the study of heroic feats and countless sacrifices made by the followers of Sikhism.

Concentrating on this theme, he painted the **Portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur** (Plate-266) in a seated posture, lost in deep prayer with his eyes half-closed. The Guru is presented here, wearing white clothes and a soft pale shawl around his shoulders. He is sitting crossed legged with folded hands in his lap. There is a halo behind his head and a metallic lamp in the shape of 'Ek Onkar' illuminating his face and the body. These symbols were creatively used to depict the realm of knowledge and darkness is shown receding behind his back. This is a true portrait of a towering personality, who possessed the strength of offering his head in sacrifice to protect the faith of others. This calendar too, is a most sought after piece of *Sikh Calendar art*. Reproductions of this calm and serene painting are in great demand.



Sobha Singh being a man of peace, whose sensibilities were deeply entrenched in the folk tales of Punjab, aspired to portray the legendary lovers of Punjab- 'Sohni Mahiwal' and 'Heer Ranjha', as the tales of these eternal lovers inspired a whole generation of writers and poets, which developed into *kissas* (stories) of their lives. It was a common scene in the Punjab, people singing these legendary tales, sitting under the banyan trees in soulful voices, with heart rending expressions and feelings. Paying his own tribute to these legendary lovers, Sobha Singh tried his hand at their depiction in various versions and successfully filtered the images in his own inimitable style and sensitivity, befitting a true and eternal love. This visual manifestation move the heart of every Punjabi, as it was a first time attempt by any painter to visually narrate the saga of lovelorn lovers, who lost their lives. People were so fascinated with this theme that even the art connoisseurs of those times appreciated this bold attempt by this master artist and these paintings were acquired by eminent dignitaries and reproduced images of these paintings reached every nook and corner of Punjab and Northern India.

**Sohni Mahiwal** (Plate-267) was painted in such an enigmatic fervour, depicting a dream-like vision, painted in strange soft tones and tints that it envelops the viewer in mesmerizing and magnetic parlance. In a poetic depiction, Sohni and Mahiwal are painted on the bank of river Chenab. Sohni is shown carrying an earthen pitcher, on which she used to float in the rough currents of this mighty river, to meet Mahiwal on the other bank of the river. The lithe figure of Sohni draped in wet clothes with long dark locks of hair, surround the innocent and tender beauty of her face.<sup>47</sup> There is a not an iota of any disgraceful erotic stance but the figures of true lovers are shown united in an embrace of divinity and pure love. Cleverly juxtaposed dark trunk of a tree in the foreground

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47 **Kanwal, Balbir Singh;** 1987, *The Spirit of Sobha Singh's Art*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.72-73

is helpful in creation of a mystic soft light, emerging from the darkness of clouds, roaring and swirling in threatening exuberance. A viewer cannot shift his gaze from the faces of these lovers, which are placed in the middle of the painting. In a painting captured in mystical charm and lyrical expression, Sobha Singh painted the arrival of **Sohni in Heaven** (Plate-268), sitting alone on small rocks, swayed by the gentle touch of waves, gazing at the source of an eternal light, where there resides a realm of peace and tranquility. Her earthen pitcher lies by her side and an amazing look prevails upon her face. This is a picture of twilight dawn. The sunrise of heavenly ecstasy, where fear fades into thin air. The white apparels are shown drenched in nectar of purity, condensing Sobha Singh's view that such pious lovers surely end up in heaven.

The painting of **Heer Ranjha** (Plate-269) equally enthralls the viewer and transports him to the times of these eternal lovers. Heer is shown seeing through a transparent veil, the image of Ranjha who became a *jogi* (wandering ascetic), is asking for alms at Heer's door. She is observing him with belated breath and placing a hand on her heart in a gesture of astonishment. The juxtaposition of *charkha* (spinning wheel), utensils, *chhiku*, and other objects in soft colours, describes the surroundings of a Punjabi household. The composition is complete with the addition of another female figure, who is engaged in conversation with Ranjha. The standing figure of Ranjha with bald head and his body is soaked in ash, is holding a long stick and a begging bowl.

Rich culture and traditions of Punjab have come alive in numerous bewitching paintings, showcasing social events and customs in a series of brides of Punjab and Kangra hills. In 1952, Sobha Singh painted a **Punjabi Bride** (Plate-270), complete with ceremonial marriage costume, intricate jewellery, *kaliras*, *tikka*, *kantha*, *kade*, *chaunk*, *nath* and a cane *pitari* as *shingar* box. She is peeping through the curtain of her *doli* (palanquin) and her eyes are full of dreams and focused on her feature. There is delicate rendering of her body

contours and her transparent *dupatta* reveals her lithe figure. Suited for the solemn occasion, the choice of colours of her clothes, is adding an additional charm and a hint of happiness. Yet the mood of the bride depicts a picture of expectation and a little sad tinge in her eyes relates to her departure from her parents' house. Portion of the *dola* (palanquin) made of bright shellac coloured wood is visible exposing a view of her parental house. This picture is very emotive and leaves a long-lasting impression on the viewer's mind. It is both enchanting and sad painting.

In yet another marvelous painting, Sobha Singh's **Kangra Bride-I** (Plate-271), takes one's breath away due to its resounding impact. Here he has concentrated more on the bride and her mood without loading the background with any elements. The stark grey blue wall left blank behind her seated figure complements the main character and lays stress on the bride sitting in a thoughtful composure, placing her chin on her hands, adorned with gold jewellery and *henna*. The typical large deep red *salu* (*dupatta*) is decorated with intricate *Phulkari* work and a *kalira* hangs from her wrist. Her feet are also decorated with *henna* designs and traditional Wicker-work *shingar* box with typical Punjabi decorations lies near her feet. The most attractive feature in this composition is the depiction of her doe like eyes filled with millions of dreams and feelings floating in them. Another **Kangra Bride-II** (Plate-272) in a different pose was completed in 1978, which shows his deep love for the subject, as the women depicted in these paintings look like shy rustic fairies, who are innocent and possessed with mellowed mannerism. The intoxicated eyes depicted in profile remind us of the almond eyes painted in Kangra miniatures.

Once Sobha Singh was asked to give his thoughts on frequent appearance of women in his paintings, he replied that '*The women haunted me in the third phase of my evolution because of her devotion to her husband, children and other members of the family. She is transplanted from one family to the other and*

*sacrifices her everything for others. She is great. I thought the Mother is always great. To satisfy my desires for mother, I painted a few women.*<sup>48</sup>

Sobha Singh was very fond of interacting with the local people, who lived around his cottage and had a genuine concern for their welfare and deep sympathy for their simple lives full of hard daily chores. He used to converse with them to know their difficulties and hardships. These simple folks in return poured their hearts to him and there existed a natural bond between them, which prompted him to paint a few characters, who came across his abode. Hardworking, shy and simplistic *Gaddi* women appealed to him, who roamed about in the pastures with their lambs, goats and sheep. Thus establishing a bond between these simple folks, he created paintings of ever-lasting appeal and charm, enjoying and relishing the green bounties of nature, where peace prevailed and the air used to be thick with mystical music and echoes of the breeze acted like balm on his soul. These pictures have a charismatic appeal and are able to carry the viewer with them to the distant meadows and snow-clad mountains.<sup>49</sup> **Gaddan** (Plate-273) is an excellent example of his work, where he could infuse poetry and lyricism in the composition. The look and the smile on the face of the beautiful Gaddan, stirs the strings of every man's heart and a feeling of heavenly bliss envelops him. The palette here soft and tender is bathed in an euphorical light. The study of goats and *Gaddi* dogs is truly remarkable, which energizes the painting with loads of pure innocent joy. The depiction of *patu* (soft woollen hand knitted blanket), *thatu* (a typical Gaddi headgear) and *kamarkasa* (waist band) provides authenticity to the subject. The area around Palampur and Andretta has many tea gardens, as this area falls in the foothills of

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48 **Kaur, Bibi Gurcharan** (Daughter of S. Sobha Singh, Legendary Punjabi Artist); October 2, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, S. Sobha Singh Art Gallery, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

49 **Kaur, Bibi Gurcharan** (Daughter of S. Sobha Singh, Legendary Punjabi Artist); October 3, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, S. Sobha Singh Art Gallery, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

Dhauladhar range. A soothing and soft hued painting of **Gaddan in Tea Garden** (Plate-274), with her *Kilta* (basket for carrying tea leaves) at her back, is shown passing through the tea garden in dimly lit landscape. There is exuberance of colour perspective with trees and mountains are merging with the sky. A look in her eyes reveals that she is waiting for someone. The painting is draped in mysteriously soft tones, as even her yellow scarf and pinkish shirt do not offend the eye, but the whole picture presents a pleasing effect on the onlooker.

In pursuance of mystical subjects, Sobha Singh did not stop at painting only the day-to-day events or creating the portraits of the local people, he sought creative satisfaction in painting new and varied subjects. But the element of mysticism always came to the front and filled his paintings with indescribable mastery in technique and rendering of excellent level. Historical events and legendary figures always attracted his attention and as a result, we have a wonderful masterpiece in the shape of **Last Desire of Mumtaz Mahal** (Plate-275), which has a plethora of all the royal and majestic leanings and this painting is full of pathos. Mumtaz Mahal is shown leaning on the shoulder of Shah Jahan in their imperial palace, who is gently embracing her in a gesture of tearful sorrow. This painting was inspired by the story of Mumtaz Mahal, who died in the arms of Shah Jahan, whispering her last desire that a suitable tomb, a symbol of their love, be erected on the banks of river Jamuna, which will immortalize their true love. There is a richness of details in this painting which has captured the palatial surroundings complete with silken curtains, lamps and Mughal style metallic objects.

His works on other themes which come to mind are painting of **Shaheed Bhagat Singh in his cell** (Plate-276), **Portrait of Baba Sheikh Farid** (Plate-277) and **Bhai Kanhaiya depicted in his own perception quenching the thirst of the whole universe** (Plate-278). Some other offbeat paintings display his keen desire to illustrate the latent humanistic and beastly powers engaged in perennial collision.

He has symbolically captured the essence of art and its purpose in the painting titled **Let art be to refine the swine and divine the refined** (Plate-279), depicting three stages of art, which refines the swine and then divines the refined. Here he had used large white wings to portray divinity and the form of an animal with human torso, as evil and unrefined creature. Pristine white mountains, soft grey blue fog behind the strange looking animal, adds a touch of mystery and enigma. A few other paintings with symbolic expressions amply project the course of his thought processes and reveal that he possessed a literary bent of mind. Another painting depicts **Art is the language of heart** (Plate-280); here a pure white fairy is shown playing on a *veena* and is surrounded by some instruments, a colour palette and some brushes. In the corner, there is a hint of full moon and some foliage in the background highlights the realm of night. It is a rejuvenating experience to go through the mystical creative world of Sobha Singh, which enriches the taste of a viewer, besides kindling the flame of a new awakening, which throws light on new perceptions and concepts. No wonder the work of such magnitude inspires and motivates the upcoming generations of artists and the general viewers alike. The purpose of art is truly served through his paintings which have no parallel in *Sikh art*.

The renowned Sikh painter, who earned the nickname of **John Constable of India**<sup>50</sup> was no other than **S.G. Thakur Singh** (Plate-281), who had his share of hardships and tribulation in the early phases of his life, when he had to work incessantly even for bare subsistence. He had to wade through deep waters, but he seems to have come out on the other shore unscathed and at peace with himself and his surroundings and the serenity of mind and inner equilibrium, he has achieved after life's strenuous toil has imperceptibly passed into his creative work. Born in 1895 in the small village of Verka near Amritsar, young Thakur

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50      **Bhatti, S.S.**; May 1, 2011, *Art under Attack*, The Tribune

Singh did not cut his teeth on any artistic heritage but according to all accounts, he had a natural inclination towards drawing often wandering off into fields to sketch from nature or seeing one of his aunts paint folk patterns on the walls of their home. S.G. Thakur Singh took initiation in art at a comparatively early age of ten by drawing mural sketches on the mud walls of his ancestral home at Verka. Regular studies did not interest him but to his good fortune in his village school, there was an art teacher, Mian Muhammad Alam, who took the young boy, all of ten years of age then, under his wing. Some time later, when Muhammad Alam got the job of an 'Art Director' in a theatrical company in Bombay painting backdrops, one imagines- he sent for Thakur Singh who joined him. The twosome were back in Amritsar a year later, however; Thakur Singh was sent to Lahore to join the Victoria Diamond Jubilee School of Art but his disinterest in formal studies continued and was back home in two years. Bombay beckoned him again and both young Thakur Singh and Muhammad Alam set off for the place. There the two worked for some years. There is the charming episode of Thakur Singh's gifts being spotted- as he sat on the Chowpatty Beach, painting the sea at sunrise- by the editor of a *Parsi* newspaper, who encouraged him to participate in an art exhibition then scheduled to be held at Shimla. Thakur Singh did take part and came back with the first prize. He was 18 years of age then. After this, there was no looking back for him.<sup>51</sup>

After Bombay, it was to Calcutta that teacher and pupil headed, for so much was happening there then: theatre, art, music. Names like Abanindranath and Rabindranath Tagore hung about in the air; a large and talented group of artists was doing things differently; *jatras* and *Parsi* theatre were drawing crowds; European paintings could be seen in the flesh: there was much to learn and, with luck something to earn at the place. Thakur Singh attached himself to

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51      **Goswamy, B.N.;** December 12, 2010, *Risen from the soil*, The Tribune

the Maiden Theatrical Company of Rustamji, painting large sceneries for the stage, but he was also constantly painting on canvas and on paper on his own.<sup>52</sup> Here he cultivated intimate friendship with eminent artists like Rabindranath Tagore, J.P. Gangooly. H. Mazumdar and others, who lavished high economies on the wonderful executions of his brush. So widespread was the spell of his genius in the art-world that it occasioned very little surprise when he annexed the second prize of eight hundred pounds in the British Empire Exhibition, held in London in 1924 for his masterly painting ‘After The Bath’, remarkable for a well formulated and lucid style applied with complete conviction.<sup>53</sup> For sixteen years, he stayed on in Calcutta, establishing quite a reputation for himself. Clearly, there was a market for his kind of academic work: figure studies and landscapes and romantic themes. Commissions started pouring in from rulers and politicians and the well-to-do, everyone looking for ‘life-like’ work that fitted into their ideas about what art should be like. There is mention of his having painted close to ten thousand works in those years.<sup>54</sup> His painting titled ‘Ganesh Puja’ was an object of attraction in the ‘Exhibition of Modern Indian Art’ opened by the Duchess of York in December 1934 in the New Burlington Galleries, London.<sup>55</sup> With the help of his friends, he succeeded in organizing the Punjab Fine Arts Society at Calcutta, whose first exhibition was held in 1926.<sup>56</sup> ‘The Punjab Fine Arts Society’ was also responsible for publishing his selected work in three volumes under the caption ‘The Art of S.G. Thakur Singh’ and another art album entitled ‘Glimpses of India- A composite of scenic and architectural beauties of India’.<sup>57</sup>

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- 52 **Goswamy, B.N.**; December 12, 2010, *Risen from the soil*, The Tribune  
53 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2  
54 **Goswamy, B.N.**; December 12, 2010, *Risen from the soil*, The Tribune  
55 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2  
56 **OBE, Ranjit Singh**; 2008, *Sikh Achievers*, Hemkunt Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, p.158  
57 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2



In 1931, he decided to come back to Amritsar and settled down there. In Amritsar, he kept his dream alive to help provide a platform for artists of Punjab, for which he established the 'Indian Academy of Fine Arts' and the 'Thakur Singh School of Arts'.<sup>58</sup> He had been associated with the activities of the Academy of which he was elected President with unanimous verdict in 1932. Under his brilliant lead, for over quarter of a century, this organization has been doing the wonderful piece of work in setting up aesthetic standards and popularizing art in the Northern India, with almost a fantastic zeal.<sup>59</sup>

Among his princely patrons have been the late Maharaja of Udaipur, who commissioned two hundred paintings; the late Nawab of Bhopal, who commissioned one hundred paintings and the Maharaja of Kashmir, Dongarpur, Travancore, Nawanagar, Kotah, Bikaner, Kapurthala, Patiala and other states.<sup>60</sup> Lord Irwin (later Lord Halifax) and Lord Linlithgow, each became the owner of Thakur Singh's paintings 'Evening Lights on the Old Palace, Udaipur' and 'Valley of Gulmarg' respectively.<sup>61</sup> Out of four reproductions of the painting 'After the Bath' one of them is owned by the Maharaja of Patiala.<sup>62</sup> The President's residence (Rashtrapati Bhawan) in New Delhi has given a place of honour to his impressive painting depicting the assumption of office by the first Indian Governor General Sri C. Rajagopalachari.<sup>63</sup> S.G. Thakur Singh had also the privilege of painting a portrait of Late Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who honoured both the artist and Amritsar by inaugurating the Silver Jubilee Exhibition of the Academy of Fine Arts on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1953.<sup>64</sup> The marvelous paintings 'Her

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- 58 **Dhillon, Gurdial Singh**; January 26, 1958, *Art Gallery at Amritsar*, The Sunday Tribune  
 59 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2  
 60 **Deva, D.**; April 20, 1952, *S.G. Thakur Singh and his art*, The Sunday Standard  
 61 **Chaitanya, Krishna**; 1951, *The Art of S.G. Thakur Singh, Roopalekha*, Vol.22, No.2, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.20  
 62 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.6  
 63 **Singh, Shamsheer**; n.d., *Thakar Singh through his art*, Thakur Singh School of Arts, Amritsar, Punjabee Press, Amritsar, p.31  
 64 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; October 30, 1953, *Indian Art Souvenir*, Amritsar, p.2

Last Desire’ and ‘Taj in the Evening Lights’ was acquired by the Government of U.S.S.R, now hangs in the National Art Gallery, Moscow.<sup>65</sup> The Scotland National Gallery of Art, one of the most selective galleries in the world, bought his painting of the ‘Qutab Minar, Delhi’.<sup>66</sup> He was invited by U.S.S.R and Hungarian Government in 1959 to hold one show of his paintings at Moscow, Leningrad, Budapest and Scotland.<sup>67</sup> In a rare honour, his painting titled ‘The Taj in Full Moon’ was selected by Central Lalit Kala Akademi and presented to High Commissioner of India in London for the Commonwealth Institute for the Blinds at London in 1965. Thakur Singh was nominated as member of Punjab Legislative Council in 1953.<sup>68</sup> He was honoured with Padamshri by the Government of India in 1973.<sup>69</sup> He also represented as an active Member of Executive Board of National Lalit Kala Akademi from 1959 to 1975.<sup>70</sup> His name and fame spread all over India and his magnificent works were acquired by Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad; Rajasthan Museum, Udaipur; Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi; Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh; Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar; Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar; Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi and Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi. He also enjoyed a royal status of “State Artist” of various states like Bhopal, Bikaner, Kotah, Patiala, Kapurthala and Malerkotla to name a few. This genius passed away on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1976, who made Punjab and India proud in the world of art and set

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65 **Krishna**; November 4, 1967, *S.G. Thakur Singh- ‘Home-Coming’ Presentation Revives Nostalgic Memories*, The Tribune

66 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.27

67 **Singh, Shamsheer**; n.d., *Thakar Singh through his art*, Thakur Singh School of Arts, Amritsar, Punjabee Press, Amritsar, p.6

68 **Krishna**; November 4, 1967, *S.G. Thakur Singh- ‘Home-Coming’ Presentation Revives Nostalgic Memories*, The Tribune

69 **Singh, Kultar**; 1973, *S.G. Thakur Singh and His Landscapes*, The Tribune

70 **Krishna**; November 4, 1967, *S.G. Thakur Singh- ‘Home-Coming’ Presentation Revives Nostalgic Memories*, The Tribune

a benchmark for the new generation artists, to follow his spirit of enterprise and immaculate professionalism.<sup>71</sup>

S.G. Thakur Singh was a master of the magic brush and understood the intricacies and application of colours in vivid perceptions. He had a complete control in capturing the moods of Mother Nature in full splendour with virtuosity of a magician and a music conductor, who made the symphonies sing at his will. Whether he paints in pastel colours, the shy smiles passed of an innocent girl or the dignified demeanor of Netaji Bose or General Hari Singh Nalwa or the silent sunny vales of Gulmarg or the waves playing in child like intimacy with the shore- the tranquil beauty enlivens them all. The technique of Thakur Singh derived its ingredients from European traditions, but this it has done without detriment to the age-long traditions of own country's art. Nowadays when sheer academic jugglery in colour, light and shade is being practiced under new nomenclatures and styles, it is refreshing to find in this great artist's brush stress on the own eternal values of beauty. He had no patience with effervallent schools or styles of art, which take fiendish delight in distorting beauty out of shape in order to appear novel or bizarre. His art is at once a reminder and a warning to those claptrap, ultra modernists with so little work and still less patience, try to slink into envied temple of fame. Through the postern door to take seat their with the immortals, like Satan stealing into the sacred precincts of paradise and win cheaply a name which alone is granted to Martyr in a cause. S.G. Thakur Singh believes in going direct to nature for subject and inspiration but does not accept nature in her wild exuberance or superfluous abundance. He reduces her to strict order and coherence for art to him is 'Nature-methodized'. This is why there is in his works an eternal freshness of appeal, deep intuitive understanding and a breadth of vision- all balanced by a perfect technique. He speaks poorly of that art which arises hoarse for a critic to deliver laboured discourse on the beauties

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71 **OBE, Ranjit Singh;** 2008, *Sikh Achievers*, Hemkunt Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, p.159

that exist nowhere. Art according to him is no more an intellectual jugglery but a language of the heart and must go straight to heart in order to be effective. It must completely overwhelm its beholder, be he a child or a philosopher, a barbarian or an art connoisseur.<sup>72</sup>

Portraiture and landscape painting are the two provinces where he has achieved unrivalled excellence. He has to its credit many commissioned portraits mostly of ruling princes. His portrait study of **Gandhiji, Netaji, Sher-e-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh** (Plate-282) and **General Hari Singh Nalwa** (Plate-283) have been wildly acclaimed as masterpieces, as he has successfully endeavoured to capture in them the faithful historical truth of these great persons. They have the same solid virtues which distinguish the commissioned portraits of the royal academicians of Britain. In landscape painting, he is essentially a lyricist. Some of his scenes can without exaggeration, be styled as symphonies in colour. Like the Greek sculptor, who could carve in stone the movement of the wind and the breeze. Thakur Singh has captured and eternalized in his paintings the fleeting colours that play upon the maiden face of the awakening Morn or of the retiring Eve and the elusive wealth scattered by moonlight. The transporting power of the imagination is well illustrated in his famous work **Aurora** (Plate-284) which is the pictorial representation of the dawn on the sea beach. It is like the vision of a place in the mind, which one intentionally desires, but to which no human path directly lead. A peep into the picture is a peep beyond the borders of the finite, when all forms end and the spirit rules in all in its naked majesty. 'Parting Kiss' another of his famous paintings represents the icy solitude of the Mount Everest flushed golden with the touch of the dying day. Here, the Everest is no longer the awe-aspiring inaccessible peak. It is to the explorer or the scientist but a perfect vision of beauty with which the spirit of the beholder can hold endless

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72 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2-3

communion and share a part of its glory. Among the architectural subjects, the beauty of the 'Taj' seems to have specially touched the tender fibers of his heart, for he portrayed it from several angles and under various atmospheric effects, every time revealing an aspect of its sublimity and grace hitherto unrevealed in colour. The actual 'Taj' is beautiful indeed but the vision of the painted in 'Her Last Desire' (acquired by U.S.S.R State Museum) under the golden rays of evening sun, with his fairy contours fading into the surrounding air, make it appear like the fragment of the forgotten dream.<sup>73</sup>

S.G. Thakur Singh's variegated world of Indian Belles comes before us not conventional in form but throbbing with life-blood and revealing a firm individualistic presentation. Being the portrait painter of high caliber, he makes the face convincingly real and emblematic of the inner rigors of spiritual conflict, characteristic of the lower classes or the sophistry and snobbism of the upper ones. As such his figures are endured with a natural grace and comeliness. Having spent a major portion of his youthful life in Bengal, obviously he could not shake himself free of the impress of Bengali life and manners, which are too apparent in the character of the figures and the background effects, against which they are painted.<sup>74</sup>

His most famous painting which he attempted in many versions is titled **After the Bath** (Plate-285) and which was bestowed with second prize in British Empire Exhibition, London, brought this artist a sudden fame and recognition, due to its high degree of technical competence. The tones of the flesh where it is bare and where the wet and dripping garment clings close to the body are graded with a discriminating colour sense and the characteristic pose brings out exquisitely the grace of the feminine figure. It is customary with Indian women

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73 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.3

74 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.4

more particularly in Bengal, to go for votive offering to a nearby temple and on their return to have a dip into a tank attached to the temple with the upper garment still wrapped around the body. This has provided the artist with a subject upon which he has profusely lavished his skill.<sup>75</sup> Predominantly his studies of women can be resolved into two categories: a frankly sensual almost titillating female figure usually with wet clinging drapery and various regional ethnic types. Inevitably, the works belonging to the first category became highly popular. The paintings in this series are **Morning Prayer** (Plate-286), **The Innocent Candle** (Plate-287), **Finishing Touch** (Plate-288), **Tulsi Seva** (Plate-289), **Old Memories** (Plate-290) and **Whispers of Love** (Plate-291). The “Woman” thus frankly became an object of gratification, the pretext of any narrative imperative being totally disregarded. It is interesting to see, however that for most of such paintings the prototypes are clearly Bengali, the typically worn *Sari* complete with a bunch of keys tied to a corner, reddened soles of the feet, red and *shankha* bangles, and never a Punjabi woman. Perhaps the explanation for this conscious choice should be sought in the background of Thakur Singh. There is nothing at all in his cultural and social background, which would have allowed him to use a Punjabi woman as his model. Eroticism and sensuality were the never intentions of the poets, writers and painters in their works, due to cultural ethos in Punjab. Such dimensions if ever attempted were indirect and low key hints or suggestions and their glamorization was a taboo. The depiction of the physical beauty was quite restrained, though there may exist a quantum of deep romantic feelings and thoughts in such creative works.<sup>76</sup>

Apart from this frank avowal of ‘Woman’, Thakur Singh made other women as well, more demure and straitlaced, even as he painted a number of

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75 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.7

76 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.127-128

different ethnic and provincial types, differentiating clearly in their facial features, sartorial fashions and their occupations. It is in these paintings that Thakur Singh's undoubted superior craftsmanship comes through his ability to capture his models in various visually advantageous poses, the felicitous handling of paint, a convincing anatomy, a meticulous capturing of details and textures and so on.<sup>77</sup>

In the later section, Thakur Singh has explored his multi-faceted artistic capabilities in portraying ladies from different provinces of India, proving his mastery over the medium in truthful fidelity and ease. The **Punjabi Bride** (Plate-292) used to be popular choice for Punjabi artists, who treated it with varying degrees of success. Due to the emotive content, the Bridehood represents a sudden and lasting break with the past like the tender plants transplanted in a strange soil. It is also the occasion of fulfillment, which breathes warmth and gladness everywhere and transforms into beauty and bloom all that comes with the range of its magic touch. The bride is animated by a feeling of conscious pride of having acquired a little realm of love of which she is an undisputed queen. In order to subdue the overaught effect of jewellery, the artist has very cleverly treated the drapery with broad casual strokes.<sup>78</sup> 'Punjabi Bride' though a picture of muted strength and confidence, has sad alluring and reflecting eyes, where dreams and expectations are woven in a pattern of a mesmerizing grace. The colour of her dazzling *dupatta* and pale silken suit transforms this picture into a happy and magnificent glow, where the regal persona of the bride presents a magnetic appeal. In the background, authentic Punjabi carved furniture adds touch of solidity and robustness- the hallmark of everything Punjabi and lavishly embroidered cuffs of her loose dress add a peculiar richness to the attire's design.

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77 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.129

78 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.17

In the painting titled **Indolence** (Plate-293), which is in the collection of H.H. Nawab of Malerkotla, has the sumptuously decorated interior of a room inhabited by an attractive type of feminine beauty. Half-aroused from her sleep but still chewing the cud of some beautiful love dream she has experienced and loathes to return to the world of consciousness and harsh reality.<sup>79</sup> The artist deserves credit for its technical excellence, the firm and realistic painting of the figure and extremely effective management of light and shade. There is an oriental quality in the linear rhythms, which flow and converge into no loose ends. The picture expresses with utmost force the artist's mind in which arouses no ordinary human responses but that rare state of satisfaction, which is styled as an aesthetic emotion.

The subject of the painting **Monzat** (Plate-294) is a noble minded, devout Muslim lady during one of her daily recitals of holy Kuran.<sup>80</sup> Her mind all of a sudden is captured by divine vision ineffably beautiful, and she falls into a trance. The world of the spirit is not far off but hovers unseen, surrounds us only to be visualized, more palpably than reality itself through reverence, simplicity and love. There is an expression of partaking of mystic experiences, which alone can open before us the golden road to bliss. The tranquil solitude, mysterious effect of light and shade dexterously manipulated, the wage effect of architectural background and above all, the characteristic pose of the figure, tend to create a consciousness of divine presence.<sup>81</sup> Though we observe a sustained presence of spiritually potent atmosphere and deliverance of deep meanings yet it is revealed that these pictures were not painted for giving any solemn messages or for advocating certain moral values as the artist has primarily chosen to paint

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79 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.25

80 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.129

81 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.26



them simply to record the fleeting movements and the fascinating vision, which he experienced after observing a particular subject.

Reflection of the various facets and moments of a day in extraordinary environs excited his senses to capture human moods and portray the undercurrents of the thought process of the subject. The hours of waiting are infact; the hours of prolonged anguish describe a painting titled **Expectation** (Plate-295). The woman embellished with jewellery and brocaded apparel with a rose of love blooming in her heart and her hand, is apparently waiting the arrival of her far way lover, long separated from her. Her expression reveals a mixed emotion of joy and sadness-joy in the hope of meeting and sadness born of uncertainty- sometimes the other gaining ascendancy. The artist's flair for painting drapery, architectural designs and acute colour sense is too apparent and is effectively used in this painting, to create an atmosphere of elegance and luxury. The light and shadow effect in the decorative interior has been judiciously devised in order to balance the overall composition.<sup>82</sup>

**Ganesh Puja** (Plate-296) is such an appealing masterpiece which highlights the concept that through the symbolic worship of idols the communion of human spirit with the Universal Spirit is connected, that can lead the spirit to the higher self-realization. The worship of 'Ganesh'-the Elephant God prevails in nearly all parts of India. The lady standing before the God is completely lost to the external world. The expression of devotion and earnestness on her face is faithfully rendered. The classical folds of the drapery of her *Sari* and the architectural background entirely Indian in spirit, lends an added charm. Use of a decorative pillar in the foreground on the left hand side of the painting, has cleverly illuminated the background with a mystical glow which prevails in the religious shrines. Mellowed soft and tender markings rendered on the classical Indian

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82 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.21

pillars relates to structures created in Southern India. There is an air of divinity which lifts the painting to a plateau of intense visual delight. Thakur Singh's fascination with provincial dresses and jewellery is manifest in many works of everlasting beauty. He has depicted these essential elements in photo-precision and the prime importance of authenticity has been faithfully established. The other bewitching paintings in this genre are **At the Temple Door** (Plate-297), **The Secret Letter** (Plate-298), **Torments of Love** (Plate-299) and **Compassion** (Plate-300).

In the paintings of S.G. Thakur Singh lie a perpetual reminder of past pleasures and the spectacle splendour of India. While depicting colourful pageant of Indian life, the artist has left many fine pictorial records: pilgrims bathing in the early dawn in the sacred Godavari, fisherboats setting out to sea in the early morning at Madras and country sailing boats returning at dusk on the Hoogly.<sup>83</sup> To those who have not actually visited the country, the paintings will reveal something of the beauty and distinctiveness of the Indian scene, architecturally, naturally and humanly. This is not putting his work in the category of colour photography. But Thakur Singh has a gift of selection, arrangement and reserve in colouring that bears its testimony to his own vital and individual sensitiveness and delicacy of response to the visible world and his joy in unsophisticated depiction of beauty. The clarity and realism shown in these paintings have their affinities with western art but his work has a firmness of execution that puts him on the pedestal of achievements in competence at par with master painters of Rajput and Mughal era.<sup>84</sup> He had the power to freeze even moment in his works and his steady hand had the command to anchor a fleeting movement without making it tumultuous and boisterous. The elements of calm and quite were

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83 **Chaitanya, Krishna;** 1951, *The Art of S.G. Thakur Singh, Roopalekha*, Vol.22, No.2, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.21

84 **Cousins, James H.;** n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties* (Preface), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.4

captured in dim fading lights and the backgrounds complement the compositions without interfering in the projection of the subject in focus.

“No doubt this ancient land of India, so vast in her extent, so varied in her loveliness, has lured from time immemorial, the footsteps of the greedy conquerors as well as the inquisitive visitors from lands far remote. But face to face with her irresistible magnificence, the conqueror found him disarmed in stead of ransacking her fair bosom was forced to lay at her lotus feet the best gift of his own exotic culture and civilization. The dazed visitor went back with his incredible tales of wonder and romance and was instrumental in manipulating fresh wave of invasion which results not a bit different from those in the past. This endless process of time has thus made India the treasure house not only of natural beauty but also of works of supreme artistic excellence. Even her minutest particle of dust is injected with some mystical, mythical or historical tradition or association”.<sup>85</sup> These are a few observations of Thakur Singh who seeped through the skin of the mystical India and yearned to touch her soul with the sheer magic of his sensitive brush. The paintings which have immortalized his love for rendering architectural marvels of India are entrenched in his wonderful control over line drawing and projection of perspectives and he truly had a keen eye for detail. Usually it is very difficult for artists to capture the architectural structures in their true element whereby the soul of the building is revealed but this master artist had a magic wand to turn the hard architectural structures into pleasing and emotive objects, breathing with enchanting mystical charm and a rare warmth in their appearance. The softened tones have a magical effect on the composition of such buildings, balanced by appropriate juxtaposition of foliage, alongwith required thickness of people as per the requirement of a specific subject. Each work of this nature and genre has an

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85 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties* (Artist's Note), Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.7

aesthetic aura, which bewitches the eye and leaves a tender expression on the mind of the viewer. In spite of all these wonderful qualities, these works are a store-house of elegantly projected architectural patterns, embellishments and ornamental elements rich in authentic details faithfully recorded and rendered with utmost patience and artistic caliber.

In these series **The Golden Temple at Amritsar-I** (Plate-301) is a classical example, where artist has stressed upon the need to depict the holy shrine in a variety of moods with the support of background filled with clouds and hues, which enhance the main structure and represent it in a dramatic way. The grey wind swept clouds canopying the temple from above, the supportive waves rising in eternal homage to the presiding spirit of the place, instead of producing a disturbed effect, impart in the whole scene the visionary quality of a dream, which tends to create in the beholder a purely mystic feeling of devotional ecstasy.<sup>86</sup> In yet another composition, the central shrine of **The Golden Temple-II** (Plate-302) popularly known as 'Sri Harimandir Sahib' seems to glide like a majestic swan on the azure waters of holy tank. The scene draws unreserved admiration of the visitor. Dark clouds perched in the background lend an overpowering solitude to the atmosphere, empowering it with poetical as well as divine bliss. In a different mood **The Golden Temple-III** (Plate-303) in this painting is shown as an abode of Almighty where there is unrestricted excess. Here group of devotees are shown entering the gates early in the morning with prayers in their hearts. Figures depicted in mellowed tones are full of religious fervour and an air of serenity prevails in the painting.

**The Qutub Minar in Delhi** (Plate-304), a painting in collection of Col. W.J. Simpson of Scotland, done in oil on canvas in 1931, is a rare work of characteristic beauty of architecture, imaginatively depicted by the artist wherein

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86 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2

a flat pale yellow background adds a touch of mystery. The surrounding ruins, the birds flying in the sky, the verdure in the foreground with a few casual visitors squatting there, are significantly introduced by the artist to reprove the vanity of the emperor, who himself alongwith the empire he founded has been made equal with the dust. In an unusual composition, Qutub Minar rises amongst the small temple like buildings in a lonely splendour like a king amongst his councilors.

‘The Taj’ is not only an edifice of supreme artistic excellence but also forms a confluence where art and nature meet. Both have bestowed upon it with the full splendour of wintry moon, in the grey dawn of the morning or twilight, to the fading evening under the star garnished light of the day, it reveals its manifold aspects of ethereal beauty. It is indeed the love dream of a beautiful soul realized in chaste marble. S.G. Thakur Singh has caught **A Glimpse of the Taj** (Plate-305), a rare vision of this ever changing, ever new monument of love radiating its heavenly graces under the first rays of the rising sun. It is as if we are beholding through Shah Jahan’s own eyes. Its fairy structure dissolving into the music of his love longings. The actual ‘Taj’ is beautiful indeed but the vision of it portrayed by the artist in the painting titled **Her Last Desire** (Plate-306) with the contours of its fairy structure fading into the surrounding air, make it appear like the fragment of a golden dream, or a gem of beauty, distilled out of pure imagination.<sup>87</sup> **Tear Drops** (Plate-307) is another gripping canvas, done in oil on canvas in 1928, which has envisioned the ‘Taj’ in a poetic parlance. Here the image of ‘Taj’ has been melted into the watery eyes of the emperor heavy with sighs of grief. He struggles with his tears and at last they recede into the bosom of nature. His eyes linger on the dim image of the ‘Taj’ in a melancholy mood. It seems that the sigh of the emperor has crystallized in snow white marble and the

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87 **Chaitanya, Krishna**; 1967, *S.G. Thakur Singh*, Editor: Jaya Appasamy, Publisher: B.C. Sanyal, Secretary, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, The Caxton Press Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, p.7

lonely and sad moon hides itself behind the mists of mystery. The Yamuna flowing silently seems to be joining the 'Taj' in an exercise of consoling each other. The subject of 'Taj' continuously inspired the artist and he created wonderful versions of this symbol of love. Each painting has something new to offer by way of ever-changing enigmatic charisma.

He traveled far and wide to relish the ambience which satisfied his urge to paint various monuments and places connected to historical importance. The paintings which come to mind are **East Gate of Sanchi Stupa** (Plate-308), **The Minakshi Temple at Madurai** (Plate-309), **Victoria Memorial Hall at Calcutta** (Plate-310), **Manikarnika Ghat at Benaras** (Plate-311), **Dasaswamedh Ghat at Benaras** (Plate-312) and **The Vishram Ghat at Mathura** (Plate-313). A master of capturing candid expressions of common folks and their surroundings with unparalleled artistic charm in his free flowing lucid style, Thakur Singh seems to be most happy with the subjects of nature- rolling hills, flowing rivers, brooks and enchanting green glory of the Mother Nature. Here in his paintings of inimitable artistic excellence, he has proved himself to be the true worshipper of Nature, which earned him the title of 'John Constable of India',<sup>88</sup> who was lost in the glory of snow clad mountains and was attracted to the smell of the soil, where he befriended simple innocent and hardworking folks, peasants and shepherds, who were naturally very dear to his heart. He filled his canvases with these subjects and draped them in innocent and divine light. His artistic excellence burst into a joyful exuberance and a strange heavenly bliss in the paintings titled **In the Valley of Gods** (Plate-314) and **Heaven of the Poor** (Plate-315). **Women of Kangra** (Plate-316) done in 1963, depicts two Kangra Women engaged in gossip against the wall of a *Kaccha* house, is a marvelous study of rustic charm and truthful depiction of their ethnic costumes, complete with pieces of jewellery and animated expressions. Nature always gladdened his heart and refreshed his soul

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88     **Bhatti, S.S.**; May 1, 2011, *Art under Attack*, The Tribune

as he painted countless scenes from various places he visited during his lifetime.<sup>89</sup>

**Parting Kiss** (Plate-317) painted in 1928 in Sikkim, is in the collection of Sir Buta Singh of Amritsar, is a tribute to the majestic Mount Everest, where the soft glitter of rosy rays seems to be engaged in a parting kiss.<sup>90</sup> The range of the painting is so vast that it takes the viewer to travel miles and miles to relish the beauty of this painting- an abode of abundant nature dotted with far-flung tiny villages, inhabited by lonely shepherds and their herds. In a similar fashion, the artist has crystallized the bewitching Kullu Valley in a painting titled **Evening in Kullu Valley** (Plate-318) in a landscape of terraced fields and glistening mirror-like lake, surrounded by still and silent trees, hills and mountains, which catches the eye of the beholder and the overall composition presents a peculiar sense of serenity and joy. Artist S.G. Thakur Singh had set a benchmark in realistic painting and had raised the bar to such an extent that it is difficult if not possible to touch the level of artistic excellence and vision he had achieved. He has reserved a coveted place for himself in Sikh painting which will continue to inspire the new breed artists.

The most versatile and prolific painter of Sikh history **Sardar Kirpal Singh** (Plate-319) was born on 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1923 at village 'Vara Chain Singh', Zira Tehsil of Ferozpur district, Punjab. His father Sardar Bhagat Singh Panesar was a renowned craftsman and excelled in wood carving, engraving and designing.<sup>91</sup> His mother Har Kaur was a pious lady. The Jain Temple of Zira has a wooden gate of exquisite beauty created by his father. Even as a child, he was sensitive to the beauty of colours and spent his spare time, watching village girls spinning and embroidering *Phulkaris* in the courtyard of his house. He felt

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89 **Singh, Shamsheer**; n.d., *Thakar Singh through his art*, Thakur Singh School of Arts, Amritsar, Punjabee Press, Amritsar, p.43

90 **Singh, Kultar**; 1973, *S.G. Thakur Singh and His Landscapes*, The Tribune

91 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Artist Kirpal Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.513-514

inspired and wanted to do something creative himself and in his own words “*I was itching to utilize my fingers by drawing something or making some crude pictures*”. At that time, drawing was introduced as a subject in class fifth. Kirpal Singh spent many hours, copying pictures from his notebooks with a G’ nib and he passed the matriculation examination in 1939.<sup>92</sup> Thereafter he joined Sanatan Dharam College at Lahore.<sup>93</sup> In 1940, he paid a visit to historical Gurdwaras of Bhai Taru Singh, Bhai Mani Singh, Dera Sahib and Shaheed Ganj in Lahore and became aware of the great sacrifices of the Sikhs. At that time, the Birth Anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was celebrated at Lahore. Though he was a science student, he spent much time in the study of history.<sup>94</sup> He was greatly inspired by the ‘History of the Sikhs’ written by Bhai Khazan Singh. Another book which made a mark on him was ‘Sundri’ a novel by Bhai Vir Singh.<sup>95</sup> After passing F.Sc. in 1941, he joined as a clerk in Military Accounts Department in Lahore Cantonment, Mian Mir.<sup>96</sup> In his spare time, he continued to paint landscapes and human figures in water colours. In 1941, he married to Kuldeep Kaur of village Kadyal in Tensil Zira. From Kuldeep Kaur, he has two sons and one daughter. The younger son Jarnail Singh paints and inherited the talent from his father. In August 1947 Kirpal Singh settled in Jalandhar, where his brother was a clerk in Industrial Department of Punjab Government. At Jalandhar, he had an opportunity to see reproductions of the paintings of the Russian artist ‘Repin’ - ‘Volga Boatman religious processions’ and ‘Cossacks writing a letter to

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92 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

93 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.94

94 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

95 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.126

96 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.45



the Sultan of Turkey' in the Encyclopedia Britannica.<sup>97</sup> He also became familiar with the reproductions of the paintings of great masters of Italian Renaissance such as Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci and Rubens. He was deeply influenced by the realistic technique of these great painters.<sup>98</sup>

Thereafter in 1952, Kirpal Singh migrated to Delhi and he earned his livelihood by designing book covers and drawing book illustrations.<sup>99</sup> Commercial art was not to his taste and in 1953 he came to Karnal and lived in the reclamation farm at 'Indri'. In the quite atmosphere of Indri, he started painting seriously. The subjects of his paintings were women transplanting paddy, caravans of gypsies and Guru Hargobind in Gwalior Fort.<sup>100</sup> In June 1955, he arranged the first exhibition of his paintings at Dyal Singh College, Karnal under the patronage of Principal Sant Rian Grover.<sup>101</sup> Though the paintings were appreciated by the visitors but not a single painting was sold. The second exhibition of his paintings was held in January 1956 at Lyllapur Khalsa College, Jalandhar under the patronage of Principal Gurbachan Singh Talib, who purchased a few paintings for the college. On the recommendation of Professor Satbir Singh, a member of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Kirpal Singh was employed as an artist at Darbar Sahib at Amritsar at a salary of Rs.250 per month during the summer of 1956. From 1956 to 1962, he painted thirty-six paintings of subject relating to Sikh history which are now displayed in the Central Sikh Museum, Darbar Sahib at Amritsar.<sup>102</sup> There include his famous

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97 **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

98 **Chitrakar, Ajajib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.103

99 **Singh, Major Gurmukh;** 2004, *Artist Kirpal Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.513-514

100 **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

101 **Singh, Major Gurmukh;** 2004, *Artist Kirpal Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.513-514

102 **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

painting of the Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as well as tortures suffered by Sikh men and women during the Mughal rule.<sup>103</sup> Kirpal Singh started donning 'Black Chola' from his 31<sup>st</sup> Birthday in 1958 after the fashion of *Sufi* poets and regarded this dress as a symbol of devotion and dedication to his self imposed renunciation of worldly matters. He was not happy at Amritsar as the curator of the museum could not understand his work and there were frequent quarrels. In sheer disgust, he left the service of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.<sup>104</sup> Some of his paintings of that period were displayed in Guru Tegh Bahadur Niwas at Gurdwara Sis Ganj. Later on these paintings were shifted to Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, New Delhi.<sup>105</sup> The Guru Gobind Singh Foundation requested Dr. M.S. Randhawa and Dr. Ganda Singh to select themes for paintings relating to Guru Gobind Singh and select an artist to paint on these subjects. Sardar Kirpal Singh was selected to paint these paintings which are now on display in Guru Gobind Singh Bhawan at Punjabi University, Patiala.<sup>106</sup>

In 1967 Dr. M.S. Randhawa who was the Chief Commissioner of Union Territory of Chandigarh, made a scheme for allotment of building sites on concessional basis to settle scientists, writers and artists. In that scheme, a plot was allotted to Kirpal Singh who started construction of a house for his residence.<sup>107</sup> At that time the scheme of Museum of Evolution of Life for which paintings were required, Kirpal Singh and Jaswant Singh were commissioned to paint large paintings showing the progress of life in the geological past. This was not a subject in which Kirpal Singh was interested but as he was in need of

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103 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.95

104 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

105 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.95

106 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.46

107 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.106

funds, he painted works relating to the Mesozoic period when dinosaurs ruled the Earth. He painted these pictures with good amount of perfection. While at Chandigarh, he was also patronized by Sardar Manmohan Singh, Managing Director of Punjab Marketing Federation. A scholar and connoisseur of art Sardar Inderjeet Singh of Punjab and Sind Bank also commissioned Kirpal Singh to paint Sikh themes so after many army officers also started patronizing him. Twelve of his paintings on the heroic deeds of the Sikh soldiers during Indo-Pak Wars were displayed in the Army Museum at Meerut Cantonment.<sup>108</sup>

In 1973 a rare opportunity came for Kirpal Singh to paint Anglo-Sikh Wars Memorial at Ferozshah in Ferozpur district. The paintings show the battles of Mudki, Ferozshah, Subronon and Chillianwala. These paintings of 10'x 20' in size are the largest ever painted in India. These paintings could not be accommodated inside a residential house. Kirpal Singh had to construct a large tent outside his residence in Chandigarh, in which he worked on these paintings for a period of three years. He also painted portraits of General Gough, Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala and General Tej Singh. Kirpal Singh is at his best in war paintings where marshal ardour is displayed. In these paintings, he has paid tribute to the memory of valiant Sikh soldiers who fought the British army and almost defeated them in two battles. This Wars Memorial, which infact is a picture gallery of war paintings, was formally inaugurated in April 1976 at one of the biggest public gatherings in Punjab. Apart from over five lacs of people who came in trucks and lorries from all over the Punjab, Ministers of Punjab Government, Deputy Defence Minister of Government of India and Heads of all the three services- Army, Navy and Airforce saluted the memorial and thus paid homage to the memory of soldiers, who lost their lives in the first Anglo-Sikh

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108     **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

War in 1846 and incidentally to the paintings which were greatly admired. Never before the work of an Indian artist had been recognized in such a manner.<sup>109</sup>

Kirpal Singh as he was deeply interested in Sikh history maintained a private library of rare books on Indian history and art. Before starting a painting, he made it his habit to consult these books carefully to study the facts and acquaint himself with the military costumes and weapons used in the war. He ascertains the authenticity of the costumes as depicted in Mughal, Rajput, Sikh and Company Schools. Kirpal Singh was a staunch Sikh and derived his inspiration from the unparalleled heroism of Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>110</sup> When Guru Gobind Singh was harassed by the Mughal army, he left Anandpur and took shelter in the *Garhi* of Chamkaur. Here his two sons Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh sacrificed their lives fighting the Mughals. In a painting by Kirpal Singh, we see Guru Gobind Singh carrying a bow directing the defense of the *Garhi*. His face radiates power and reckless bravery. We also see defiance and courage in the visage of Sikh soldiers drawing a bow and shooting an arrow. What a painting can convey, writing cannot convey as its impact is direct and even an illiterate can understand the message of the artist. A glance at a painting of Kirpal Singh provides the viewer a better insight into several aspects of Sikh history than he could get by reading history books. Kirpal Singh is truly the artist who made alive the history of Punjab.<sup>111</sup>

Unlike other painters, Kirpal Singh made a conscious effort to stand away from the subjects which were being dealt by then prominent painters, he made his mark in painting Sikh wars and history with a heavy dose of rustic flavour and a definite direct approach and was usually successfully in the narration of a

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109 **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

110 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.95-103

111 **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

particular theme or an episode from Sikh history by infusing his masterstrokes with the energy of a sword, so as to capture the moment in a befitting speed and movement. He aptly chose tumultuous and moving backgrounds to enhance the subject in truly dynamic dimension. The study of horses, weapons, costumes and the glow of fearlessness on the faces of brave soldiers engaged in the sacred duty of defeating the invaders captured by him on his canvas speaks volumes of the dexterity and virtuosity he had attained during his career as an artist.

Kirpal Singh was fascinated by the integrity of facts and fiction while simultaneously sensing clear points of convergence between the two and decided to use his sufficiently acquired skill in handling oils in the service of Sikh history. This purpose remained with him throughout his life, even as he made occasional forays into other themes. For the most part these paintings are simple in structure and narration, as the primary intention was to present the theme in an uncluttered and accessible manner. Two stylistic streams seem to run through his works, sometimes coalescing but more often sharp and distinct. He made a large number of paintings to be turned into prints and in these paintings there is plenty of clarity of forms and the use of such colours as would lend themselves easily to replication without much departure from damage to the original, a syncopated space and perspective in which elements of the composition would be entailed to each other in such a way that the whole would become not only an effective design but also a communicant. It is in other paintings, intended largely as murals that the emphasis changes as he seeks to capture not only the exact historical context but also, if possible the currents and cross-currents of intrigue and treason that usually underlay these events. In this context **Guru Gobind Singh at Chamkaur Sahib** becomes very significant where the essentially lonely fortitude of the Guru is almost poetically captured. In **Guru Ka Seena** once again he reduces the whole story to a shadowy wall in a corner while the entire surface of the canvas vibrates with infinite gradation of colour as a lone

horse flies out in the empyrean. The sense of time remains eschatological, but there is never a sense of the tragic. It is with such paintings that Kirpal Singh lifts a historical event beyond its physically measurable context and the image becomes a part of ethnic memory.<sup>112</sup>

Kirpal Singh was a perfect story teller in visual idiom and had the gift of narrating them in bold and powerful visuals. The way he narrated Sikh history depicting innumerable acts of Mughal tyranny and intolerance perpetuated against god fearing innocent yet brave devout Sikhs, sends a shiver in the spine as the gory acts of torture move every heart and soul. The paintings which caught the imagination of every Sikh are those of the Sikh followers like **Martyrdom of Bhai Mati Dass** (Plate-320), Bhai Mati Dass who was executed before the eyes of Guru Tegh Bahadur, was a man of strong faith and determination. According to Sikh tradition of sacrifice, when his body was being sawed into two pieces, voice reciting *Japji Sahib* was emanating from the sawed out parts. His brother Sati Dass was also burnt alive. He was wrapped up in cotton wool and set on fire. Both these brothers were great grandsons of Bhai Praga ji.<sup>113</sup> This moving painting depicts a heartrending scene, Bhai Mati Dass's arms are tied to wooden blocks and two devilish and fierce looking Mughal soldiers are shown sawing his body into two halves and a blood stream flows through his face and chest. To create a sense of gloom and horror, the artist has chosen dark colours in the background and the whole scene is painted in dimly lit chamber. A Mughal executioner holding a javelin is shown supervising the whole gruesome act. The figures in the painting have been organized in such a manner that effectively project the subject in simple yet truthful style concentrating on the subject with utmost attention without adding any unnecessary elements. But this is a

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112 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.126-127

113 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.48

remarkable picture which successfully highlights the supreme sacrifice of Bhai Mati Dass.

**The Sacrifice of Bhai Subegh Singh and Bhai Shahbaz Singh** (Plate-321) a father and son duo was committed in 1746 under the orders of Yayia Khan who was a great tyrant, by crushing between *Charakhdi* (spiked wheels) the bodies of Subegh Singh and Shahbaz Singh. The *Qazi* (Muslim priest) had asked Subegh Singh to convert to Islam and thus the life of his son would be saved. But the brave Sikhs refused to listen to this advice and preferred to lay down their lives by mentioning that their sacrifices are nothing as compared to the great sacrifices made by their Gurus and loss of a son was insignificant.<sup>114</sup> This painting was painted in the year 1961 in oil on canvas medium. Again the emphasis is on the main subject and the Mughal architectural building shown in the faded background and there is the presence of the crowd with dazed expressions on their faces and fear in their eyes as two large wooden *Charakhdis* are being rotated by the Mughal *jallads*.

In yet another painting titled **Martyrdom of Taru Singh** (Plate-322), Bhai Taru Singh and his sister were arrested on complaint for providing meals to the underground Sikhs. The residents of Lahore secured the release of the sister by paying a payment of one lakh rupees but the brother insisted that he would sacrifice himself than seek pardon. Zakariya Khan ordered that his hair be removed alongwith the skull. Bhai Taru Singh quietly recited the holy hymns when his skull was being chopped off on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1745 and thanked the Guru for providing him the courage to forego his life.<sup>115</sup> Though this painting represents a horrible scene yet there is no fear on the face of Bhai Taru Singh or instead the

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114 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharam Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.46

115 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.53

*jallad* who is holding the *Khurpa* (weapon) in one hand and the skull of Bhai Taru Singh in other, is an embodiment of fear and there is an expression of scare and disgust after committing this heinous crime against the faithful devout Sikh.

A scene showing the **Sacrifice of Bhai Mani Singh** (Plate-323) painted in 1957 by Kirpal Singh, evokes a sense of pride in the hearts of Sikhs as Bhai Mani Singh an old man of seventy-seven years with flowing grey beard is shown offering his limbs to be cut by the executioner of Zakariya Khan without a trace of fear or remorse on his face. Bhai Mani Singh led the Sikhs at such a crucial time when nearly everyone was hostile to them. He disciplined and organized them under one leadership. On the excuse that Bhai Mani Singh did not pay the promised amount, Zakariya Khan ordered execution by chopping off each limb of his body. The executioner took pity on his old age, but Bhai Mani Singh told him to follow the instructions of his chief just as he himself was abiding by the will of his Master. He kept on reciting ‘Sukhmani Sahib’ as the execution went on.<sup>116</sup> It is with such paintings full of Sikh valour and bravery that Kirpal Singh achieved great admiration and was instantly propelled into fame, as these paintings touched the deep chords of devout Sikhs. The costumes of the Mughal figures and the narration of this episode in Sikh history in such truthful manner and impressive expression, undoubtedly recognizes Kirpal Singh’s talent in organizing scenes in a realistic and without even an element, which may take away the eye from the main subject. Dramatic rendering of the perspective in faded rustic colours infact surcharges the painting with added historical importance.

Continuing with the series of paintings on Sikh themes, Kirpal Singh envisioned the quantum of sufferings faced by the Sikhs during the reign of Zakariya Khan, who had unleashed a reign of terror and tyranny, in a painting

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116 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.97-98



titled **Reward for killing Sikhs.** (Plate-324) People were rewarded for killing the Sikhs and payment was made to them by counting the heads of the Sikhs mounted on spears. In the depiction of this brutal act, Zakariya Khan is shown sitting on a platform paying for the heads of the Sikhs brought by the tyrant Mughals to his court. He seems to be pleased with the number of heads mounted on the spears. The artist has again captured the heartrending scene with amazing bold approach and successful in portraying the essence of the horrible atmosphere prevailing during the Mughal rule. Infact depiction of such scenes have strengthened the faith of the devout in Sikhism and there is an added zest for sacrifice as a tool to thwart the evil and beastly rulers. Zakariya Khan and Mir Mannu had given a call to throw out all the Sikhs from the province and had fixed a handsome reward for their prosecution and liquidation. Ten rupees for information, fifty rupees for killing and eighty rupees for bringing a severed head of a Sikh, although he wasted lacs of rupees like this, the Panth went on flourishing and multiplying.<sup>117</sup>

**Faith above family** (Plate-325) *Sidak Ton Santan Sadke* is a large painting done in 1959. This painting show Sikh Mothers who were forced to wreath themselves with the mangled limbs of their minced children but never let their faith be shaken up.<sup>118</sup> Here in this moving picture, Sikh Mothers are shown sitting silently wearing the limbs of their butchered children but no one is shown crying or creating a hue or cry and a large crowd is shown looking at these brave mothers. Some executioners are engaged in chopping the limbs of the innocent children with large swords and some Mughal soldiers are pulling the children away from their mothers. The picture represents a gory scene and some vultures are shown eagerly awaiting for the minced body on the branches of a tree. Some

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117 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.51

118 Ibid, p.54

dogs in the foreground are also relishing the human flesh but there is a strange silence and the ladies are entrenched in faith.

The other masterpieces of *Sikh art* by this great artist include some paintings of Sikh warriors prominent among them are **Baba Deep Singh Shaheed** (Plate-326), **Nawab Kapur Singh** (Plate-327), **Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia** (Plate-328), **Bhai Praga** (Plate-329), **Bhai Bota Singh and Bhai Garja Singh** (Plate-330), **Baba Banda Singh Bahadur**, **Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia** (Plate-331), **Bhai Sukha Singh and Bhai Mehtab Singh** (Plate-332). When Baba Deep Singh came to know that Jahan Khan, a general of Abdali had violated the sanctity of Sri Darbar Sahib, he set out in that direction immediately, accompanied by only eight Singhs. On the way, large batches of Sikhs joined him but at Sangrana, he drew up a line asked them to cross it over if they were willing to lay down their lives. Everyone jumped over the line without hesitation. Baba Deep Singh had his head chopped off in the fight but carries it on his hand and fought his way to the periphery of Darbar Sahib, where he finally breathed his last.<sup>119</sup> This painting is a picture of supreme sacrifice and pays tribute to the valour, who never hesitated to lay down their lives for the cause of the faith in the Name of the Guru.

A painting of **Banda Singh Bahadur** (Plate-333) who was earlier known as Madho Dass Bairagi before his baptismation by Guru Gobind Singh, projects this great warrior who considered himself to be a humble devotee of the Guru. Sitting in a heroic posture with his sword and shield, bow and arrows against the backdrop of a fort where Nishan-e-Khalsa is hoisted and a cannon is lying near the boundary wall. A man of dedication and determination, the Banda Singh Bahadur after the occupation of Sirhind abolished Zagirdari (feudalism) from Punjab. He made Mukhlisgarh his capital and issued currency in the name of

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119 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.56

Gurus. His official seal bore the mark of Degh Tegh Fateh (hail sword and free kitchen). He was tortured to death in Delhi.<sup>120</sup> He remained every inch a Sikh to the end.

Paying a befitting honour to the selfless unbiased services of Bhai Kanhaiya ji, a man blessed with such a charitable deposition that he did not see any difference between a friend and a foe, served water and applied balms to the wounded soldiers without discriminating against their army and religious status. In the battlefield, he served the wounded Turks with equal generosity as he served to his own Sikh soldiers, when someone complained of this to the Guru; he submitted '*Everywhere he saw none but the Guru himself*'.<sup>121</sup> He is one of the pioneers of the tradition of social service and he believed that a saint who cared for materialism is not a saint but a mercenary.<sup>122</sup> The even handed **Bhai Kanhaiya** (Plate-334) has been immortalized in Kirpal Singh's painting. He is shown serving water to a wounded Turk who is lying amidst a pile of many wounded soldiers in the battlefield. The horror and the chaotic atmosphere of the war engulfed in rising dust, has been graphically captured in a suitably adopted colour perspective which shows dim outline of a distant building or a fort and the soldiers have been merged with the background in an impressionistic style. Mere depiction of cannon in the foreground enhances the overall design of the composition.

The credit for painting the war scenes with justifiable historic perspectives and genuine conviction goes to this artist, in his remarkable works done in illustrating the sagas of battles where Sikh soldiers showed extreme valour and

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120 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharam Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.40

121 **Shankar, Vijay.N and Kaur, Harminder**; 2005, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib- A Universal Scripture for Mankind*, Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, Haryana, p.49

122 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.36

performed humanistic tasks. In the painting **Singh- An Embodiment of Mercy** (Plate-335) is a visual account of the Battle of Panipat during which Ahmed Shah Abdali abducted 2200 girls. When the Singhs came to know of this, not only they rushed to their rescue but also enshowered their safety back home sometimes as far as Maharashtra. Historian M.J. Brown acknowledges that such an act was exemplary in chivalry as well as kindness.<sup>123</sup> Sikh soldiers were not only trained by the Gurus to fight the oppressors and tyrants but he also infused in them the virtues of kindness and mercy. They were always ready and available for performing tasks which were for the welfare of the mankind. Here in this painting, Sikh soldiers are shown surrounding the Mughals and rescuing the ladies from their possession. The artist had a great sense of colour and his pictures are pulsating with vigour and unmatched rendering of clusters of soldiers and creating a wonderful depth by diffusing the figures in the dusty backgrounds.

Two paintings narrating **Battle of Chamkaur** (Plate-336-337) from different angles establish Kirpal Singh as a master of war painting, due to his keen eye for detail and an effortless control over such compositions. He could visualize such scenes due to his love for going deep into the history and a rare grip on the subject as he consulted scholars and studied books which presented a blow by blow account of the battles fought by the Sikhs. These two paintings deserve special mention due to their overwhelming yet subtle visual narration wherein the *Sahibzadas* the central characters of these paintings are shown engaged in pitched battle with the tyrant Mughals. In spite of being surrounded by thousands of soldiers, they are showing exemplary bravery and are facing the onslaught with determination and pride even the enemies are shown astonished at their valiant disposition. Diffused backgrounds, foliage, forts and dark smoke screens

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123 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.63

rising out of the pitched battle in fact grant an added essence to the battle scene without interfering in the cleverly organized and moving compositions. In the dim visibility, figures are merging with the background yet there is masterly use of highlighting which enables the main character to stand out from the rest of the crowd. In these battles, Guru Gobind Singh's eldest son Ajit Singh enters the battle at Chamkaur. He challenges the enemy with a rare spiritual strength and attacks the fierce enemy to run away. He fought to his last breath and attained martyrdom.

The valuable contribution of Sardar Kirpal Singh to *Sikh art* will always be acknowledged by the Sikh Panth as his works have not only recorded the factual contents of the Sikh history but has in his inimitable expressions motivated and inspired many artists to devote their creative talents in promoting *Sikh art* and culture. Reproductions of his paintings are in great demand and are being acquired by the Punjabis all over the world. These works have kindled a new light in the minds of the Sikhs regarding their glorious history and devotion of their forefathers in establishing Khalsa Raj which always stood for equality, love for all mankind and nurtured a deep resolve in their minds to face the tyrant and oppressors with iron fists. He passed away on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1990.<sup>124</sup>

Amongst the four artists- Sobha Singh, S.G. Thakur Singh, Kirpal Singh, G.S. Sohan Singh who were considered as four columns of *Sikh Popular art*, the name of artist **G.S. Sohan Singh** (Plate-338) will be remembered as the greatest and most popular painter of *Sikh Calendar art* due to his own distinctive painting style. G.S. Sohan Singh was born in August, 1914 in the house of Bhai Gian Singh *Naqqash*, a famous fresco-artist of Golden Temple at Amritsar. He had two brothers and one sister. His elder brother Sunder Singh, who was an equally gifted artist, started painting in his early childhood and created some magnificent

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124 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Artist Kirpal Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.513-514

paintings. But he lost his life on 13 April 1919 during the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh.<sup>125</sup> His father Gian Singh discovered in him a flair for drawing and saw a spark in his eyes whenever he attempted a design exercise. He passed his eighth standard examination from Government High School, Town Hall, Amritsar as the young boy was always engrossed in drawing and painting.<sup>126</sup> His father sent him to the popular artist Sardar Hari Singh so that he may get the knowledge of the fine nuances of art under the gaze of a commercially successful artist. Sardar Hari Singh who had at that time been working in the famous Elphinston Theatrical Company, Calcutta. Later on in 1931-32 on the vending up of the company, the master and pupil came back to Amritsar.<sup>127</sup> The artist's father had by that time retired from his service in Golden Temple and both father and son started painting religious themes, preparing charts for students as well as framing pictures.<sup>128</sup> His stay at Calcutta was of utmost importance regarding his development as an artist and here he expanded his vision by viewing the works of many pioneer artists and he even got the opportunity to work with them on many projects.<sup>129</sup> This training which he received under strict discipline stood him in good stead as here he acquired an eye for detail and the use of vibrant colours while composing backdrops of numerous important productions of theatre. He also excelled in composing ornamental frames and this aspect was amply used in painting some fabulous Sikh calendars as they were always rich in content and narration. At pioneer film studios in Calcutta, he under his Guru's guidance developed a wonderfully appealing stylization of painting which was

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125 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.24

126 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.63

127 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.24

128 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.64

129 **Verma, P**; n.d., *Revealing the Art of G.S. Sohan Singh*, G.S. Sohan Singh Artist, Punjabee Press & Tej Press, Amritsar, p.10

instantly admired by the people engaged in commercial painting. He experimented with many techniques and shortly, he discovered his own signature style which reverberated with vibrancy and aesthetics.

On his way back from Calcutta, he had a chance to visit Delhi, where the works of many popular artists influenced his work. Visiting museums and other places of artistic value always appealed to him and he made it a point to visit Lucknow, Allahabad and Bombay, to quench his artist's thirst by visiting art studios and by viewing the works of artists who had made their mark in 1931-32.<sup>130</sup> After such sojourns, he had obtained enough confidence in his art and in 1932 he made a portrait of Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia which fetched him a first prize at Ramgarhia Federation Conference at Kharagpur. This encouragement paved a path for his career and after this success he made a portrait of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur in a warrior pose. This first multicolored design that was got printed and marketed by the artist in 1932 was well received in the market and more than five hundred copies or reproductions were sold in a short span of time. Encouraged by its popularity the artist prepared about three new designs every year, got their blocks prepared at Lahore, printed and marketed them.<sup>131</sup> After the death of the artist's mother in 1951 and his father in 1953 with the selfless help and guidance of P. Verma, he was able to publish a book titled 'Gian Chitrawali' in 1956 to commemorate his father's creative genius.<sup>132</sup> This afforded the artist an opportunity of gaining proficiency in the block line. The printing and publishing work created for him a new wave in the market and thus he was offered orders which kept him going financially strong throughout the year. From 1931 to 1946, G.S. Sohan Singh created some paintings and calendars depicting *Sikh art* and history. He got them printed and

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130 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.24

131 **Walia, Varinder**; December 1, 2005, *The rich life of an artist who was a pauper*, The Tribune

132 **Verma, P**; n.d., *Revealing the Art of G.S. Sohan Singh*, G.S. Sohan Singh Artist, Punjabee Press & Tej Press, Amritsar, p.11

sold the framed copies and thus had a lucrative business in this field.<sup>133</sup> He was also fascinated by European artists and successfully created some replicas of their works.<sup>134</sup> This enabled him to indulge in oil on canvas technique and he had the foresight to translate this newly acquired passion into the creation of some enchanting pictures pertaining to Sikh history. Thus he started taking keen interest in understanding in the ethos of Sikhism with added zest and researched his subjects with a scholarly eye. The printing techniques he had mastered have been passed on by him to his son Sardar Surinder Singh, who ranks among experts in line blocks, monochrome and tri-colour halftone blocks and photography etc.<sup>135</sup> As a result of this proficiency, they tackled multifarious subjects in the art field- *Calendar art* designs, oil and water colour paintings, commercial labels, book jacket designs, subject illustration designs, newspaper ad-designs apart from very fine themes in old Kangra, Pahari and Mughal style.<sup>136</sup>

Landscape painting, paintings of monuments, portraits and imaginative subjects were near to G.S Sohan Singh's heart and he was a great admirer of Sikh school of art founded by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, which provided him with an opportunity to learn new techniques of painting and was able to handle even large works. He has to his credit dozens of gold and silver medals, cash prizes as well as commendation certificates won by him in a number of art exhibitions held from time to time throughout the country. The partition of the country came as a rued shock for this sensitive artist who lost many of his relatives in the riots and this affected his psyche and hence the themes which he had never attempted before such as reign of gloom, brutality and horror entered in some of his

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133 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 64

134 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.25

135 **Walia, Varinder**; December 1, 2005, *The rich life of an artist who was a pauper*, The Tribune

136 **Verma, P**; n.d., *Revealing the Art of G.S. Sohan Singh*, G.S. Sohan Singh Artist, Punjabee Press & Tej Press, Amritsar, p.11-12



creations.<sup>137</sup> During this period, his business also got affected and he suffered quite a few financial losses but he worked day in and day out to make up the loss in such trying circumstances. To sustain his financial position, he started work with several newspapers as an illustrator, prominent amongst them are Daily Ajit, Veer Bharat, Lahore, Sher Bharat from Amritsar. He worked for magazines, designed pamphlets, many research books and periodicals. In addition to that, as he was expert in giving designs for boxes, labels and other commercial art jobs; he continued such projects and later on started the work of giving retouching and finishing touches to the already painted paintings in oil on canvas and acted as a restorer of art.<sup>138</sup> As no medium posed any problem that he could not solve. At the back of his mind, he always cherished a desire to paint some revolutionary paintings and create those works of art which caught his fancy. He also attempted painting in Kangra style but soon returned to his own style which was equally appreciated by artists and art connoisseurs as he had attained a mastery over the lyrical line.

G.S. Sohan Singh created several paintings in the praise of God glorifying His creations- mountains, lofty meadows and rolling hills, filled with magical flora and fauna, which have the eternal power to stir a divine symphony in the heart of a sensitive thinker. He always yearned for a place where there is no physical and mental pain and turmoil and envisaged some subjects which provided him peace and solace. In spite of being engrossed in commercial aspects of his career, he found time to pursue his first love for imaginative painting and he participated in several major exhibitions at Calcutta, Kharagpur, Bombay, Trivandrum and Delhi, where his works received huge acclaim and were awarded gold and silver medals. This fortified his resolve to continue painting

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137 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.25

138 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 64

some unusual themes apart from his very popular paintings of *Sikh art*. An exceptional painting of Guru Nanak was bought by nearly five hundred Americans, who were very much impressed with the artist's flair of the brush. Sardar Swarn Singh, the Home Minister of India presented Sardar G.S. Sohan Singh with a *siropa* at the Maharaja Ranjit Singh Company Bagh at Amritsar in a ceremony inaugurated by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. Legendary writer Mulk Raj Anand and Principal Teja Singh had paid glowing tributes to this talented artist. The new generation aspiring artists who sought a career in art always flocked his studios to get guidance and inspiration. G.S. Sohan Singh was a very mild mannered man and a humble person. During the year 1970, he was acclaimed as the Master Artist of the year at Chandigarh and the same year at Ludhiana, he received a prestigious award from the Ramgarhia Silver Jubilee Conference. His studio at 27-Braham Buta Market, near Sarai Guru Ram Dass, Amritsar is considered a shrine for young and upcoming artists. In recognition of his towering artistic talents, he was made a life member of the governing body of Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar and he acted as a judge for the grant of awards on selected exhibits.<sup>139</sup> Though G.S. Sohan Singh faced many financial pressures and hardships during his life time but he was never disheartened and continued with his passion for painting the Sikh history in a style that truly reflected his inner sensitive mind and strengthened his pivotal role in furthering the cause of *Sikh Calendar art* both in terms of expanding the scope of the reproduced calendars and making it a financially viable enterprise. It is with his ingenuity that the calendars of Sikh Gurus are produced in large numbers. Following his footsteps his two sons- Surinder Singh and Satpal Singh Danish, also share the credit of promotion of this popular genre of art as his eldest son Surinder Singh is a well known Block Printing Engineer and Graphic

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139 Verma, P; n.d., *Revealing the Art of G.S. Sohan Singh*, G.S. Sohan Singh Artist, Punjabee Press & Tej Press, Amritsar, p.11

Artist and his younger son Satpal Singh Danish has followed his father in keeping alive the family tradition of painting of *Sikh art*. G.S. Sohan Singh breathed his last on 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1999 at the ripe age of 84 years.<sup>140</sup>

G.S. Sohan Singh after tasting considerable professional success in commercial art projects, trained his attention towards the painting of Sikh history, as this subject provided him a personal creative satisfaction as the episodes from Sikh history which he had studied in various books kept on egging his soul to devote his time to this work which was to him a source of inspiration and a sacred task. He created some magnificent paintings in his truly classical and appealing style as he had inherited the love of designing intricate jewellery items and objects with floral and geometrical pattern from his father who was a renowned decorator and Fresco painter in Golden Temple. G.S. Sohan Singh deftly utilizes these skills in his painting, which was a culmination of European and Indian classical painting. Due to this enchanting quality, he had been successful in carving a niche for himself in *Sikh Calendar art* world and lively colours added the additional charm to his works.

A painting of **Guru Gobind Singh on horseback** (Plate-339) and a falcon perched on his gloved hand became an iconic picture which is deeply etched in the minds of the viewers. This painting was done in 1954 in oil on canvas medium and is in the collection of S.S. Hitkari, New Delhi, rendered in simplistic style yet the portrait depicts very powerfully Gurus intrinsic personality, his thoughts and ideology. His face has an expression of divine solemnity and the softness of a child and his eyes have an expression of determination.<sup>141</sup> This painting which is rich in design value clearly shows even the minutest ornamental details in jewellery and embroidery embellished on the costumes of the Guru. The horse gently treads on a path surrounded by deep green foliage and

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140 **Talwar, Rashmi**; March 16, 2001, *Tribute to renowned artist*, The Tribune

141 **Daljeet, Dr.**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.56

is punctuated by flowers and herbs. Guru's eyes are set on a distant object in a gesture of a visionary and there is a royal persona to his erect posture, projecting a sense of absolute control of mind and body. Using the method of colour perspective, the artist has effectively added depth to the picture. The background is filled with a large mass of rising clouds in soft pale grey colours which reflects the filtered sunlight. The flapping of the falcon added sense of movement and a touch of realism. The painting is an example of a well controlled masterly disposition and its soul radiated strength and valour. Though there is pleasing play of light and shade which heightens the aesthetic value of the painting.

Another masterpiece done on the theme of **The Bounteous Guru Har Krishan** (Plate-340) the sixth Guru of the Sikhs. This work was done in 1976, is in the collection of Baba Baghel Singh Museum, Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, New Delhi. Guru Har Krishan was born of Guru Har Rai and Mata Sulakhni in 1656, succeeded to Gurugaddi only when five years of age. He was exceptionally intelligent and wise for his age. He was able to instruct and guide his Sikhs to resolve their issues and remove their doubts and possessed such spiritual strength that he could lead his Sikhs to salvation. He passed away when only eight years old yet he made his life and thus Sikhism, the highest ideal of service of sufferers, the seed of which Guru Arjan Dev had laid in constructing the 'Leprosarium' at Taran Taran, thereby declaring that service to mankind is the highest divinity.<sup>142</sup> When Guru Har Krishan came to Delhi, the city was then in the grip of an epidemic. He went all over the city in narrow lanes and by lanes he gave succour to all in distress without any discrimination of caste, creed and religion. His very presence and the divine look would rid the patients of their

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142 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.48

sufferings.<sup>143</sup> In this painting, the artist has depicted Guru Har Krishan seated in a palanquin and a large crowd of his devotees seeking remedy to their sufferings, gathered around the Guru. The Bounteous Child Guru Har Krishan is shown blessing them with something or the other. The picture has been composed in intelligent and calculated formation of figures placing the Guru in the central space and thus the overall impact is dramatized and moves the eye effortlessly from one object to the other in right sequence and the impact it leaves on the viewer is overwhelming and it soothes the tension in one consciousness. The hallmark of the painting besides being its humanistic theme is appropriately earmarked space, where the essence of the painting that is the service of lepers is placed on top of corner on the left hand side, suitably merged in a subtle manner which does not disturb the balance of the painting. His dimly lit picture lends a spiritual aura to the painting where each figure is engaged in some activity and the animated expressions on the faces of the figures and their postures highlight the narrative aspect in lucid manner. Artist's eye for detail and mastery of ornamental objects is adequately visible. The whole picture gently moves the beholder. Though the picture is draped in classical Italian Renaissance style, the elements of Sikh culture such as costumes, headgears and the skin tones of the figures make it an interesting specimen of *Sikh art*.

Taking inspiration from the *Janam Sakhis*, G.S. Sohan Singh narrated the episode of Guru Nanak's life, wherein a cobra shades child Guru Nanak from the bright sun and an astonished Rai Bular alongwith his servants and the villagers, looks aghast at this unusual sight. This illustrated three-in-one calendar painting on the theme of **Sarp Chhaya** (Plate-341) engulfs the painting into a dream-like spectacle and there is a hint of surrealism in controlled manner as the artist had

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143 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharam Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.25

devised a novel method to design his painting in amazing geometrical divisions and such compositions narrate three different episodes in one picture. The unity of the painting is achieved by merging the three forms into a decorative panorama. Infact such stylization appeals to the masses, as it carries the message of the painting in lyrical concept. G.S. Sohan Singh was perhaps the first *Calendar art* artist, who understood the intricate elements and components of a visually pleasing work which was capable of attracting the attention of the viewer and on the other hand, it effectively carried the message in simple visual narration. In top left circular section, Nanak is sitting in the lap of his mother, a bright halo surrounds his head and a visitor to his house is surprised at this spectacle. In the second circle in the right hand side, the artist narrates the episode of Panja Sahib where Guru Nanak stopped a large stone boulder with his hand.

The artist's contribution to *Sikh art* is tremendous, as he has given to the Sikh world such fabulous specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* which adorn the walls of a large number of homes and business establishments. A rare calendar depicts **Bal Gobind Rai**<sub>(Plate-342)</sub> Guru Gobind Singh dressed in extremely regal looking clothes with a *kalgi* and a small turban, sitting in the lap of a Queen who longed to have a son like him. Bal Gobind Rai detecting her wish went and intentionally sat in her lap like her own son, to fulfill her desire and ate from her hands.<sup>144</sup> In each *calendar art* painting, the artist has time and again demonstrated his control over the subject and the image he perceived in this is brought out in such a fabulous presentation that one is compelled to share his vision and shower praise and admiration. His work was never rigid in compositional aspect and there is a well channelized flow of artistic energy. An added element in his art is the inscription of the whole story in simple words, giving a cue to the viewer to

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144 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.55

understand the content. The usage of such inscriptions in the paintings goes back to the times of illustrated manuscripts and *Janam Sakhis*, where the artists for the benefit of viewers, gave some details of the characters and the place where the scenes being executed. This quality increased the popularity of such kind of work and thus increased its circulation through the production of colourful calendars. Indeed it was a unique device to reach to the masses.

Another rare theme attempted by this artist, portrays the **Avatardharan of Guru Gobind Singh** (Plate-343) the Celebration of Birth of Guru Gobind Singh. Here Guru Tegh Bahadur is shown distributing alms to the people and Sikh followers are engaged in distributing clothes, sweets and other valuable items like coins etc. G.S. Sohan Singh was an ardent Sikh and possessed the humanistic qualities of humility, dedication and hard work. He was a frontrunner in propagation of the message of Sikhism through his intricate and absorbing paintings which highlighted the messages of the Gurus and the duties of the devotees- their selfless service and an ever ready mental resolve to face the oppressors. Dwelling on this subject, he painted **Guru Gobind Singh's call to the Sikhs** (Plate-344) which reads as '*Hum Is Kaaj Jagat Mein Aye*'. In this powerful painting, he urged his Sikh warriors to fight for justice and never shirk their duty in laying down their lives in the cause of truth and liberation of humanity. The tenth Sikh Guru is shown urging the Sikhs by raising his arm towards the sky in a valiant pose and in the background the outline of Anandpur Sahib with Nishan Sahib is visible. In the foreground, brave Sikhs are raising their hands in unison showing the solidarity with the Guru.

During Guru Nanak's *Udasis* (Religious travels), he came across a horrible cannibal named 'Kauda' who used to kidnap travelers and cooked them alive in large *karaha* (wok) to eat them.<sup>145</sup> G.S. Sohan Singh's powerful visual

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145 **Gill, Ranjit Singh**; 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.58

narration of **Guru Nanak's encounter with cannibal Kauda** (Plate-345) has been illustrated in a dramatic presentation. The whole scene has been enacted with an emphasis on flawless depiction in well controlled compositional balance and there is a marriage of real and surreal elements. The overall visual impact is both interesting and self-explanatory and has a pleasing touch in colour scheme especially in the background where snow-clad heavenly mountains are glowing in the light of spiritualism, as beams of light from 'Ik-Onkar' placed on top of the composition. In the forefront, ferocious looking Kauda is shown carrying Mardana in his powerful arms, to immerse him in the boiling oil which is being heated by swirling flames. Nanak through the power of his discourse changed this cannibal and he promised to abandon his evil acts. The picture radiates with a pious and peaceful expression on Nanak's face. His calm persona overwhelms the cannibal and he becomes man of peace. The picture projects the victory of the good over the evil and has all the stunning features of an emotive and expressive calendar. It is truthfully narrated in straightforward approach without indulging in aesthetic complexities and the viewer instantly relates to the episode without confusion and doubt.

**Guru Nanak's visit to Kuarudesh** (Plate-346) While passing through 'Kuarudesh' during his *Udasis*, Guru Nanak came to know that this kingdom is inhabited by enchanting Female Sorceresses, who adopt the images of musicians and dancers to entice the travelers. They possessed the power of transforming men to animals, to ascertain this practice Guru Nanak asked Mardana to go to them to see what happens. These beautiful Female Sorceresses turned Mardana into a sheep with their magical powers, he begged them with folded hands to forgive him and turn him into a man again. But they laughed and danced in merriment ignoring his wails. Guru Nanak had to step in and he defeated them by



the power of the 'Divine Name' and they were forced to admit their defeat.<sup>146</sup> The people turned into animals were returned to human species. This episode narrates the slavery of man to the enchanting vices and temptations, thereby becomes an animal. Liberation and salvation by remembering the Name of the Almighty prevents his degradation. The philosophical message behind this episode stresses upon the control of one's heart and mind to protect him from succumbing to these temptations. This page from the *Janam Sakhis* is elaborately illustrated by the artist in beautifully rendered disposition. The whole atmosphere has been captured justifying the physical appearance of the wicked sorceresses, attired in magnificent clothes with flowing locks of hair. The clouds enhance the mystery and deceptive elements in the painting which attracts the attention of the viewer. Here the Queen of the sorceresses, wearing a bright red *dupatta* bedecked with glittering *tila sitara* is shown in an interactive posture with Guru Nanak, who with the gesture of his hand explains the futility of such acts and instructs them to shed such deceptive behaviour. They seem to be spellbound with his words of wisdom and agreed to become normal human beings. The whole concept of the story is inscribed on the clouds in simple Gurmukhi script as the rays of light being emitted from the word 'Ik-Onkar' dispels the darkness of ignorance. Such thoughtful calendars by artist G.S. Sohan Singh have carried the message of Guru Nanak to the masses and have recorded the historical events in appealing visual stylization. There is a bounty of theatrical expression and mannerism in bold, easy to intercept narration as it is being enacted on the stage. Colours are mostly vibrant and do not recede into the atmosphere but come alive in attractive interaction with the viewer.

G.S. Sohan Singh, a stalwart of *Sikh Calendar art* in an unparalleled decorative and ornamental calendar, has illustrated his creative dynamism in a

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146 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.18

painting 'titled **Satguru Nanak Pargatya Miti Dhundh Jag Chanan Hoya** (Plate-347) a work rich in classical as well as intricately embellished and technically sound unique composition with illuminating oval and circular frames, narrating the events pertaining to the life of Guru Nanak Dev. The main circular frame depicts Guru Nanak in blessing gesture and below this frame is an oval floral frame which houses the sacred Gurdwara Nanakana Sahib. In the first small circle on top left side, the episode of 'Sarp Chhaya' is depicted. The composition is divided by two more circles to show the events of 'Sacha Sauda' and Nanak drawing milk out of Bhai Lalo's bread and blood from Malik Bhago's bread. The two circles at the bottom on left and right side depict portraits of two sons of Guru Nanak- Baba Sri Chand and Baba Lakshmi Chand. Near these circles the words 'Nirankari Darshan' are inscribed on ornamental background. The painting is mostly in primary colours, visually very appealing as there is stress on vibrant colours and iconic stylization punctuated by the pattern of flowers and leaves, to enhance the overall appeal of a calendar. This profusely decorated specimen of *calendar art* amply demonstrates its capacity to enchant and carry the divine messages of Guru Nanak in a befitting manner which is always the basic purpose of an art work of this genre.

G.S. Sohan Singh true to his love for narrating the enlightening episodes from the lives of the Sikh Gurus, has created another calendar projecting the importance of dedicated service to the Guru and the need for humility and meditation by illustrating a page from the life of **Guru Amar Dass** (Plate-348), the third Sikh Guru, who despite of his advancing age, served the Guru with utmost dedication and who used to fetch water everyday in early morning from a far off *baoli* at Sri Goindwal Sahib. Here in this painting, Guru Amar Dass is shown filling the pitcher with the water for his Guru so that he could bathe. The omnipresent symbol of 'Ik-Onkar' is always respectfully placed on top of the calendar and underneath the inscription '*Bhale Amar Dass Gun Tere Upma Tohe*

*Ban Awe*' is placed. In the sequence, Guru Amar Dass is shown carrying the pitcher of water on his head. The centre is decorated with floral patterns and bouquets of flowers, surrounded by the circular floral frame where the Guru himself is shown in a contemplative mood, slightly reclining on a *takia*. In the next illustration, Guru Amar Dass is shown meditating. He is standing and holding a loop of a rope, as he used to follow this meditative stance so that his attention is not distracted. Gurdwara Goindwal Sahib is presented here with two 'Nishan Sahibs'. The messages of Sikhism carried through these fascinating calendars, deserve appreciation as this genre has played its powerful role in the promotion of Sikhism and its ideologies in very effective manner by using visual concepts which are charged with spiritualism and divinity. In this painting, G.S. Sohan Singh has paid a tribute to Guru Amar Dass as he was an epitome of humility, kindness and an unwavering devotion. Performing his sacred duty of promotion of *Sikh art* and history through the medium of colourful calendars, G.S. Sohan Singh has devoted his attention to Guru specific calendars. In these calendars, he has illustrated the relevant and significant episodes from the lives of respective Gurus with their iconic portraits in the centre of the calendar, adding an ornamental and stylized look to such calendars. A prominent feature in all such calendars is the written word that is condensed details about the historic relevance of the painting which provides the viewer direct reference. Infact these works are illustrated episodes relating to the Gurus. Equal emphasis is laid on the essence and the message of a particular work. Thus their popularity can be gauged from the fact that viewers adore them and bow their heads in prayer as a bond is achieved between them instantly which is the hallmark of a good calendar.

Continuing with the process of creating fascinating calendars, the one which portrays the supreme sacrifice and bravery shown by **Baba Deep Singh Shaheed** (Plate-349) who attained martyrdom, demands attention for truthfully

bringing alive the deep insight of this great warrior, who laid down his life for protecting the sanctity of Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. He kept on fighting the devilish enemies who were involved in the sacrilege of this holy place. During the fierce fight, his head got severed from his body yet he kept on fighting holding his severed head on his palm and a heavy sword in the other hand till he reached the *parikarma* of Sri Darbar Sahib and offered his head there and breathed his last.<sup>147</sup> The whole episode underlines the spirit of valour infused in the Sikhs by the tenth Sikh Guru, who never showed their backs in the hour of adversity. A sense of pride envelops a viewer looking at this calendar where **Baba Deep Singh** (Plate-350), the brave warrior is shown in full armoury like armlets, metallic breast shields, *Katar* (dagger), axe, *Kirpan* (sword), *Kada* (iron bracelet), *Chakkars*, *Kamarkasa* (waist-cloth), *Khanda* (double edged sword) and protective shields on arms and legs in a charging warrior pose. The battle ground is littered with the severed heads and bodies of the enemies and there is stream of blood spread on the ground. Blood dripping from the *Khanda* sends a shiver in the spine as the whole scene reverberates with roaring war cries of the Sikhs who carry the 'Nishan Sahib'. Typical of his style, there is a richness of colours and the projection of the main character stands out dwelling on the heroic content.

'*Tumre Greh Pragtega Jodha Jan Ko Bal Gun Kino Na Soda*' meaning 'In your home will appear a great warrior, whose power shall no one tame' were the words of Baba Buddha to Mata Ganga who used to bring food for him everyday, while he used to graze his cattle in the fields. He was so pleased with her humility that he gave her a blessing that very soon Waheguru- shall fulfill her longing for a son. Mata Ganga gave birth to Guru Hargobind who changed the course of Sikh history and added the concept of Miri Piri in Sikhism. This is the subject matter of a calendar by G.S. Sohan Singh, illustrated in a very appealing manner. The complete atmosphere presented in this calendar shows **Baba**

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147     **McLeod, W.H;** 1995, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, The Scarecrow Press, London, p.73

**Buddha accepting food from Mata Ganga** (Plate-351) who is accompanied by another lady. This is a remarkable depiction of the scenic elements like the hut of Baba Buddha covered in the shade of various trees, plants and a few cows and buffaloes are shown grazing in the background, which also gives a peep of some snow-clad mountains and a pure blue sky. On left side top circle, there is a picture of an infant embraced by Mata Ganga. On the right side circle, Gurdwara Baba Buddha is visible. By adding essential elements of a village, the artist has illustrated a revolving *hult* (Persian wheel) and the presence of a well.

Taking inspiration from an illustrated manuscript in possession of his family, G.S. Sohan Singh duly analyzed its contents and was inspired to paint the painting of **Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia** (Plate-352), who was a leader of 'Ramgarhia Misl' whenever there was a threat to the Sikh Panth; he was the first to accept the challenge. Qazi Nur Mohammad writes that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia were very close friends and used to fight and win battles under one flag. The later had his surname after the Ramgarhia Fort, which was built in defence of Sri Darbar Sahib. Historian Khushwaqt Rai writes that he was a highly affable, intelligent and morally upright person.<sup>148</sup> This painting done in 1961, brought laurels to the artist in the form of first prize at the Ramgarhia Federation Conference Kharagpur. The painting speaks volumes of the creative talent G.S. Sohan Singh had in his artistic armour and aptly describes the scene of Maharaja Jassa Singh Ramgarhia alongwith his hundreds of warriors attacking the Red Fort, which was ultimately won by him alongwith Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The scene of this pitched battle narrated in a great detail that one can see highly motivated brave Sikhs in their battle costumes, armed with glistening swords, are shown in action that besides being visually powerful, pulsates with the resolve and blessings of the Ten Sikh Gurus which they carried in their hearts

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148 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.58

and minds. The central figure of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia wielding a sword and riding a white horse bedecked with ornamental embellishments is a true picture of a motivated and fearless warrior. Storm like atmosphere in the background highlights the scene of this battle.

The artist has left us with memorable paintings and *calendar art* works as the artist on the very onset of his career, had envisioned the need and importance of a genre of art which may be commercially viable. He had successfully launched his career and pursued it with diligence and dedication. In the world of *Sikh Calendar art*, artist G.S. Sohan Singh can be considered as one of the foremost pioneers, his style of painting found innumerable admirers and he virtually laid the foundation of mass production of Sikh religious and historical calendars, being a forerunning commercial artist, he was well versed in the art of reproduction and commercialization of this genre of art.

In the year 1914 a bright child was born in the house of Sardar Gurdit Singh and Daya Kaur at village Jartauli, district Ludhiana, who was destined to paint the true essence of Gurbani, Sikh history and culture in such meaningful manner that perhaps no other artist had ever gone so deep into the fathomless ocean of wisdom embodied in the words of Sikh Gurus, their lives and their missions. His father was an engineer by profession who was employed in the East Bengal Railways and his mother passed away during his early childhood. Thus the young sensitive boy was brought up under the benign gaze and protection of his grandfather Baba Daya Singh, a practicing *Hakeem* who was known for his kindness, generosity and spiritual wisdom. Due to his grandfather's long stinted service to the poor and the suffering masses living in nearby villages, young **Trilok Singh Chitrakar** (Plate-353) learnt the first lessons of service to mankind which is one of the basic tenets of Sikhism from his grandfather. Thus this young child was initiated into the study of scriptures and Gurbani at an early age. His deep understanding of this subject is reflected in his

expressive paintings which are based in moving narration and remarkable expression, thereby vividly capturing the very soul of the Sikh religious subjects. His philosophical exposition has brought out the myriad manifestations of the Sikh religion, ethos and values.<sup>149</sup>

Trilok Singh passed his Middle School Examination from Khalsa High School, Kila Raipur where he was very popular amongst his class fellows as a bright painter.<sup>150</sup> He devoted most of his time to the subject of drawing and painting. He used to be deeply engrossed in drawing and illustrating dancing peacocks and galloping deer besides figures of men and women- trees, flowers, huts and mountains on his notebooks and his classmates always encircled him in excitement and prodded him to illustrate their notebooks too, he enjoyed this task immensely. Another aspect which improved his drawing of plants, flowers, trees and herbs, was due to his closed contact with the nature, when his grandfather who was a famous *Hakeem* sent him to gather medicinal plants and herbs to make medicines for his patients. While picking and gathering these plants, the young artist would enjoy copying their shapes and textures and thus he perfected his drawing to such an extent that he could draw a particular variety of a medicinal plant from imagination thereafter.<sup>151</sup> These practical lessons enriched and sharpened his artistic skills which were later on used in many of his works. He composed wonderful paintings with a balanced and realistic rendering. His compositions always came alive due to his deep interest in nature and a resounding knowledge of the balance of forms.

After the schooling, Trilok Singh shifted to Assam where his father had brought a large chunk of land during his service in the railways. Here Trilok

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149 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.108

150 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.65

151 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.108

Singh learnt Assamese, Bengali and English languages and he tasted the exposure to fantastic styles of painting of many artists living in this area. This indeed was a turning point in his artistic career. He equipped himself with various styles of painting and tried his hand on water-colours, oil colours, tempera and sketching in a truly free manner. Here he attained the experience of a mechanical engineer. His father Sardar Gurdit Singh witnessed his keen and dedicated interest in painting and resolved to send him to the most popular Punjabi artist S.G. Thakur Singh, who was practicing in Calcutta at that time. Here in Calcutta, Trilok Singh learnt the fine nuances of art from the renowned Bengali artist Hamendra Mazumdar and created some extraordinary paintings.<sup>152</sup> After attaining considerable professional skills and control over academic work, he established his art studio-cum-workshop namely '*Trilok Shilpa*' at Calcutta, Assam, Shillong and Meerut. At Meerut, he also worked as an Instructor in Art Shop of the 17 E.T.C. Meerut Cantonment, where he used to teach the art of drawing and painting to the army recruits. This was the period when his true artistic talent was exposed and he was instrumental in creating a large body of his works and relished the taste of name and fame.<sup>153</sup>

During the period of 1932 to 1943, artist Trilok Singh was at his zenith in the world of painting and this period saw the creation of scores of wonderful paintings done by him on various subjects but the struggle for freedom movement acted as a magnet and a catalyst for him and he diverted his artistic skills and strengths in painting the pictures full of patriotism and national pride. This was his solemn contribution in the freedom struggle which was appreciated by the masses. After seeing his paintings drenched in the fervour of patriotism Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru remarked that '*We are proud that you are one of the*

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152 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.66

153 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.109



*most useful painters of India who have put dedicated efforts in the cause of India's freedom struggle through your art.'* His sensitive heart was moved by the sad happenings in the Punjab during the freedom struggle movement as the people of Punjab were witnessing a social and political unrest of worst kind. There was repression and chaos prevailing in this region, which affected a large number of young freedom fighters who were bewildered at the injustices and mindless atrocities being meted out to them by the Britishers. The society as a whole was depressed and engulfed in gloom and hopelessness. He came to Punjab and resolved to kindle the spirit of freedom and fight injustices through his art so that the seeds of hope are planted in the hearts of the people. In order to instill a sense of national pride in the minds of the youth, he wholeheartedly devoted his time in creating paintings oozing with nationalism and freedom. Sardar Niranjana Singh Talib, the then President of Punjab Pradesh Congress in 1935 praised his work and regional and national leaders engaged in the freedom struggle showered appreciation and applauded his efforts. His vision was broadened and he created the paintings on subjects like Kashmir issue, Tibet problem, War with China and Pakistan, Victory of Bangladesh and Indian peace policy.<sup>154</sup> In the nutshell, he abhorred wars and aggressions. There is a glimpse of peace, harmony and joy in his works which advocates international brotherhood necessary for a peaceful world, where violence has no place and all nations live in perfect harmony without fear. This period projects him as a 'Peacenik' and a 'Nationalist' to the core.

In spite of all these above mentioned creations, the strength of his real art was based on the tenets of Sikhism. Being a painter of Sikh religion and history he always believed that his main task in life was to spread the light of the divinity and spiritualism enshrined in Sikh scriptures and Gurbani. He was an ardent

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154 **Rani, Dr. Saroj;** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.660

believer in the essence of Sikh religion which always propagated peaceful co-existence, universal brotherhood, importance of service to mankind and dignity of labour. These are the hallmark ideals which inspired his innermost thoughts and he painted the paintings on Sikh subjects as a form of his true devotion and his sacred sole aim of life. The main source of inspiration for him, in his own words was the symbolism present in the form of imagery in Gurbani and he believed that there was a treasure of divine thoughts, which need to be transported to the canvas through his brush. He strove hard to accomplish this spiritual task throughout his life. This artist fully understood his duty towards the upliftment of society so that he could tackle many unsavory practices and traditions by way of his thoughtful and truthful depiction of preaching of the great Sikh Gurus. He practiced art for the betterment of a harmonious and healthy society and took it as a great weapon to fight the evils of corruption, dishonesty, indiscipline, evils and menaces of drugs and intoxication besides the social biases and discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, religion and gender.<sup>155</sup>

Trilok Singh once remarked that the artist who influenced his works were many and foremost among these artists was Sardar Lahora Singh who painted the portraits of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and Hari Singh Nalwa. He was equally impressed with the works of Sri Ram, whose paintings were printed in a magazine called 'Phulwari'. The other important artists whose works were admired by him are historical paintings done by Master Gurdit Singh, Sardar Jodh Singh and Sardar Kirpal Singh. He owes his gratitude to Sardar Ganga Singh for his excellent contribution towards the Botanical drawings and paintings and to S.G. Thakur Singh for architectural masterpieces. He confessed his admiration for mysterious, lyrical and philosophical paintings of Allah Baksh. He had learnt

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155 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.109-110

a great deal from the drawings of Leonardo Da Vinci in execution of mechanical devices and inventions. His most intense and innermost feelings and creative urges are influenced by the Almighty's bounty of elements such as the sun, the moon, the rivers, the mountains, endless variety of flowers, leaves, animals and birds, which always surround his senses, in appreciation of these natural bounties, he offered his humble creative homage to the absolute creator- the God. He was always absorbed in understanding the mysteries and surges of mysticism, which stirred his impulses. A true nature lover, he found solace in silence and meditation. Sardar Trilok Singh can be called a thinking artist, who had attained a grasp over clear perceptions after deeply studying the works of Bhai Gurdas.<sup>156</sup> Words of wisdom which were immensely useful in real life were adopted by this artist for the cause of social justice and fight against dark and gloomy evils of ignorance and prejudices. He took upon himself to uproot the causes of social evil, which were spreading like epidemics in the atmosphere of ignorance.

The literary works of Waris Shah, Firozdin Sharaf, Charan Singh Shaheed, Munsha Singh Dukhi and Hira Singh Dard provided him the additional impetus to strengthen his resolve to use art as a source of purifying the social and cultural set up, which was embroiled in the very traditions and practices, which divided and weakened the society. In broad spectrum, his works can be classified in following categories: The first and foremost subject dear to his heart was the visual description of the wisdom enshrined in the Gurbani which provided him a rare opportunity to explain in visuals the soul and the metaphors used in this great literary work. Another equally absorbing subject for this great artist was the narration of the events contained in the *Janam Sakhis* and here he excelled in visualization and compositional aspects and provided an aura of divinity to these works. He was also fascinated by the folklores and eternal tales of Punjabi lovers

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156 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.110

like that of Heer Ranjha, Sasi Punnu, Mirza Sahiba, Sohni Mahiwal, Luna and others. In this series the important painting that comes to mind is titled '*Heer Di Kahani Tasveer Di Zubani*'. These moving and expressive paintings found instant admiration from the viewers. Yet the other interest which captured his attention was the paintings of Punjabi Cultural heritage and traditions. In these engrossing paintings, he projected the day to day life of the 'Land of Five Rivers', emphasizing on folk dances, customs, traditions, rituals and ceremonies. He was spellbound by the natural beauty of simple Punjabi villages and rustic surroundings. The most appealing works in this section are titled '*Dharan Kaddiyan Naaran Dudh Ridkadiyan Mutiyaran*', '*Bhangra Paunde Jat*', 'Maidens thumping the grounds with the powerful steps of *Giddha*', 'Individual paintings of workers, peasants, cart pullers' and 'Simple folk engaged in agricultural and daily rural chores' attracted his attention as he loved them immensely.<sup>157</sup> Infact the soul of Punjab resides in his paintings; he has hardly left any subject related to traditional Punjab which could not come under his gaze.

The other benchmark contribution of this sensitive artist is the paintings of Sikh Gurus, wherein he always added a new dimension to the work after carefully studying the qualities and historical aspects attributed to a particular Sikh Guru during his lifetime. This generated a spellbinding artistic vision to a painting, he used some elements in the background which were not earlier noticed or painted by other artists. Being a true Sikh and a patriot, he always took it as a sacred task to paint pictures of patriotic ambience and through these paintings, he urged the fellow citizens to honour nationalism. He exhorted the people to come forward to offer their energies for the upliftment of our country. He emerged as a successful commercial artist due to his skillful rendering and painting in vibrant and variegated styles and techniques. He worked for

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157 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.110-115

Department of Languages, Punjab as State Artist and designed and illustrated scores of subjective and imaginative book covers and illustrations, which are aesthetically rich and appealing. The most prominent contribution in this department during his tenure of twenty years is the creation of designs and layouts for 'Dictionary Panj Jilda'. He also illustrated 'Punjabi World Dictionary' and 'Dictionary for children'. Not resting at his artistic laurels, he devoted his time to literary works also and wrote articles, essays and stories on a variety of subjects in popular magazines like 'Punjabi Duniya' and 'Jan Sahitya'.<sup>158</sup> The book 'Duna Laha' written by him is one of his remarkable works, which contains thirteen essays on 'Jin Loin', 'Bhula Bula', 'Boli Te Tuli De Mahan Chitrakar Tagore', 'Marjiuda Te Chanan Munara Chakravarty' and 'Sade Pyare Neta Jawahar Lal Nehru Di Wasiyat'.<sup>159</sup>

Performing his duties as a social reformer, he created magnificent paintings and calendars on the necessity of social reforms in the society so that it can get rid off the diseased mentality and the people may breathe easy through fresh and progressive thought processes. The visually powerful work created in this connection is on the **Significance of respect to the elders and parents** (Plate-354) based on Bhai Gurdas's stanzas (37-13). Here he has attempted to impress upon the -newly-weds to pay due respect to their parents and serve them with devotion and earnestness. Yet another painting titled **Sarabi Da Maut Nu Sada** (Plate-355) delivering the message of evil effects of drinking on the youth is visually vocal and powerful using the symbolism of fire and destruction contained in a peg of wine. Here he extols the youth to shun this ever engulfing fire which has the power to burn and destroy everything. A symbol of snake is both shockingly eye-catching and projects dangerous venom contained in a bottle

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158 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.66-67

159 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.116

of wine. The symbol of skeleton denotes imminent death, here is shown inviting the drunkard to the grave and the impact of this deadly potion is being borne by the family and children of a drunkard. They are shown wailing and crying inconsolably. In a similar style, yet another calendar titled **Jhutha Mad Mool Na Pijayi** (Plate-356) meaning- '*This is false intoxication never drink it.* Though these works may seem to be simplistic but they carry a useful message for the youth who indulged in intoxication and ruin their lives.

Artist Trilok Singh never hankered after name, fame and laurels. His admirers who are found in great numbers, have devoted an entire large room for his works in a beautiful museum at 'Sangriya Mandi' in Rajasthan. Besides his collections in Central Sikh Library and Museum at Amritsar, Moti Bagh Patiala, Baradari Palace at Patiala and Private Art Gallery Sardar Gurmukh Singh & Sons at Ludhiana. His paintings are found in permanent collection of many private art collectors in England, America and Canada. As his style was appropriate for *Calendar art*, Sardar Gurmukh Singh & Sons, Ludhiana reproduced a large number of multi-coloured calendars printed on offset. These calendars are immensely popular in many countries where his Punjabi admirers have settled.<sup>160</sup> His grip over versatility is visible in all styles in innumerable calendars done on varied topics and he had attained a mark of excellence in every style. His many admirers believe, he was a true diamond who could be fixed in any precious metal yet he always retained his individualistic values and luster.

A painting titled **Duniya Te Asi** was awarded Silver Medal in the Ramgarhia All India Federation, Kharagpur (Bengal) at the tender age of seventeen years. He participated in prestigious art exhibitions such as All India Ramgarhia Federation (1931), All India Ramgarhia Federation, Kharagpur (1932), All India Fine Arts association (1933), All India Fine Arts, Calcutta

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160 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.133

(1935), Fine Arts Painting Center, Assam (1935), All India Arts and Industrial Exhibition, Patiala (1952) where he was awarded a gold medal, Ramgarhia College, Phagwara (1955), Gram Udyog Vidhyapeeth Museum's Annual Exhibition (1956), Punjabi University, Patiala (1967) and Chitralok Mandal, Patiala (1973). In recognition of his artistic merits and excellent contribution towards fine art Giani Zail Singh, the then President of India awarded him cash prize of Rs.5000 and named a street in Patiala after his name as 'Chitra-lok Street'.<sup>161</sup>

Presenting a poetical expression to his paintings artist Trilok Singh perceived his paintings in an extraordinary vision which borders on surrealism as symbols used in his works are unusual and visually very powerful. He strived hard to impact the viewer with a fresh vision and imagery as he had ample control over his medium and could express his views through fresh and aesthetical vocabulary. In his calendar titled **Dharam Chalawan, Sant Ubharan-Dusht Saban Ko Mool Uparan** (Plate-357) depicts Guru Gobind Singh appearing from the skies with a sword in one hand and a *simarini* of beads in his another hand. Mankind is shown being engulfed in roaring and thundering waves and a ship is shown caught amidst encircling torrents. Images of death and destruction are incorporated in such horrifying magnitude that the viewer is compelled to ponder over the reign of terror, perpetuated by the Queen of the Death against the saints. This is a very evocative and expressive calendar which arrests the imagination of the viewers and justifiably explains the message of the Guru in a credible manner.

In other painting titled **Bhai Jaita carrying the holy head of Guru Tegh Bahadur** (Plate-358), Bhai Jaita is shown amidst a strong storm surrounded by wild foliage and lost in a deep forest, where horrifying snakes are swirling around in

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161 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.132-133

the bushes and thorns are piercing his feet. Bhai Jaita is calmly holding the holy head of the Guru, wrapped in a cloak protecting it from the vagaries of nature. An inner turmoil is surrounding him and Trilok Singh has painted the trees and tall grass bending under the mighty thrust of the winds against his body. This is a very moving calendar and the artist has been successful in capturing the mood of this episode in befitting manner.

An appealing calendar on altogether different subject reveals his love for the environment and saving it from destruction. Here in this painting titled **Trees as Protector** (Plate-359) shows his love for symbolism and a saint is shown protecting a tree where birds and animals have found their nests and its large roots are embedded in the soil. A man carrying a pitcher on his head and an axe on his shoulder is shown approaching this tree in a deep forest where animals and birds of different species are running about in a scare to save themselves from this person. There is a saintly expression in the execution of this painting in soft warm greens, ochres and browns. All his paintings and calendars point towards his personality as ‘True disciple of Sikhism’, a ‘True Patriot’ and a ‘True Reformer of society’.<sup>162</sup> He channelised his art and creative skills towards the upliftment of mankind.

**Jaswant Singh** (Plate-360) can be considered the first and foremost surrealist and muralist due to his surrealistic stylization of paintings and with masterly handling of large mural-type works of art.<sup>163</sup> Being a quite and introvert personality, he devoted more time on the study of his subject and created artworks which speak of his high-end dexterity in the art of subjective painting and unmatched aesthetic appeal. He believed in the dictum of less talk and more work and religiously attended to his painting projects, devoting long hours as he

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162 **Chitrakar, Ajajib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.114

163 **Randhawa, M.S**; 1971, *Portraits of Guru Nanak by contemporary artists, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.5



was a perfectionist to the core. He always thought the emerging artwork would be well tuned and of high aesthetic value. A master of the medium of oil painting, he has to his credit ten large murals in the size of 12”x15” on the theme of ‘Evolution of Man’, adorning the walls of the Museum of Evolution in Chandigarh. This is perhaps the largest project done by a painter of *Sikh Calendar art* and it was offered to him by late Dr. Mohinder Singh Randhawa I.C.S., the then Chief Commissioner of Chandigarh, who himself was a great connoisseur of art and culture.<sup>164</sup>

In the adjacent building of this large museum, his twelve paintings of ‘*Raagas and Raginis*’ done in 1967, are in permanent collection of Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, which are breathtakingly fascinating and precious. These present a rare example of his depiction of the *Raagas* in vibrant colours and dreamlike symbols, aptly describing his love for surrealistic painting. These thought provoking and immensely captivating paintings are visually so bold and strong that they have the power of a magnet to pull the viewer. This is the result of his deep study of the *Raagas* as he was an accomplished musician and enjoyed playing *Sarangi*. He fully understood the fine nuances of Indian Classical music and had the capacity to visualize the *Raagas* in such wonderful forms. His close association with Sangeet Samrat- Bade Ghulam Ali Khan further deepened his sensitivity to music.<sup>165</sup> Similar large murals are also part of the collection of Mohinder Singh Randhawa Library, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. These were commissioned by Dr. M.S. Randhawa, when he was also holding the charge of Vice-Chancellor of Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana.<sup>166</sup>

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164 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.83

165 **Singh, Prem**; 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings* (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.3-4

166 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.83

Sardar Jaswant Singh was born in 1918 at Rawalpindi, now in Pakistan.<sup>167</sup> He was a self-taught artist and devoted his time to study the works of great masters and popular painters of his times. He was greatly influenced by the works of Allah Baksh, Abdul Rehman Chughtai, Sarfraz, Babu Balraj, Roshan Lal and Ishwar Chitrakar and they were amongst his best friends.<sup>168</sup> He started his early career as a commercial artist in 1936 and established his art studio in Lahore, the cultural capital of Punjab. Here he attained competence in doing signboard jobs and he had a flair for design work and illustrations, which provided him steady income but his heart was mainly in creative painting. He found time on Sundays to go out of the city and paint natural scenes in water colours and oil colours. This gave him creative satisfaction and broadened his vision as a painter of natural scenes alongwith figure drawing and other compositional variations of landscapes, cityscapes, fields and forests. This way, he attained considerable dexterity in handling all sorts of projects, be it book design, magazine illustrations, banner painting, scene painting, portraiture, lettering and designing in Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi and English. Soon he surpassed his compatriots in the field of commercial art and became popular Punjabi painter.<sup>169</sup> But his restless mind urged him to move on to Calcutta, the great center of art and culture. He worked there as a designer for a year. After attaining this useful experience in creative designing and painting which gave him much needed exposure, he returned to Lahore in 1941 and started his artistic career with a renewed zeal and confidence.<sup>170</sup>

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167 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.93

168 **Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh;** 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings* (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.5

169 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.83-85

170 **Singh, Prem;** 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings* (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.3

To expand the scope of his business he joined hands with well known commercial artist Sarfaraz and established a studio. But soon they parted ways and established their individual commercial art businesses. Once the task of earning good livelihood through art was accomplished, he pursued his other interest namely study of literature and music. He was fortunate enough to have a large number of friends and admirers such as novelists, story writers, poets, writers and musicians. He was enjoying this phase of life as he found new friends in Bawa Balwant and Ishwar Chitrakar, who spent hours in his company and discussed the fine and significant aspects of art. These art discussions and interactions were very fruitful and valuable for the fine tuning of his artistic sensibilities. They discussed the merits of colours, compositions and other technical and commercial features in popular and commercial art. During the period 1943-44, Jaswant Singh used to attend to his commercial art book jacket designing jobs during the day and dedicated his creative energies towards the study of old masters' drawings and paintings during the night. He studied the drawings and paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo and attained proficiency in drawing. He was considered a multi-dimensional artist and had the competence to work in water colours, tempera and oil colours.<sup>171</sup> After partition of the country, Jaswant Singh shifted his base to Delhi and started a small studio. Here he came into contact with B.C. Sanyal, Dhan Raj Bhagat, Kamal Sen and Bimal Das Gupta who were associated with the Delhi School of art. They asked him to join the school as a teacher but he refused as he was interested in practicing as a freelance artist. Such a decision at a time when every migrated Punjabi was groping in the dark can only be attributed to a man who has a strong commitment and deep faith in his art.<sup>172</sup>

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171 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.83-85

172 **Singh, Prem**; 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings* (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.3

In 1956, he painted large size paintings in the 'Reception and Recreation Hall' of the Central Railway Hospital at New Delhi.<sup>173</sup> He put up his first solo show of paintings at All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi in 1959, which was an instant success in consolidating his career as a freelance artist. A number of small commissions followed soon, he had his own group of admirers who acquired his paintings. Encouraged with this success, he continued his artistic journey and held exhibition of his works from 1959 to 1987 at the prestigious galleries and became a well known figure in Delhi art circles and beyond.<sup>174</sup> Here some of his works brought him in contact with Dr. M.S. Randhawa, a patron of arts, who was engaged by Government of India in the rehabilitation of migrants from Pakistan in India as a 'Rehabilitation Commissioner'. Dr. M.S. Randhawa provided him with an opportunity to paint large paintings for 'Museum of Soil' at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. His fame grew from strength to strength. Soon he was invited to participate in a very large and prestigious exhibition of paintings done on the life and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, in which most of the realistic painters participated. The works in this exhibition were similar in style and fashion as these were normally painted in the usual style of 'Calendar art'. These were quite appealing for the common man and were popular due to their religious content. But Jaswant Singh seized this opportunity to showcase his seriously acquired mastery over realism and surrealism and painted the large paintings in unusual style projecting a new vision and imagery which was never witnessed before in such works. Artists and the viewers were spellbound and greatly admired and appreciated these works. These provided altogether a new dimension in their creation, depiction and perception. He opened new vistas for

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173 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.93

174 **Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh;** 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings* (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.5-6

the viewers and compelled them to think about new aspects in the philosophy of Guru Nanak Dev. The viewers feasted on the vibrant and skillfully handled conceptual compositions taken from the life of Guru Nanak Dev.<sup>175</sup> They were amazed at the skill and unique imagery of this artist and soon he became a household name in Punjabi households. Calendars of his paintings were reproduced in large numbers. Some of these original paintings are adorning the walls of Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh. The most imaginative work which was a major departure from the earlier painted themes of **Guru Nanak- An Eternal Pilgrim** (Plate-361), where he avoided showing Guru Nanak's face but concentrated on his wooden clogs, *simarini* and knee length *choga*.<sup>176</sup> This is perhaps the only painting which was based on the symbolism and qualities of Guru Nanak's mission as an apostle of peace and love. This painting is based on the Guru Nanak Dev's four *Udasis* (religious travels). Here his right foot is shown on the ground and the other foot is shown receding in the distance. This is an excellent example of colour perspective which the artist has skillfully adopted and conveyed Guru's mission by traveling and meeting people from all walks of life and from many distant lands. In the background, the deft handling of rocks and mountains in a photographic realism, adds mystic charm and presents the vastness of Guru Nanak's mission.

In a rare display of symbolism, Jaswant Singh attempted a painting of Guru Nanak which is perhaps the only painting where Guru Nanak has been personified in the shape of five hands that is the five main ideals preached by the Guru. The first hand represents 'Nanak-the Protector of the down-trodden', the second hand as 'Nanak-the Philanthropist', the third being holding a sickle is a symbol of 'dignity of labour', the fourth hand holding a *simarini* represents

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175 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.85-86

176 **Daljeet, Dr**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.149-151

‘Worship and remembering the Name of the Almighty (*Naam Simran*)’ and the fifth hand denotes a pointing finger towards heaven thereby signifying the ‘Oneness of God and having faith on Him’.<sup>177</sup> This painting portrays the Guru Nanak’s concept of hard work and sharing with others whatever one has earned.

The other remarkable painting which has summed up Nanak’s persona is titled **Guru Nanak- the Devotee** (Plate-362). Here Guru Nanak has been painted in a meditative mood with eyes closed and lost deep in thought. He is gently holding the *simarini* and his head wearing a cap is slightly reclining towards left side shoulder. The palette here is unusual and different from the accepted iconography as this painting has soft tones of ochre, browns, sepia and burnt umber. A shawl is diagonally wrapped around his chest and shoulder and he appears more of a *yogi* as someone who is a commoner but dim light on his face sets him apart and the overall aura of divinity surrounds his face. Another noticeable feature of this painting is his short and grey beard and he is not wearing any additional *simarini* around his neck which is usually shown in the popular iconographic calendars. In ‘Guru Nanak as a Devotee’, the image is lifted above the merely sectarian, the message of oneness of God becoming aligned to that of oneness of humanity.<sup>178</sup>

In 1973, artist Jaswant Singh painted a large canvas in oil on colours on the historical ‘Jallianwala Bagh Massacre’ which was commissioned by Government of Punjab and it forcefully brings out the scene of atrocities, torture and a reign of terror in this painting where hundreds of innocent people were gunned down by the Britishers on the day of Baisakhi.<sup>179</sup> This painting is a moving portrayal of this historical event and the viewer is filled with sorrow and

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177 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.87

178 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.124

179 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.85

unfathomed gloom and anger. The scene is so vividly captured that it presents a first hand account of the massacre in photographic detail.

Another series of paintings for Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Museum, Anandpur Sahib, depict events from Guru Tegh Bahadur's life but these paintings are uniquely individualistic in interpretation and bear the mark of his stylization. He selected those moments as would easily lend themselves to be heightened in dramatic expression- **The Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur**, **The Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev** (Plate-363), **Bhai Jaita taking the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur from the place of Martyrdom** (Plate-364) and **Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur in Spiked Cage** (Plate-365) are some of the main themes of these paintings.<sup>180</sup> Emphasis on details and background are his hallmark elements and the palette is very mature and warm. He has avoided bright and vibrant colours and has chosen a palette which highlights an event according to its historical significance. But being a surrealist at heart, he has never forgotten to dramatize the whole scene with magnificent use of highlighting and a moving and pulsating composition.

The series done on '*Raagmala* Paintings' are considered his masterpieces, as these provided him the necessary creative satisfaction and a sense of elation. The paintings on prominent '*Raagas*' and '*Raginis*' include **Raag Dipak** (Plate-366), **Raag Mal Kauns** (Plate-367), **Raag Hindol** (Plate-368), **Raag Bhairavi** (Plate-369), **Ragini Bhopali** (Plate-370), **Ragini Bhairavi** (Plate-371), **Ragini Bagesari** (Plate-372) and **Ragini Gaud Malhar** (Plate-373). Jaswant Singh devoted his whole life to painting and study of music and Sikh scriptures, besides doing the normal commercial art projects in his studio in Delhi. He kept himself busy in painting the pictures which were close to his heart and sensibilities. He viewed and perceived different

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180 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.125

aspects of life in his own inimitable style and there was a lyrical dimension and dramatization in them, which are the true basic elements of a surrealist work.

Jaswant Singh has to his credit more than thirty-seven solo shows of his works which he held in Bombay, Chandigarh, Calcutta and Ludhiana. He established a five room large Art Gallery in his house in Delhi where most of his paintings are displayed.<sup>181</sup> The collections of his works are spread all over the globe and in India major museums and galleries have acquired his works for permanent collections such as National Gallery of Modern Art at New Delhi, Government Museum and Art Gallery at Chandigarh, Indian Academy of Fine Arts at Amritsar, Punjab Agricultural University at Ludhiana, National Gallery of Yugoslavia and several private collections in India, U.S.A., Australia and Canada.<sup>182</sup> In appreciation of his art, Government of India has conferred upon him six President Awards.<sup>183</sup> Jaswant Singh is a major Sikh artist whose contribution towards *Sikh Calendar art* is of great significance and has helped the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* to achieve novelty and individualistic approach, which was akin to contemporary idiom in art.

**Master Gurdit Singh** (Plate-374), who can truly be referred in *Sikh Calendar art* as the harbinger of Sikh renaissance in art, had the good fortune of studying painting at Royal School of Art, London, under the guidance of stalwart western style European painters.<sup>184</sup> He had achieved an unmatched skill and deftness in works as is mostly associated with European classical painting style. Art education in England was fully geared for professionalism and sound technical competence with emphasis on 3-dimensional compositions and use of figurative

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181 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.88

182 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala**; 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.93

183 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.88

184 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; 2008, *Exhibition of Paintings of 'The Great Masters of Amritsar'* (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.3



elements from life. At the same time, European art education also stressed upon the elaborate use of background, architectural objects, landscapes and the other paraphernalia such as furniture, household objects, curtains etc, to highlight a given painting and enrich it with life-like tints and tones. Gurdit Singh was exposed to these finer elements and features and had achieved a considerable mastery in presenting a theme in soulful realism and superb rendering. Influenced by the European masters while studying in the art school in London, he had a flair for organizing the compositions with thickly inhabited and well organized characters and had remarkable knowledge of hues and colour perspectives. Portraiture was his forte. He used his skills and technique to paint Sikh historical events and portraits of Sikh personalities in befitting manner. There is a touch of classical appeal in his compositions.

Gurdit Singh was born in 1900 at Amritsar and was deeply interested in *Sikh art*, literature, culture and traditions.<sup>185</sup> He was endowed with wonderful qualities of head and heart and was an efficient organizer. He resolved to establish a 'Sikh Museum and Art Gallery' on the lines of the museums he had witnessed in Europe. He firmly believed that art education should be imparted in a systematic way and paintings of Sikh and Punjabi artists should be displayed in such a museum, so that the artists may also get the required encouragement and due appreciation. This way art of the Sikhs will be preserved and propagated. Another mission in his mind was painting on the themes of Sikh wars, valour and sacrifices and he strove hard to accomplish the sacred duty of propagating the ideals of Sikhism through visually powerful paintings. An establishment of an academy in Amritsar, which was already a renowned center for *Sikh art* and crafts, was a pioneering work. He was able to establish Indian Academy of Fine Arts in Amritsar in 1928, which saw the association of other great Sikh artists

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185 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; 2008, *Exhibition of Paintings of 'The Great Masters of Amritsar'* (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.3

like S.G. Thakur Singh and prominent personalities from various fields like Dharam Singh Engineer, Dr. Gopal Dass Sarpal, Dhruv Dev Arora, Durga Das Bhatia and Sunder Das Oberoi. Later on, S.G. Thakur Singh was made President of the Academy in 1932. This academy was religiously involved in promotion of *Sikh art* and organized regular art exhibitions, workshops and seminars where artists from all over India were invited to participate and display their work. This was indeed the first cultural art institution in Punjab.<sup>186</sup>

In recognition of his artistic talents, humility and dedication in furthering the cause of the Sikh religion through his wonderful paintings and documenting the personalities through his life-like portraits, Master Gurdit Singh was offered the post of Chief Artist of the Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar situated in Sri Darbar Sahib, the holy premises by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar.<sup>187</sup> This was a befitting reward for someone who possessed great organizational qualities and had the experience of establishing an academy. Infact the major contribution of Master Gurdit Singh to *Sikh art* is the compilation and documentation of Sikh personalities like poets, martyrs, Generals, warriors, thinkers and philosophers. These portraits painted by him now adorn the large galleries of this magnificent museum and are visited by thousands of devotees from all over the world.

Due to his deep interest in Sikh history and literature, he familiarized the viewers with many not so popular life events of Sikh Gurus. The noticeable paintings done by Master Gurdit Singh which are in the collection of the Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar include **The Valour of Moti Mehra** (Plate-375) done in oil on canvas medium in 1965. He has narrated the story of Moti Mehra, a water carrier who came to know that the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh- Baba

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186 **Sharma, Shivani**; November 14, 2009, *City set to get haven for budding artists*, The Tribune.  
187 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; 2008, *Exhibition of Paintings of 'The Great Masters of Amritsar'* (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.3

Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh alongwith their grandmother Mata Gujri, were lying hungry and interned in Thanda Burj (cold tower). He did not bother about royal displeasure and threw up his scaling ladder and returned only after having offered milk to the young *Sahibzadas*.<sup>188</sup> This painting speaks volumes of the in-depth study of the subject and how skillfully Master Gurdit Singh has captured the cold wintry night and the gloom of this Burj. The painting is remarkably composed with emphasis on the central characters accentuated by appropriate surroundings. Dim light of a small lamp with flames waving in the wind lighten up the dark room but there is peace and serenity on the faces of Mata Gujri and the young *Sahibzadas* are attentatively gazing at Moti Mehra. The subject of this unique painting pays tribute to the valour of Moti Mehra and also narrates the suffering of the young *Sahibzadas* at the hands of tyrant Mughal rulers.

The other painting titled the first holocaust which occurred in 1746 at Kahnuwan in District Gurdaspur. The scene of this painting depicts the **Ghalughara**’ or **‘Massacre of innocent Sikhs** (Plate-376). Yahya Khan and Lakhpat Rai had taken a pledge to wipe out the Sikhs. They chased hiding columns of the Sikh army in the woods of Kahnuwan and besieged them. Nearly ten thousand Sikhs were liquidated in the following clashes. Retreating regiments of the Sikhs braved an onslaught under the command of Nawab Kapur Singh. Even though they were hungry, they did not lose their determination and fought on in the scorching heat. The Sikhs call this carnage ‘*Chotta Ghalughara*’.<sup>189</sup> The painting is witness to the difficult terrain where Sikhs fought this pitched battle as this area had thick growth of thorns and bushes, swamps and muddy rivulets.

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188 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.44

189 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.45

The overall effect of this painting is very absorbing as Master Gurdit Singh has painted thousands of warriors on horsebacks and cavaliers on foot, engaged in the battle with Mughals.

The artist exhibited his creative strength in capturing a page from Sikh history on **Bhai Dyala** (Plate-377), who was brother of Bhai Mani Singh. At the bidding of the Mughal rulers, he was executed when he was asked to sit in a cauldron of boiling water at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi. Panth Prakash describes that Bhai Dyala neither protested nor cried: no matter that the executors kept the fire burning.<sup>190</sup> The martyrdom of Bhai Dyala in such brutal and barbaric manner throws light on the cruelty of the Mughal rulers, who mated out innumerable atrocities on disciples of Sikhism. But with the grace of God and the blessings of the Gurus, they never wavered and kept their dignity alive for the sake of freedom of worship. This painting was well received by the viewers and innumerable calendars of this painting were reproduced by many printing houses and some new generation artists also attempted this important theme of *Sikh Calendar art*.

**Carnage of Nankana Sahib on 21 February, 1921** (Plate-378) was the subject matter of other important paintings by Master Gurdit Singh. Mahant Narayan Dass, Manager of Gurdwara Nankana Sahib trapped two hundred Akali Singhs in connivance with police. They had come to visit the shrine and he had them hacked into pieces by his hired mercenaries. Later the mangled and mutilated bodies of the Singhs were burnt in kerosene oil. This episode is considered to be one of the bloodiest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century massacres. The Gurdwara however was handed over to Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak

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190 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.47

Committee the following day.<sup>191</sup> Another historical painting depicts **The Sacrifice at Panja Sahib on 30 October, 1922** (Plate-379) which was done by the artist in 1975. On hearing that the Sikhs arrested at Guru Ka Bagh, were being escorted in a train to Naushera Jail (Attock), the Sikh Sangat (devotees) of Panja Sahib decided under the leadership of Bhai Pratap Singh and Bhai Karam Singh, to offer them refreshment come what may. When the station master expressed his inability to stop the train, Bhai Pratap Singh and Bhai Karam Singh alongwith hundreds of others lay on the railway tracks. The train stopped and *langar* was served to the arrested Sikhs. But not before the train had crushed both under its wheels.<sup>192</sup> The painting displays the deep resolve of Sikh devotees in offering their lives for the sake of service to fellow beings and no power could deter their determination in performing their holy tasks. Expressions on the faces of the devotees have been portrayed in true-to-life precision. The painting is infused with a spirit of valour and dignified struggle.

Continuing with his series on martyrdom of Sikhs, Master Gurdit Singh painted **Massacre of Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April, 1919** (Plate-380) in 1968. The painting is in the size of 48”x 79”. Thousands of Punjabis assembled on Baisakhi Day at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, they were caught unaware when General Dyer ordered fire at them without warning. Nearly 1500 people were either killed or injured out of which 347 were Sikhs. The killings at Jallianwala Bagh evoked strong reaction of anger and grief throughout the country.<sup>193</sup> Most of the deaths occurred when the gathered people started running incoherently and fell into the

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191 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.76

192 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharam Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.62

193 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.75

deep well or some of them jumped into the well intentionally to save themselves from the bullets. The narrow alleys surrounding this Bagh were blocked by the armed soldiers so that the people may not escape from the raining bullets. This episode shook the soul of the country and added a saga of valour which changed the course of freedom struggle in India. Each of the painting done by this master artist is laden with minute detail and dramatic use of colour perspective. He is very successful in capturing the mood of the moment with magical use of light effects and the palette is carefully chosen to suit the soul of the painting.

Two remarkable full length portraits of Bhai Gurdas and Sain Mian Mir deserve mention, as very few artists have attempted portraits of these two towering personalities. **Bhai Gurdas (1543-1637)** (plate-381) was the first preacher in Sikh tradition. He assisted Guru Arjan Dev in compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. His own poetry according to Sikh traditions was deified by Guru Arjun Dev as key to Granth Sahib.<sup>194</sup> This portrait was done in 1975 and illustrates Bhai Gurdas as a pious learned and humble man who had intense understanding of Indian classical music and mentioned suitable *Raagas* for the singing of Gurbani enshrined in the Adi Granth. This painting is in the collection of Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi and has been reproduced in many calendars. This is an extraordinary example of a realistic portrait and Master Gurdit Singh has showered his artistic skills and bounties on this portrait by providing it with high-end features in composition and space organization. Angular position places the main figure in the center of the painting, seated on a *Takhtposh* (throne) surrounded by scriptures, lamps and writing desk. He is shown deeply engrossed in meditative stance and looking in the distance that is pondering or contemplating on a thought. Strengthening the fact that the artist had great sense of design, the *agarbati* metallic stand shown in the painting depicts a swirling cobra with raised hood while a glimpse of an animal skin is also visible where

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194     **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.119

Bhai Gurdas is sitting cross-legged wearing a milky-white *choga*, turban and *parna*. The colours are very soothing and harmonious. The whole picture oozes a peaceful atmosphere. The overall ambience in this painting projects a noble person, dutifully engaged in performing the sacred duty of compiling the Adi Granth with pious mind and religious dedication.

**Sain Mian Mir (1550-1633)** (Plate-382), a *Sufi* Saint was born at Sistan and belongs to the lineage of Khaliph Umar. He laid the foundation stone of Sri Harmandir Sahib. He was a great devotee of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Hargobind Sahib.<sup>195</sup> Gurdit Singh painted this painting in 1976 and it is found in the permanent collection of Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi. The artist painted this painting to project the fundamental ethos of Sikhism that there should not be any discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, colour, creed and due reverence should be paid to the pious and holy people of all religions. In this painting, Sain Mian Mir is shown in sitting pose with his left arm resting on the *Takia* (a large pillow) and 'Kuran' - the holy book of the Muslims is placed on a wooden stand. Decorative metallic lamps prevalent during the period have been incorporated in the composition. The *Sufi* Saint has a *simarini* made of transparent beads and wearing a brocaded woolen robe and stylish headgear. Such emphasis on detail has been given that even the veins of his hand are visible and the overall impact of the painting is of warmth of a benign dignitary.

Gurdit Singh died in 1981 and the artist throughout his life remained focused on the paintings of Sikh history and Sikh Gurus and was instrumental in the establishment of two major institutions. Thus his contribution to *Sikh Calendar art* is of phenomenal value. As through his calendars, the true elements of Sikhism were propagated and he occupies a coveted place in the history of *Sikh Calendar art*. He was a great teacher, an organizer and above all a guiding

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195     **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.118

spirit who inspired innumerable new generation artists engaged in this genre of painting.

Renowned Sikh artist **Amolak Singh** (Plate-383) was born on October 2, 1950 at Amritsar. His father Sardar Balwant Singh was employed in the Post and Telegraph Department, who nursed the ambition that his son may get employed at some good position in government job. But contrary to his father's dreams and wishes, he was destined to be an artist of great repute as right from his early childhood. Amolak Singh invested his sensibilities to drawing and painting and yearned to achieve success in the field of art. Till the time he passed Middle Standard Examination, he was always engrossed in drawing and his drawing teacher Mohan Lal always encouraged him as he saw the spark of a master in his pupil. After passing class tenth examination, Amolak Singh had to shift to Delhi alongwith his family, here he continued with his art and joined the evening college for further studies. Visit to Delhi proved very fruitful to Amolak Singh as he got the golden opportunity to meet many young and established artists and visited numerous museums and art galleries, workshops and studios of other artists, which widened his scope of artistic vision. After these visits, he sincerely felt that without proper teacher it is rather difficult to attain proficiency in this vast field, as painting demands dedicated and sustained efforts to go deeper into the essence of art and academic art training. He joined as apprentice with Master Jagiri Lal and kept on working on his paintings day and night. But his parents were disillusioned with his choice of profession and wanted to make him an engineer. Their repeated efforts to dissuade him to abandon this profession failed as he had firmly resolved to make painting as his profession and worked hard to make a niche for himself.<sup>196</sup>

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196 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.157



To sustain his painting, he adopted commercial art and worked for some studios and art agencies. This exercise brought him in touch with banner painters who painted for film advertisement and during the course of his earlier pursuits he had to shift to Bombay for a while. Here he perfected the art of large banner paintings and painted full length portraits of Bollywood actors and stars. He earned his livelihood from 'Banner Painting' from 1970-1974. Besides learning new techniques and styles in painting, he also experimented with brush and knife painting. In Bombay, he came in contact with famous professional artists and was amazed to see their works which were done in a variety of styles and techniques and on contemporary subjects. The use of impasto technique gave him an added expertise in producing enchanting paintings, as this technique was appreciated by a large number of artists and laymen alike, due to the richness in textural content, which enhanced the overall appeal of even an ordinary subject. He practiced this technique and used it skillfully in most of his paintings; we see them in the collection of *Sikh art* galleries. It is a matter of great honour that he produced nearly two thousand paintings in oil on canvas medium and about two hundred of his paintings have been reproduced in the form of multi-coloured calendars done on Sikh historical events, life events of the Sikh Gurus and Sikh battles.<sup>197</sup>

Sardar Amolak Singh worked fourteen years as Curator of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee and renovated Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar in Sri Harmandir Sahib Complex after 'Operation Blue Star'. He did pioneering work in restoring this museum by bringing it back to the original condition and organized it efficiently with innovative display work. He had been honoured by different organizations and individuals for his work. His works used to be published in daily newspapers on regular basis. Thus he became a people's

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197 **Chitrakar, Ajajib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.158

artist, who had immense popularity due to the subject matter of his remarkable paintings. Amolak Singh had the honour of working under the guidance of Sardar Sobha Singh at Andretta (H.P.). Here he created more than four hundred paintings and one can see his works at the Punjab and Sind Bank, PNB Finance, Bank of Punjab, Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar and Baba Baghel Singh Museum, Chandni Chowk, New Delhi.<sup>198</sup>

In 1980, Principal Satbir Singh, a renowned Sikh author brought him to Amritsar thus he was appointed curator of the Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar. He was the third person to be appointed to this post, previously held by likes of Kirpal Singh and Master Gurdit Singh. This museum contains hundreds of his paintings which are beautifully displayed there. He also improved Baba Baghel Singh Museum, New Delhi within three years with new paintings. The year 2001, saw him working for Bhai Mati Dass Museum, Chandni Chowk, New Delhi, where he also made efforts in building plan of this museum. His efforts paid well and the result was the museum on the Sikh history. He is one of the most prominent painters who made rich contribution to Sikhism by portraying the Sikh history with his brush. He was also engaged in establishing Sikh Museum at Paonta Sahib while portraying Sikh history on canvas. Many organizations had honoured him for his works and his death was mourned by Chief of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar and other dignitaries of Sikh world. He passed away in sleep at the age of fifty-six at Batala in 2006.<sup>199</sup> Initially, he was influenced by the creations of masters like Sobha Singh, S.M. Pandit, Repin and Rembrandt. But after meeting Sobha Singh, he mainly concentrated on painting Sikh historical events and acquired the habit of going deep into the historical as well as spiritual aspects of Sikhism. The authenticity of the subject matter is the result of deep study and discussion with

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198     **Walia, Varinder**; October 16, 2006, *Artist Amolak Singh dies in sleep*, The Tribune

199     Ibid

scholars and authorities on Sikh history. While working in Delhi and Bombay, he was tired of painting repetitive works for pure commercial consideration and felt suffocated and dissatisfied. Thus he used to take short trips to Andretta and be in the company of Sobha Singh, who inspired his works and gave him fresh lease of creative life with new found strength and enthusiasm. He used to go back and start working on fresh ideas and improved his perceptions and mode of painting by adopting more aesthetic approach. Life and works of Sobha Singh were his real ideals and he considered him as his guiding force.<sup>200</sup>

With the publication of large number of his paintings, he was patronized by many organizations chiefly among them are Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar and PNS Bank. Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, Delhi also acquired his paintings for their museum. In the early stages of his career, he used to participate in all major art exhibitions but he soon realized that the art of painting for him is a mission and there is no need for fame and name as he gets the spiritual and divine satisfaction by offering his humble services as an artist to the Sikh Panth and considered himself the chosen one to do this sacred task. Other prominent subjects which were his source of inspiration is the vibrant yet simple rustic life of the villages, its people, ceremonies, customs, folk songs and festivals.<sup>201</sup> He enjoyed painting these images with great aplomb and relished the rustic aroma of the soil.

Amolak Singh's other major contribution to Sikh Panth and Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar is portraits of Sikh Gurus in many different poses, besides frontal portraits to profiles and till torso and many of them have been shown in seated positions with elaborate backgrounds, costumes and objects related to the Gurus. This is perhaps for the first time, any artist has ventured to portray the Sikh Gurus apart from the normally popular iconography. In large portraits of

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200 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.158

201 *Ibid*, p.159

Guru Hargobind Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Ram Dass, a discerning eye can easily detect Sobha Singh's influence on this painter as even the palette used by him mostly resembles with the master artist of Sikh Gurus. These paintings have been made more interesting and elaborate by depicting in the background some religious places, Gurdwaras, shrines, forts, simply a terrain of a particular place peeping behind a curtain or a *Mehrabi* door. He has paid due attention to the painting in the front as well as the relative scenic background in the back. Close inspection of the painting titled **Guru Ram Dass** (Plate-384) shows the holy pond in the background, where the episode of '*Kago Hanse Kare*' was revealed. Here in this pond, the artist has shown crows bathing in the pool and flying out as pure white cranes. Behind the pool in the distance, a village with muddy houses is skillfully painted and shows some figures who are astonished at the sight of this miracle. In this portrait, another noticeable feature is that Guru Ram Dass is holding a rose and some Jasmine flowers and rose petals are also lying in front of him in the foreground. Costumes of Guru Ram Dass painted in pure white and pale colours are reminiscent of renaissance paintings.

Portraits of **Guru Gobind Singh** (Plate-385), **Guru Hargobind** (Plate-386) and **Guru Har Rai** (Plate-387) have been done in similar fashion and due attention has been paid towards their majestic and exalted positions. Amolak Singh has presented them as royal and regal personalities, sitting on the throne with sword in one hand and falcon perched on the other gloved hand. A casket of arrows, a bow and swords are also lying nearby and at the back lavish curtains are draped in vibrant colours. A portion of the fort with '*Nishan Sahib*' is visible in Guru Gobind Singh's painting and galloping white horses are shown outside the door of the room in Guru Hargobind's painting. The Gurus are shown wearing the true royal symbols usually associated with kings and warriors that is layers of necklaces and a *kalgi* worn over brocaded silken robes.

A large painting titled **Khalsa Mero Roop Hai Khaas** (Plate-388) done in 1982, depicts Guru Gobind Singh at Chamkaur Fort and he dresses up a Sikh Bhai Sangat Singh who resembled him in his battle outfit, with turban and crest and himself quietly makes his way towards Macchiwara. Bhai Sangat Singh waged the battle in Guru's place and finally laid down his life reciting Waheguru Waheguru!<sup>202</sup>

**Guru Nanak curing a Leper** (Plate-389) - during his first *Udasi* (religious travels) Guru Nanak Dev alongwith Bhai Mardana visited Goindwal, district Amritsar. He called on a leper and asked him to permit him to spend a night in his cottage. The leper was amazed and filled with joy and said "*Even the animals would not come nearby because of the grace of God I have come cross a human being.*" Whereas at the very sight of the Guru Sahib, the leper was cured of the leprosy. These are the ways of Men of God who by way of compassion cured the ills of humanity.<sup>203</sup> The scene is so well composed that it immediately attracts the viewer and the highlight of the work is fantastic brushwork with an eye for detail, supported by mastery of still life painting and knowledge of colour perspective. The meticulous competence is revealed in superbly handled light and shade process projected in realistic manner.

In another painting, his high artistic caliber comes alive, which is titled **Compiling of Guru Granth Sahib** (Plate-390). In this painting, Guru Arjan Dev and Bhai Gurdas are engaged in the compilation of Granth Sahib. After the completion of sacred task, Granth Sahib was taken to Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar with reverence and installed there.<sup>204</sup> As this was a very prominent occasion in Sikh history, the artist has vividly captured this sacred process by accentuating

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202 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.37

203 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.16

204 **Singh, Taran**; 2004, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.239-252

the building of this holy shrine, the pond that surrounds it and the tree under which Guru Arjan Dev, Bhai Gurdas and a disciple carried out the compilation work, finalizing the manuscripts and giving the required touches.

Amolak Singh also painted some relatively unknown episodes from the lives of the Sikh Gurus and in one such specimen **The Invincible Guru** (Plate-391) depicts an episode from Guru Hargobind's life. Several fruitless efforts were made on the life of Guru Hargobind, right from his infancy. A snake charmer was bribed who let loose a poisonous snake but the great Guru overpowered the snake gently and easily.<sup>205</sup> The artist has narrated another anecdote from Guru Hargobind's life in a painting titled **Bhai Bidhi Chand** (Plate-392), when a Sikh of Kabul wanted to present a horse to Guru Hargobind Sahib. The governor of Lahore forcibly took away the horse. Bhai Bidhi Chand, brave and dedicated soldier of the Guru, volunteered himself to bring back the horse. He disguised himself as a grasscutter, reached the royal stable and managed to come out of the stable with one horse. Second time, he dressed himself as a fortune teller and reached the royal stable. He roared the horse and jumped over the wall of a fort and galloped away to Amritsar, to present the horse. Guru Sahib was pleased with him and showered his blessings upon him.<sup>206</sup> This painting describes the resolve and valour of Sikh disciples as Guru always appreciated the brave soldiers because during this time Sikhs were facing hostilities at various fronts.

**Guru Hargobind giving audience to Noorjahan** (Plate-393) is yet another magnificent painting. Queen Noorjahan, who was an ardent disciple of Mian Mir, once went to Lahore to seek the blessings of Guru Hargobind. Giving answer to one of her queries, Guru Sahib enlightened her by saying that one should never forget Death and should always remember God. Guru Sahib counseled her not to engage herself in the pursuit of worldly things, but instead she should try to

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205 **Singh, Fauja**; 2004, *Guru Hargobind*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.232-235

206 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, P.68

comprehend truth and discharge the duties of a true wife.<sup>207</sup> This painting is a case of factual historical discovery from Sikh history and painted in inimitable style of this artist, who was who was at ease in organizing the composition with a large number of figures, without loosing sight of the main subject. He emphasized the main characters by placing them in the forefront and methodically organized the space in sound deftness.

**Mutual conflicts result in utter destruction** (Plate-394) is the subject matter of a painting wherein the artist has narrated the story of Raja Chankardhawaj of Assam and Raja Ram Singh, who were great enemies. Guru Tegh Bahadur brought about peace between these two kings by offering them his wise discourse. As a result, the fighting forces of both Rajas erected a monument of peace with their weapons lying own, thereby vindicating the Guru's exhortation that '*Hatred divides and love unites and all disputes can be settled through mutual discussions and peaceful negotiations*'.<sup>208</sup>

Sardar Amolak Singh has to his credit a large number of illustrated books explaining the Sikh tenets where he through his powerful illustrations has depicted the basic fundamentals of Sikhism, Sikh Gurus, Sikh symbols, Gurdwaras, significant events relating to Sikh martyrs, Sikh wars and pictures of unmatched brutal atrocities of tyrant Mughals on Sikh disciples. The book titled 'Ardas' presents first-hand visual information about the prayer of the Sikhs and its contents have been illustrated in expressive and lucid manner by giving the wording of whole 'Ardas' stanza-by-stanza with suitable illustrations. It appropriately explains what Khalsa stands for and what are the ideals and ethos behind its establishment. These books are very popular and have been published by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar. These are in great demand and devotees carry them to various countries. The other notable

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207 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.59

208 **Banerjee, A.C.;** 2004, *Guru Tegh Bahadur*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.331

publication illustrated by this artist is titled 'Guru Hargobind Sahib' which has a collection of meticulous illustrations depicting the life and times of Guru Hargobind Sahib and how the concept of 'Miri' and 'Piri' was established by Guru Sahib.

With an intent on bringing forth the numerous noble qualities of Guru Gobind Singh besides being a 'Saint' and a 'Soldier', the artist has expressed through his paintings Guru Sahib's compassion for his disabled and blind followers, who wanted them to overcome their disabilities in a painting titled **Helping the Helpless** (Plate-395). He even taught several of his blind disciples, the art of music and made them expert in instruments such as *Tabla*, *Saranda*, *Rabab* and *Taus*. The Guru bestowed his blessings on the handicapped without discrimination.<sup>209</sup> This way they were encouraged to serve the Sikh Panth through their own musical contributions.

**The Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh** (Plate-396) is one of Amolak Singh's finest works. In this painting, the artist has delivered the message that Maharaja Ranjit Singh- the Sikh sovereign of Punjab treated all alike and made no discrimination between men of one faith and another. In his court, Muslims, Hindus and Christians received equal treatment. The 'Lion of Punjab' had even issued an edit in the name of Faqir Nurruddin that the Faqir could reverse his own royal order if it in any manner impeached on the rights of a common citizen. The painter shows the 'Lahore Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh' filled with ministers, courtiers, generals and warriors dressed in royal and regal dresses with weapons and even a tiger is shown lying in the ground alongwith some guns and swords. The painting presents a majestic splendour of the riches of this mighty emperor who was a kind ruler at heart.

Another aspect of glorious Sikh history is visualized in a painting titled **Kesri (Saffron) Flag on the Red Fort (March 11, 1781)** (Plate-397). Between 1765

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209     **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.77



to 1781, the Sikhs conquered Delhi 15 times. In 1781, Sardar Baghel Singh hoisted Kesri flag on the Red Fort and Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia graced the throne of Delhi.<sup>210</sup> This painting was done in 1975 and shows a cavalry of Sikh warriors on horsebacks right in front of the main gate of Red Fort. The painting amply suggests that the artist has achieved considerable expertise in painting the architectural buildings and monuments in photographic realistic style. The artist through his sheer hard work and unmatched dedication has carved a niche for himself in the *Sikh Calendar art* and he ranks as one of the pioneers of painting Sikh religion and history. Though he died young when he was in 50s yet he had received honours and recognitions and it is no mean an achievement to be appointed as a Curator of the finest Sikh Museum at Amritsar.

**Bodhraj** was a prolific and versatile artist whose magical brush strokes and deep understanding of Sikh history and culture, culminated in the production of hundreds of appealing and expressive paintings done specifically on the theme of Sikh culture, Gurus and history. He was patronized by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar and his distinctive style caught the attention of even popular artists engaged in the similar themes. So profound was his control over the brush that he produced painting after painting in a free flowing manner which gave an added charm to his compositions. He had an eye for landscape and environmental elements and most of his paintings are pleasing because of the harmonious colour schemes and in-depth knowledge of perspective. Arrangement of figures in his paintings was profoundly given due importance to avoid the static stagnation of the composition. Each figure seems to stir with calculated moment and gesture. Capturing the features and moods on his subjects was his artistic merit and expression reins supreme in these remarkably fluent and effortless paintings. His academic acumen was of superior

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210 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.64

scale and he had professional competence to compose these paintings, due to his skills in drawing as well as control of his hand in the medium of oil colours. Devoting long hours to every painting, he always upgraded his study of costumes and the characters to be shown in the paintings and perfectly understood the whole episode from history, for which he sat down to paint.

Bodhraj basically hailed from Jalandhar district but he worked at Amritsar for many years in the early stages of his career. He admired artist Hari Singh and requested him to accept him as his disciple, who was sure that this young man has a flair for drawing and painting. Hari Singh also admired his humility and a deep resolve and earnestness to learn from his Guru. Sardar Hari Singh was himself a stalwart who was born in 1894 and died in 1970. Hari Singh traveled a lot to acquaint himself with the novel techniques which were being adopted by Bengali artists and other artists especially in Bombay. He secured a job with Maiden Theatrical Company in Calcutta as a scene setting artist for 14 years and he had the credit of designing the sets for a very first Hindi movie 'Alam Ara'.<sup>211</sup> Learning from such a pioneer was a matter of great pride and honour for Bodhraj and his master showered all techniques on his disciple which he had acquired after decades of doing commercial work. For many years Bodhraj worked in Hari Singh's studio and his creative talents were noticed by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar and many patrons of *Sikh art* and printing presses as he could design books, illustrate suitably and paint fluently in any medium. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar provided him bulk orders for paintings on Sikh themes and most of these paintings were published in the booklets, catalogues and brochures, produced by this institution in an exercise to spread Sikh way of life to the

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211 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; 2008, *Exhibition of Paintings of 'The Great Masters of Amritsar'* (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.2

devotees. Using vibrant colours, he produced paintings which were adored and accepted by the masses and the classes.

As his popularity grew, Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi engaged him to paint paintings for them on a variety of themes so that these paintings could be converted into calendars for wider circulation. The themes he attempted includes **Cobra provides the Shade** (Plate-398) taken from a *Janam Sakhi*. Once young Nanak had taken his cattle for grazing in the field, he lay resting there and the sun rays fell on his face. After some time, a Cobra crawled out of its hiding place and spread its hood to provide shade over young Nanak's divine face. The local official of the village Rai Bular noticed this miracle as he was passing that way. He had sent for Nanak's father Mehta Kalu and told him '*Kalu! Don't curse your son. He is a great being. My village survives because of his grace. Both of us are blessed as he is born in our village*'.<sup>212</sup> The artist has perceived this painting in a realistic way and the richness of aesthetic qualities of his skillful rendering comes alive in true spirit of a masterpiece. There is unmatched quality of landscape painting endowed with natural colours in this work which can be compared akin to the works done by European Landscape painters. Though young Nanak and the Cobra have been superbly painted with suitable highlights but this does not distract the attention from the cleverly handled background; it only enhances the mysterious charm of the scene.

**Bhai Mardana receiving Rabab from Bebe Nanaki** (Plate-399) has a distinctive subject matter which was hardly attempted earlier. A sister's love for her brother is a perennial theme of Punjabi folklore. *Janam Sakhis* tell us of several stories depicting Bebe Nanaki's love for her brother Nanak. Bebe Nanaki was the first to recognize Nanak as One blessed by God. She is seen here with her husband Jai Ram. Mardana- the minstrel had received the *Rabab* from her, on

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212 Gill, Ranjit Singh; 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.28

which he played, while accompanying Guru Nanak, singing songs of divinity. This was before Guru Nanak set out on his preaching odysseys accompanied by Bhai Mardana.

A brilliant painting titled **Eradication of Poverty** (Plate-400) on the unusual theme by artist Bodhraj has projected Guru Nanak's mission. Guru Nanak preached that poverty can be eradicated by 'Self-help' and self-initiative alone. Once he went to a village and was distressed to see the dirty slums. He was appalled to see the miserable and unhygienic condition in which the poor people were living. He set on fire that *basti* and helped in building a new and clean village in its place.<sup>213</sup> The painting is self-explanatory in its content and well executed and comprises of all the minute details related to a '*Shramdaan*' or 'Self-help' concept.

The basic philosophy of Guru Nanak is the **Selfless service to Mankind** (Plate-401) or '*Nishkaam Seva*' and this idea was kindled in his disciples and the other Sikh Gurus who religiously followed it. Stressing upon this ideology which is based on humility and spiritualism, Guru Amar Dass following the Sikh traditions of service, which is also considered as 'Supreme Worship' served his master Guru Angad Dev for 12 long years, wading through rain and storm. When a weaver's wife observed sarcastically '*Amru- the Homeless*', Guru Angad Dev blessed the devotee instead with the title '*Niasareyan Da Aasra- A shelter for the Homeless*'.<sup>214</sup> Such lofty ideals of Sikhism have been painted in wonderful style, which at once impact the mind and leave an indelible mark on the soul of a viewer. Deft handling of the composition wherein the artist has captured the pitch dark night and Guru Amar Dass is struggling hard to save the pitcher of water placed on his shoulder, for the sake of his Guru as he stumbles in the darkness. A dim light is coming out of the poorly-lit hut of a weaver where

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213 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.21

214 **Gill, Ranjit Singh;** 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.114

the wife of the weaver is shown staring at the falling Guru. Bodhraj, who was himself a simple and humble person, had great fancy for such high ideals of Sikhism and directed his creative talents in capturing such episodes, which stir a sense of duty and devotion in one's mind.

Continuing with such series, he painted a painting titled **Blessing** (Plate-402) which narrates the life of a poor leper named 'Prema Chaudhari', who fell at the feet of Guru Amar Dass. Guru Sahib gently blessed him and gave him a bath with his own hands, restored him to good health and called him 'My Son Murari'. He got him married to a lady called Matho and made them an ideal couple.<sup>215</sup> Learning from such acts of service, the Sikh disciples were not only overwhelmed but they too followed in his foot steps and practiced in real life what Guru preached. They devoted their self wholeheartedly to the upliftment of the needy and the downtrodden. The artist had great respect for such deeds and always selected these themes for his paintings, whereby he could in his own humble way project the divine and spiritual tenets of Sikhism.

A painting displaying a rare gesture of sweetness and humility is aptly titled **A Gurumukh is always humble** (Plate-403). It describes the story of Datu, son of Guru Arjan Dev, who considered himself to be the claimant of *Gurgaddi*, which he however could not ascend to. Deeply frustrated Datu struck Guru Amar Dass with his foot, when he was seated on *Gurgaddi*. With a rare display of sweetness and humility, the Guru kept seated on the *Gurgaddi* and did not utter a word of anguish rather he observed that '*Your foot must have been hurt by my hard bones*'. Guru Sahib did not act by way of coercion but displayed his compassion.<sup>216</sup>

Bodhraj delved deep into the treasures of wisdom contained in 'Sukhmani Sahib (Psalm of Peace)' and brought out pearls of wisdom in his visually charged

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215 **Dil, Balbir Singh**; 2004, *Matho Murari*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.66

216 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.61

images which were full of competent authenticity. This fact is superbly established in his works and the way he narrated a painting was indeed astonishing and impressive. He successfully created the overall atmosphere of a specific era supported by deep knowledge of building structures, trees and landscapes. In the painting titled **The Guru's Word is the Panacea for all ills** (Plate-404), Guru Arjan taught his disciples through his 'Psalm of Peace (Sukhmani Sahib)' that our life is worthless if our soul is not moved at the sight of pain and agony in fellow human beings. Rendering them the service in the hour of their need is of prime significance. At the town of Taran Taran, he himself alleviated the sufferings of lepers, for whose treatment he also built a 'Lepers-Home' there. The Guru and his disciples did not only preach but practiced in real life and devoted their lives in removing the sufferings and diseases of abandoned poor people.<sup>217</sup> Bodhraj's paintings are a kaleidoscope of the godly deeds of the Sikh Gurus and their devoted disciples. These paintings have generated great interest in the minds of the devotees and moved their hearts to perform 'Seva' or service in their own lives. These idealistic topics from the Sikh history can only be chosen by a person who himself was full of compassion and a kind being. He had done utmost service to *Sikh art* and it is not surprising that calendars of his paintings are in great demand due to their artistic merit and powerful spiritual content. Each painting is though realistically done yet an air of spirituality and divinity surrounds each of them, due to the choice of ethereal palette. Greys and blues have deftly been used alongwith white and pale shades.

The artist has selected very carefully the landmark occasions in Sikh history and recorded them in his versatile style. The other important painting by this artist is on the **Installation Ceremony of Granth Sahib at the Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar (1604)** (Plate-405). Instead of feeling proud in

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217 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.37

bringing out such a unique scripture, Guru Arjan Dev remained humble and as a mark of respect to the holy book, always occupied a seat on the floor in the presence of Granth Sahib. Baba Buddha, the first Granthi would read from Granth Sahib and the audience would enter into trance.<sup>218</sup>

A unique painting titled **Tread With Care** (Plate-406) which describes Guru Hargobind's love for nature narrates the story that once the child Guru Har Rai was strolling in the garden, a rose fell down, when it got struck with the fringe of his robe. Guru Hargobind, symbol of sympathy and humility told his grandson Har Rai to take care while strolling since flowers and plants are also living organisms, lest the act is repeated. Guru Har Rai followed his advice throughout his later life.<sup>219</sup>

Bodhraj's other valuable contribution are the paintings of Saints, *Bhagats* and *Faqirs*, whose verses are enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Amongst the prominent personalities included in these series is **Baba Sheikh Farid (1173-1266 A.D.)** (Plate-407) who was a great *Sufi* saint. He was an epitome of humility and lived an austere life. His only blessing from the God was that a life of prayer and meditation. His following *saloka* forms the subject of this painting-

*“Sweet are candy and sugar and honey  
and Buffalos’ milk*

*Yea, sweets are these but sweeter by faris God.”*<sup>220</sup>

Painting of **Bhagat Kabir** (Plate-408) is also specimen of his superb visualization and depiction. Bhagat Kabir (1398-1494 A.D.) was a revolutionary saint and poet of Bhakti Movement. He emphasized on the equality and fraternity of all mankind. Once Bhagat Kabir was going to sell a piece of cloth woven by

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218 **Singh, Taran;** 2004, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.239-252

219 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.60-61

220 *Ibid*, p.92

him, he met some *sadhus* on his way, to whom he gave the entire cloth free of cost. Kabir's 541 hymns and *salokas* are included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>221</sup>

Swami Ramanand who was born in 1359, was also one of the pioneers of Bhakti Movement in Northern India. He has also been regarded as a bridge between the Bhakti Movements in the South and the North. Though a Brahmin by birth, yet he did not entertain any sense of pride because of his caste. **Bhagat Pipa (b.1425 A.D.)** (Plate-409) received divine enlightenment by the grace of Swami Ramanand. 1 hymn each of both the Bhagats is included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>222</sup> Here in this painting, Swami Ramanand is shown blessing Bhagat Pipa. He is surrounded by his disciples and *yogis* and a peaceful atmosphere has been created where they are standing in front of their hut or *ashram*. Depicting the pioneers of Bhakti Movement, Bodhraj also painted a painting of **Bhagat Namdev** (Plate-410). God's name was always on the lips of Bhagat Namdev who was born in 1270 A.D. He was asked to show miracles by the king. He refused to do so and he was thrown before a drunken elephant to be crushed to death. God saved his own saint Bhagat Namdev. He spent last days of his life in village Ghuman, now in district Gurdaspur. 60 of his hymns are included in Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>223</sup>

The services of artist Bodhraj will always be remembered as his works are distinguished in the sense that he stressed upon discovering unique episodes in Sikh history and did full justification in narrating them through powerful visual language which had a spark of masterly treatment and a philosophical and spiritual flavour emitting from them. These works are considered as a significant source of *Sikh Calendar art*. The other works including designing of booklets,

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221 **Alag, Dr. Sarup Singh**; 2003, *An Introduction to Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Swami Printers, Ludhiana, p.99

222 **Bahri, Hardev**; 2004, *Pipa*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.342

223 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.95



brochures and information material on Sikhism is also noteworthy and worth appreciation. He passed away in 1992.

**Mehar Singh** (Plate-411), a true disciple of Sardar Sobha Singh, imbibed most of the qualities of his master as he spent a considerable amount of time with him and devoted his artistic sensibilities in touching the soul of the subject and capturing the essence of a given topic by peeping deep into its layers as this was the major lesson from this great artist. A great work of art does not linger on the surface but it has the inbuilt qualities to touch the innermost undercurrents, thoughts and manifestations pulsating in the veins of the masterpiece. Valuable discussions with Sobha Singh sharpened his intellect and enriched his understanding of apparent layers of art work. He was born in 1929 at Lahore and had discovered that he had in him what it takes to be an artist. His sustained hardwork, dedication and open mind in absorbing and learning new techniques and styles, equipped him in attaining good proficiency. But after passing his Intermediate Examination from Panjab University, he felt that it was a futile exercise to continue with further education and waste the valuable time which he always wanted to spend on improving his drawing and painting. After thoughtful consideration he thought most appropriate to request artist Sobha Singh to accept him as a disciple. Years 1946-48 were more crucial in his art career as he in the company of his master crafted his life's precious jewel. This was the time he wholeheartedly offered his entire intellect and served his Guru to sharpen his talents. This opportunity also provided him with a new insight into the spiritual and divine content of the paintings being done by Sobha Singh and opened his mind's eye by providing new vistas in perception and symbolism. He came out from his adopted master's studio as a young artist full of excitement and enthusiasm which was the result of the confidence, he received from Sobha Singh. But sadly this part of India was in great turmoil due to the partition of the country in 1947 and there was an air of uncertainty and desperation as lacs of

people had lost their homes, hearths and their dear ones. They were penniless and bewildered at this unfortunate happening in the history of India. The uprooted Punjabis migrated to various parts of India and started gathering their broken lives. This was the time that young Mehar Singh too shifted to Delhi.<sup>224</sup>

From 1949-54, he joined Delhi Polytechnic and received formal art education to equip himself with finding some government job. Here he had an opportunity to study the fine nuances of Indian and European art from his teachers and art history books. He was in contact with many practicing artists and observed their paintings with a keen eye. Coming to Delhi was a turning point for his career as the exposure he got from many art exhibitions widened his scope of art appreciation and also provided him livelihood as a commercial artist. The expertise he had attained while he was under apprenticeship at Sobha Singh's studio, withstood him in good stead as he had developed a flair for portrait painting, illustrations, magazine and book designs. Later on, he joined American Embassy, New Delhi as an artist and worked there from 1958-72. Here he attained knowledge in all departments of art designing, printing and publishing. The stint at American Embassy was fruitful in the sense that Mehar Singh had the first hand account of seeing some contemporary art works which set him on the way to establish him as a truly versatile artist by emboldening his creative vision. As he was professionally confident of his capabilities as a commercial artist and an expert in portrait painting, he decided to establish his own studio in Delhi and do freelancing in art. This satisfied his thirst for doing quality work besides being financially sound. During this period, there was a great demand and scope for commercial art and advertising. He carved a niche for himself as a top-notch portrait painter and was commissioned portraits of leaders, generals and other famous men. But his love for painting portraits of Sikh Gurus and the

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224 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.116

Sikh historic moments, always lingered in his subconscious mind. He soon devoted his attention to the paintings of Sikh history, art and culture as local Gurdwaras initially offered him projects to paint on these themes. The seeds of his creativity were sown in his early years as a young boy and he received several awards and a prominent award was bestowed upon him for his artwork by YMCA, Lahore in 1946. Consequently Government of Punjab also awarded him in 1948-49 for his services to art as during this period art institutions were being set up by the government which were earlier based in Lahore and other parts of West Punjab. Punjabi artists were busy learning and adopting new techniques and trends in art from their counterparts in Bengal and elsewhere.<sup>225</sup>

Recognizing his high caliber of painting, he was awarded by Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar in 1948-49 and 1970 as 'Best Artist'. The renowned artist S.G. Thakur Singh, who was the patron and President of this academy prophesized that '*Mehar Singh would be an artist of great acclaim due to his deep understanding of realism in art*'. The portrait of President of America- Richard Nixon, painted by him in 1969 was so appreciated by the President that he sent him a letter of commendation. Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi awarded his works for the three consecutive years that is from 1981-83. He was honoured by All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi in 1993 and the society described him as the leader of new school of painting. Another prestigious award was bestowed upon him by the Punjab Government in the name of 'Sobha Singh Memorial Award' in 2001. Besides awards and laurels, he continued to receive art commissions and projects from Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar, Bank of Punjab, Punjab and Sind Bank and Dr. Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendra, Dehradun.<sup>226</sup> The artist was involved in creative contemplation to such an extent that he used to prepare for months

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225 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.117

226 *Ibid*, p.51

before doing a particular subject in his painting and tried his level best to reach the bottom of the subject to understand it in totality so that the outcome of his work is both historically authentic and its philosophical and other perspectives are perceived well. In short, such dedicated endeavours brought out the best in him as an expert and skillful artist. At the same time, the pictures were well balanced and complete in all aspects both creative and aesthetically sound. He made it his habit to search for new facts and events in Sikh history, which provided uniqueness to his work and polished his paintings with a sparkle of imagination and a heavy dose of technical extravaganza. Each work seems to be a masterpiece as he provided full attention to his work be it a portrait of a personality or the court scene of the majestic 'Lion of Punjab'- Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Mehar Singh's preferred palette was composed of warm, vibrant and majestic colours, which upgraded the works to new heights of artistic magnificence. To describe his works in short, there was an abundance of spontaneity, directness, naturalness, simplicity and boldness.<sup>227</sup> The vigour in his drawing is visible in most of his compositions done on the theme of Sikh history as they are a moving description of the glorious chapters of Sikh history. Figures over-laden with jewelry and embellishments have been avoided by him and only bare essential decorative articles, ornaments etc have been used while depicting a historical personality, a Sikh General or a warrior. But due consideration has been given to the costumes, postures and gestures of characters in a painting. His achievement lies in the faithful depiction of Sikh characters with a glow of light on their faces as inherent in a Punjabi face, eyes sharp and deeply set on the object, define the determination and resolve to succeed in a struggle. The spirit of valour alongwith humility and spiritualism infuses the paintings with a certain

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227 **Rani, Dr. Saroj;** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.51

strength and enlightenment. Due to his mastery of handling of light and shade, use of highlighting and selection of suitable colour palette, his paintings are bewitching to the eye and hold attention of the viewer due to striking freshness, lucid movement and rhythm. He visualized the complete Sikh history right from birth of Guru Nanak to the life of Sikh Guru Gobind Singh and threw light on social, historical, cultural, economic and political milieu of Sikh history in his own distinctive style. Though he confessed that his main source of inspiration was European art which enabled him to adopt new and fantastic mannerism and mode of visual narration. But at heart, he was a true Indian whose consciousness was embedded in traditions and social manifestations. Spiritually, he was attracted towards the ever flowing spring of wisdom and divinity of Sikhism.

While portraying the glimpses from Sikh history, Mehar Singh has done some impressive works which acquaint the viewer with the noble virtues and lofty ideals of Sikh Gurus. Prominent amongst these works is painting titled **Robe of Honour** (Plate-412). Baba Amar Dass served Guru Angad Dev with utmost devotion and dedication. Besides fetching water from the river Beas for his master's daily bath everyday, he would also serve in the *langar* throughout the day. Every year the Guru acknowledged his services by conferring upon him a robe of honour which the great Guru wrapped around his head. Baba Amar Dass was decorated with the *siropa* 7 times. 'Seva' (Selfless Service) is one of the main tenets of Sikhism exemplified thorough the lives of the Gurus.<sup>228</sup> In this painting, Guru Angad Dev is shown wrapping a *siropa* on the head of Baba Amar Dass and the congregating disciples are watching this exercise with kindness and gratitude lit large on their faces. In the background of the painting, Gurdwara Sahib is visible alongwith some hutments. Serene and calm environment presents a scene of the divine solitude and the mood has been accentuated with floating soft clouds. The painting demands attention as it

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228     **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.25

focuses on the sacred task of honouring a person who is genuinely engaged in serving the humanity without any selfishness.

Depicting a leaf from Sikh history, the artist has captured the **Visit of Jahangir to the Golden Temple** (Plate-413). Jahangir visited Amritsar to pay obeisance to Guru Hargobind Sahib; the emperor entered the *parikrama* and bowed before Sri Darbar Sahib. He made an offering of 500 Mohras (ginnies). Listening quietly to the *kirtan* (devotional song) sung by Bhai Satta and Bhai Balwand. He was so enthralled that he himself was engrossed in the holy recitation of the Gurbani for a long time.<sup>229</sup> Episode like this have brought out the ideals of secularism in Sikhism as each religion and sect received equal respect and devotion. It also underlines the fact that in Sikhism no one is above anyone when he comes to a place of worship. Kings and beggars are considered equal in the eyes of the God. Paintings on such religious fervour have been attributed to this artist's popularity as the purpose of painting on such themes provided him a humble chance to contribute to a lofty cause and it was not a mere exercise to earn a livelihood. Through these paintings, the propagation of divine spiritual strength contained in Sikh religion touched the hearts of the Panthic followers.

Mehar Singh also paid his artistic tribute to portray the equality of women with men as preached by the Sikh Gurus during their lifetimes. In a painting **Mai Bhago- the Fearless Lady** (Plate-414), the artist has immortalized her persona as a mirror to virtuous and fearless warrior. Her blood boiled at the timidity of those who, smitten by the ravages of a prolonged siege, disclaimed Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib and wanted to return to their homes. Mai Bhago charged these with cowardice and lack of faith and led them back to fight with the armies of Wazir Khan of Sirhind at Khirdiana (now Muktsar) in the year 1705 A.D. She herself fought with valour and redeemed the faithless. The forty deserters, who lay dead on the ground, were blessed by the Guru Sahib as 'Forty

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229     **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.56-57

Immortals (Muktas)'. The spear that Mai Bhago used in the battle is still preserved at Sri Hazur Sahib.<sup>230</sup>

Paintings of *Janam Sakhis* done by this artist offer a mellowed down and subtle presentation and his distinctive hand is apparent. Thus they qualify in the category of *Sikh Calendar art* though they are not reproduced in large numbers and were used by Banks and other such establishments for making small table calendars and folders.

A noteworthy creation by Mehar Singh is the painting **Nanak di Chaddar**. The news spread that Guru Nanak was ready to embark on his last journey. The disciples began to arrive in large numbers without a distinction of Hindus or Muslims. The Guru sat under an acacia tree. The withered tree burst into bloom. New leaves and flowers appeared. He pacified them that no one should weep. Holy music filled the air. The Guru went into a trance according to *Puratan Janam Sakhi*. The Muslim wanted to bury him while the Hindus wanted to cremate him. Guru spoke '*Put ye flowers on the right and left whose flowers were fresh in the morning shall have the right to dispose off his body*'. Then he drew a sheet over him and passed away. The assembly paid obeisance. When the sheet was lifted, there was nothing but the flowers. The flowers of both the Hindus and the Muslims remained fresh. The Hindus took their flowers respectively. The whole *sangat* fell on their knees and this moment has been well represented by the artist. The painting related to this subject is true to the text of *Janam Sakhis*. The Hindus and the Muslims are shown folding their hands in a mark of respect to this sheet of cloth. Baba Buddha held the sheet in his hands and advised them to pick the flowers. The green trees full of yellow flowers surround this place. Bhai Lehna stands at the back of Guru Nanak.

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230 **Padam, Piara Singh**; 2004, *Mai Bhago*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.323-324

Portraits of **Maharaja Ranjit Singh** (Plate-415) and his sons- **Maharaja Sher Singh** and **Maharaja Dalip Singh** are the other noticeable works which deserve mention. In these portraits, he has skillfully captured not only the features of these royal entities but has forcefully brought out their inner strength as majestic rulers. These regal portraits are laced with elaborate details in the shape of accessories and ornaments worn by these rulers. The artist has projected them seated in the ambiance of well researched pieces of furniture and other royal embellishments. Brocade work and silken clothes emit dazzling luster and sheen. The viewer instantly comes face to face with the regal and majestic past of Sikh rule. The artist has done full justice in bringing alive the famous personalities of Punjab such as **Faiz Ahmed Faiz** (Plate-416), **Prithvi Raj Kapoor**, **Gurmukh Singh Musafir**, **Sobha Singh (his Guru)** (Plate-417), **Balraj Sahni** and various actors, poets, writers, army men and other dignitaries from divergent walks of life. These can be considered as his best works as he had the skill and the artistic capacity to infuse life into these portraits. These portraits have brought him a lot of fame and name. Famous author and columnist Khushwant Singh has mentioned his name along with his picture in 'The Tribune' in his weekly column and described him as an astonishing portrait painter.

The artist is still religiously engaged in the service of art and contributing his valuable share to enrich the world of *Sikh art*. In a rare gesture, the Punjab Government also appointed him as President of Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi and during this period, he established a 'Portrait Gallery'. He was also instrumental in organizing art workshops and artists' camps besides holding exhibition of paintings of other Punjabi artists from time to time.

**Devender Singh** (Plate-418), known for his illustrious work in Sikh religious art is the most effervescent and widely published Sikh artist. He has a rich legacy of both religion and art behind him; he could not have stayed away from art even if he wanted to. But becoming an artist exclusively in the area of Sikh religion



was just a stroke of luck as far as Devender Singh is concerned. He was born in Amritsar on November 6, 1947 and painting came as inheritance from his father Sardar Sewak Singh, a commercial artist but the son turned the art into one of transforming Sikh religious history in delightful compositions in pastels. He received his formal education at Bombay, Amritsar, Ludhiana and Chandigarh.<sup>231</sup> A dropout from the Government College of Art, Chandigarh, Devender Singh does not believe that one has to have a professional degree to be an artist and he further justifies that '*One needs guidance, which I had plenty from my father but never felt that I had to complete my diploma to become what I wanted to become.*'<sup>232</sup> Work never eluded Devender Singh ever since his first collection of paintings on Sikh women was brought by Punjab and Sind Bank for their calendar in 1972.<sup>233</sup>

Though he had never been out of work ever since, he started working at the age of 7 years with his father Sewak Singh. Illustrations being his first love and he started his career as an illustrator for popular 'Amar Chitra Katha Publications' in the early 70's and illustrated colourful comics containing stories of 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh', 'Guru Nanak Dev' and other Sikh Gurus. This was followed by 'Guru Tegh Bahadur- an illustrated biography' published by the Punjab and Sind Bank, a book on 'Guru Amar Dass' and then 'Child Heroes of Punjab'. Later, the orders for calendars year after year placed by the Bank of Punjab, Punjab and Sind Bank and Markfed kept up the trend, giving him the signature style, he is today known for. The walls of the Sikh museums in Paonta Sahib, Guru Tegh Bahadur Museum, Anandpur Sahib, Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, Punjab Arts Council, Chandigarh, Punjab Vidhan Sabha, Chandigarh, Markfed house, Chandigarh and Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi are adorned with his works.

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231 **Menon, Rathi A**; June 22, 1998, *The hand that gives form to Sikh history*, Indian Express

232 **Rashid, Parbina**; April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune

233 **Menon, Rathi A**; June 22, 1998, *The hand that gives form to Sikh history*, Indian Express

He is not only popular at the regional scene, his paintings have been well appreciated and have been acquired by museums abroad- Sikh Museum, USA, Shri Deshmesh Sikh Temple, Birmingham, England, Central Sikh Temple, Singapore, Guru Nanak Satsang Sabha, Singapore and Museum of World Religions, Taiwan. Recently, he bagged an assignment of painting forty paintings on events of Sikh history from Sikh Museum, London.<sup>234</sup> This amply demonstrates that his work has been accepted and being appreciated by art lovers and connoisseurs outside India too.

Devender Singh showcased his creative talent in painting a series on 'Baramaha' based on compositions on seasons by Guru Nanak Dev in 'Raag Tukhari' and Guru Arjan Dev in 'Raag Majh' which were made into calendars by Punjab and Sind Bank and Markfed in 1972.<sup>235</sup> However these calendars gave the glimpses of cubism in his style but with pleasing tones, colours, sharp curves and angular forms, they presented a captivating look and this way the artist has managed to integrate a contemporary stance in a subject, which was highly lyrical and full of symbolism. Figurative drawing with imaginative distortion used in these compositions, attracted the attention of even many creative contemporary artists, who were practicing only modern idioms in their paintings. This work is unique and distinctive in the sense that very rarely such themes are attempted in *Sikh Calendar art*. This project propelled his career to greater heights and many institutions noticed his artistic caliber and saw a spark of versatility and an air of freedom and freshness in his works. He was asked to paint on diverse topics in Sikh history and culture and continued this exercise with a vigour and deep dedication. Overlapping of shapes and forms and use of monochromatic colours alongwith calculated angular lines became his hallmark and signature style. He attempted other themes concerning Punjabi culture,

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234 **Rashid, Parbina**; April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune

235 **Rashid, Parbina**; May 6, 2004, *Golden Temple model to adorn US museum*, The Tribune

traditions, customs and folk dances in semi-realistic contemporary style. But due to commercial compulsions, he abandoned his earlier cubistic style and started concentrating on realistic paintings on Sikh history and Sikh Gurus. As patrons of such paintings were more interested in narrative and historical contents, which are understood well by the masses as the sole aim of such paintings, is the preaching of Sikhism and recording the history of the Sikhs. This offered him a steady flow of art commissions and regular financial support. An ever increasing popularity of the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* is primarily its direct contact with the viewer who is transported to the times of a particular historic period through visually mobile narrative. It is no wonder that calendars on such religious themes are reproduced and bought by a large number of people and it is a flourishing printing and publishing business besides being a mode of advertisement for many enterprising commercial establishments and institutions.

Devender Singh's interest in Sikh painting was kindled after he saw works of Sardar Sobha Singh and paintings of Sikh Gurus became his main source of inspiration. A close brush 'both literally and metaphorically' with religion has not only strengthened his deep abiding faith in the ways of God, his most ambitious dream project hovers around a religious subject. To recreate the momentous moments in the glorious past, the epic battle scenes, he however often delves deep into the voluminous pages of history and at times frequents the relevant places where the events had occurred hundreds of years ago. Another remarkable opportunity arrived, when a film written, directed and produced by famous Punjabi actor Mangal Dhillon, included the illustrations done by this artist on popular historical events in Sikh history.<sup>236</sup> Thus his paintings reached the overseas audience.

Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi duly recognized his contribution and awarded him a 'State Award' for his painting titled 'Lone Woman in a reflective mood' in

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236 **Singh, Nonika**; August 6, 1999, *Brush with Sikh history*, The Tribune

its Annual Art Exhibition.<sup>237</sup> As the number of admirers and lovers of his art grew in Britain, where he displayed his works in Gurdwaras and other cultural centers, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Punjabi Service, approached him for making a documentary on his life and works, which indeed was a great honour for this unassuming introvert artist.<sup>238</sup> In the year 2004, he embarked upon an altogether new journey and created a replica of 'The Golden Temple' for the prestigious Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C. For this artist, it is a dream come true. He expresses his excitement and enthusiasm in the words that '*I have never visited the museum myself but to know that my creation will now adorn one of the finest museums in the world, gives me a sense of worthiness as an artist.*' The replica is made of pure silver and gold. He further informs that '*He had studied each part of the 'Golden Temple' and made a film on it so that he could capture the true essence of the temple.*' The main temple is placed on a 4 feet by 4 feet painted glass framed with wooden planks that creates an illusion of the *sarovar*. This fantastic replica was made at the cost of 5 lacs.<sup>239</sup>

Devender Singh feels more tempted towards using the technique of semi-abstract with major concentration on the choice of palette as he relishes blending rich colours with feathery strokes and it results in vibrant rhythmic compositions draped in dreamy effects. Despite his busy engagements and rush of assignments, he still devotes the right amount of time to a particular painting and puts his laborious efforts in achieving aesthetic excellence after giving due thought to the essence of the subject and confirmation of authenticity of the event from various historical perspectives and sources. Though, he considers painting to be an obsessive preoccupation that stems from within One's being- 'a voice of One's soul'. He accepts assignments for all sorts of paintings but leaves the mark of his sensibilities in his own preferred style, whereby satisfying his creative urges and

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237 **Menon, Rathi A**; June 22, 1998, *The hand that gives form to Sikh history*, Indian Express

238 **Rashid, Parbina**; April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune

239 **Rashid, Parbina**; May 6, 2004, *Golden Temple model to adorn US museum*, The Tribune

at the same time eking out his livelihood. He believes that '*Artworks should be simple and self-explanatory and not weighed down under the pseudo intellectual burdens.*' He would rather paint a picture which is easily understood by a viewer without the need of explaining it for an hour. He does not relish explaining his paintings to the viewers because basically a painting is a visual exercise. There should be enough content and directness in its narration that it is easily understood and the messages are carried to home in a befitting way. These are the qualities usually associated with works of *Sikh Calendar art* as they directly interact with the viewers and infuse the gist and moral which is socially relevant with such works.

In the genre of *Sikh Calendar art*, there certainly exists a restriction that artists are not free to afford the visually and aesthetically free trends and messages. Painting on a topic automatically restricts the mind of a creator as these works are created for a purpose. In this case, his paintings have been done for the patrons who are engaged in the preaching of Sikhism and are also duty bound to record the historical aspects for the future generations. But there is no iota of doubt that this artist is extremely sensitive and responsive to his surroundings and social responsibilities. He yearns to paint in a much freer manner and religiously believes in the words of Henry Ward Beecher that '*Every artist dips his brush in his own soul and paints his own nature into his pictures.*' On a philosophical note he muses, '*If we were to follow Guru Nanak's one-line teaching- Kirt Karo, Naam Japo, Wand Ke Chhako (work, pray and share) - life would be a utopian dream.*' Since for us ordinary, selfish mortals all this seems a tall, impossible order to emulate, Devender Singh has little option but to capture the utopian paradise on his canvas.<sup>240</sup>

In Sikh tradition most of its values have been attained in practices whether than in preaching. The oldest institutions effective are '*Sangat and Pangat*' and

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240 **Singh, Nonika**; August 6, 1999, *Brush with Sikh history*, The Tribune

later on ‘*Langar*’ gave Sikhism most of its social values and perception of humanism. ‘*Sangat*’ effected spiritual elevation through devotion and guided the self to liberation. To portray this concept, artist Devender Singh has painted two paintings in 1980 where **Mata Khiwi, wife of Guru Angad Dev is shown preparing *kheer*** (Plate-419) and distributing it to the *Sangat*, thus the concept of *Langar* gained credence. It also taught the value of sitting together with humility and eating together without any consideration of caste, creed, colour, sect and religion. In these wonderfully painted expressive paintings, the artist has shown **Mata Khiwi distributing *kheer* amongst the people sitting in rows** (Plate-420). He has depicted Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, *Yogis*, *Faqirs* and Saints, to underline the significance of a casteless society and equality of mankind.

In yet another significant painting titled **Women Parishes** (Plate-421), where the artist has drawn the attention of Sikh devotees, is the basic need to treat men and women as equal persons without any favour or gender bias. Here he has portrayed an episode in which Guru Amar Dass, the third Sikh Guru, appoints a woman preacher as parish. He asked them to conduct Sikh missionary and parish work. Districts under the charge of men were known as ‘*Manjian*’ from ‘*Manji*’ - a string bed. Those in the charge of women were known as ‘*Pirhian*’ from ‘*Pirhi*’ - low sitting stools, on which they sat to minister to the disciples. Their selection for this important task indicated the faith of the Guru in the capacity of women for organizational work.<sup>241</sup>

Behold on the noble thoughts of Guru Amar Dass, the artist has painted a painting titled **Behold all Human Race as One** (Plate-422) as Guru Amar Dass conferred equal status on men and women and disapproved of gender discrimination. He forbade the practice of ‘*Sati*’ - burning of wife at the pyre of

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241 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.28

husband, as it was considered an insult to human dignity.<sup>242</sup> Historical instances like this fully justify artist's own concerns on gender discrimination. Describing Guru's love for the weak and the needy, a painting titled **Guru's Blessings** (Plate-423) narrates the episode of Gangu Shah who was unemployed and who sought help for his livelihood from Guru Amar Dass. The Guru blessed him and he flourished as a banker in Delhi. But he had a setback when he turned away a needy person sent by the Guru. Gangu begged for pardon and fell at the Guru's feet in Goindwal. Thereafter, he never sent back any needy person, who deserved to be uplifted.<sup>243</sup> This underlines the fact that Guru preached the mankind that our actions and deeds even in our business should be for help and upliftment of the weak and the needy.

A painting recognizing the utmost devotion of a devotee **Bhai Manjh** (Plate-424) is a rare leaf from Sikh history. Bhai Manjh, an ardent disciple of the Guru Arjan Dev used to bring dry wood everyday for the *Langar* to be cooked. One day while carrying wood, he tumbled into a well following a storm. Guru Arjun Dev found that despite his predicament Bhai Manjh had saved the wood from getting wet. The Guru honoured his disciple by saying '*Manjh is beloved of the Guru and the Guru of the Manjh.*'<sup>244</sup>

Devender Singh's other two noteworthy paintings are **Baba Buddha blessing Mata Ganga** (Plate-425) and **Guru Arjan Dev helping the peasants**(Plate-426). In the first painting Mata Ganga is shown seeking blessings of Guru Arjan Dev to bear a child. Guru Sahib advised her to invoke the blessings of Baba Buddha (1506-1631 A.D.), the most revered Sikh. Going to Baba Buddha, to pay her respects, she carried with her *Missi Roti*, an onion and *Lassi* (buttermilk). While breaking the onion, Baba Buddha pronounced, '*Soon you*

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242 **Bhatia, H.S. and Bakshi, S.R.**; 1999, *Encyclopaedic History of the Sikhs and Sikhism*, Deep & Deep Publications Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.14

243 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.31

244 **Daljeet, Dr**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.66

*will be the mother of a child whose gallantry and valour will be unmatched.*<sup>245</sup>

In the second painting, Guru Arjan Dev is helping the peasants. The economic wellbeing of the country was closely linked with the monsoon. With a view to alleviate the sufferings of the peasants, Guru Arjan Dev helped the villagers in digging six-channel Persian Wheel (*Chhcharta*) wells to irrigate their fields. '*Chhcharta*' is a living monument of his efforts in this direction.<sup>246</sup>

The story of **Bhai Banno**(Plate-427) is described in one of Devender Singh's paintings. Bhai Banno's services in the construction of Sri Harimandir Sahib are significant. On completion of Sri Harimandir Sahib, someone asked Guru Sahib as to who should be served the platter first according to the establish practices. Guru Sahib said, '*Whoever has done service everyday by remaining modest and keeping his low profile.*' Guru Arjan Dev honoured Bhai Banno by placing the first platter of feast before him.<sup>247</sup> This painting aptly justifies the value of modesty and dedication in the service of the Panth and encourages those who devote their selfless service without feeling proud.

Devender Singh has selected the subjects for his paintings after carefully studying the basic significance of a specific Sikh ideal. A prominent painting **Bandi Chhor Guru** (Plate-428) expresses the lofty ideals of Sikhism and coming to the assistance of those who need immediate help and protection. In this episode, Guru Hargobind ordained the Sikhs to arm themselves to resist injustice and tyranny. This annoyed Emperor Jahangir who ordered incarceration of the Guru in the Gwalior Fort. Soon realizing his mistake, the emperor ordered his release but the Guru refused to accept the offer, till 52 innocent Rajas were also freed. Instructions were issued that whosoever holds the Guru's dress will be freed.

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245 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.38

246 **Gill, Ranjit Singh;** 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.136

247 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.44



Guru Sahib wore a special apron with 52 strings attached to it. Each Raja held one string and walked into freedom.<sup>248</sup>

Devender Singh painted a painting in 1975 about the historic event of **Kashmiri Pandits meeting Guru Tegh Bahadur** (Plate-429). A delegation of 500 Kashmiri Brahmins led by Pandit Kirpa Ram met Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur Sahib. Pandit Kirpa Ram told the harrowing tales of torture initiated by the orders of Aurangzeb, for converting them to Islam. Guru Sahib was mentally occupied with the issue when the child Gobind Rai happened to be there and asked as to what was the matter. Guru Sahib told him that the sacrifice of some great soul is called for. ‘*Who else than you can serve the cause?*’ was child Gobind Rai’s spontaneous reaction.<sup>249</sup>

In a heartrending moving painting **Rangretta: Guru Ka Beta** (Plate-430), the artist Devender Singh has portrayed Guru Tegh Bahadur’s supreme sacrifice to protect the religious freedom of oppressed Kashmiri Pandits. Guru Tegh Bahadur’s head was severed from his body by the execution at Chandni Chowk, Delhi in 1675 A.D. There was great consternation and confusion. At that time, Bhai Jaita, a devoted Sikh came forward and picked up Guru’s severed head swiftly, covered it respectfully and slipped out of the crowd. He struggled hard and managed to reach Anandpur Sahib and laid the sacred head respectfully in front of Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru embraced Bhai Jaita and said, ‘*Rangretta: Guru Ka Beta- Rangretta is the son of the Guru.*’<sup>250</sup>

The artist has brought to light many anecdotes from Gurus lives which establish the fundamentals of Sikhism and the values of humanism. Most of the paintings have been narrated from day to day incidents but are significant due to the in-depth meaning and ideology symbolized through simple terms. In a

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248 **Daljeet, Dr**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.43

249 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.71

250 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.69

painting, Devender Singh has expressed that even as a child Gobind Rai through his innocent gestures underlined the universal truth. In the painting **All Human beings are Equal** (Plate-431), there is description of child Gobind Rai's spark of spiritualism and divinity. The moment child Gobind Rai was born in Patna, Pir Bhikhan Shah of Thaska, offered his prayers facing east instead towards the west, contrary to his daily practice. He left for Patna immediately. On arrival at Guru's residence, Pir placed two bowls of milk and water before the divine child. The new born divine 'Being' put his hands on both the bowls thus signifying: *The entire humanity springs from the same divine fountain: How can some be good and others evil?*<sup>251</sup> The artist has a knack for discovering and demystifying universal gems of wisdom from simple incidents in Sikh history and lives of Sikh Gurus. A similar painting highlighting the virtues of hard work is described in a painting **Hard and Soft hands** (Plate-432). Guru Gobind Singh once declined to drink water offered by a wealthy young man because he had never served the *Sangat*. When the young man brought water, the Guru discovered that his hands were soft and tender. Answering the Guru's query, the youth confirmed that he had never done any work with his hands to serve others. He was overtaken by a sense of shame and guilt and vowed before Guru Sahib to help the needy and the suffering people.<sup>252</sup>

Devender Singh's work done in contemporary style **Tukhari Chhant Mahala-1 Baramaha** (Plate-433) is most expressive and establishes him as an artist of many shades. Guru Nanak Dev recited 'Baramaha' at Kartarpur (Ravi) soon before his merger with the light Eternal. The artist has drawn paintings based on 'Baramaha' - depicting different seasons. The pangs of separation, longing for the divine lover, the intense desire for union of the soul with the Supreme Being are some of the themes, portrayed in these paintings of magical charm and using

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251 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.55

252 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.77

mystical metaphors. These possess superb artistic merit and abound in aesthetically rich splendour. His vision and imagery carefully mingled with appropriate colour palette and well balanced compositions mesmerizes the viewer and compels the viewer to contemplate and taste the divinity and spiritualism of Nanak's poetry. These paintings are based on Nanak's verse for traditional Indian months such as **Chetu** (Plate-434), **Vaisakhu** (Plate-435), **Jethu** (Plate-436), **Asaru** (Plate-437), **Savan** (Plate-438), **Bhadau** (Plate-439), **Asuni** (Plate-440), **Kataki** (Plate-441), **Manghar** (Plate-442), **Pokhi** (Plate-443), **Maghi** (Plate-444) and **Phalguni** (Plate-445).

**Kar Sewa** (Plate-446) can be considered as one of his pragmatic paintings done in remarkable detail and mastery over architectural as well as figurative drawing. The Sikhs long for a dip in the holy tank at Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. The periodic cleaning of the *Sarovar* in Sikh tradition is called 'Kar Sewa'. The 'Kar Sewa' of sacred *Sarovar* inside the 'Golden Temple' brings forth the ennobling spirit of brotherhood. The people join in this service to undergo the process of elimination of ego.<sup>253</sup>

A landmark project of painting a series of paintings on **Twelve Great Sikh Women** (Plate-447) engaged in a wide range of activities, having a visceral effect that inspires spirituality, courage and wisdom, has been recently completed and the reproduction of these works have been completed in a form of a calendar for the year 2012 by the 'Sikh Foundation International'. Its paintings by the artist Sardar Devender Singh depict events deeply etched in the consciousness. From 'Bibi Nanaki' to 'Maharani Jindan', we witness 3-dimensional figures contributing vitally to the dynamic Sikh tradition. The style employed in these paintings is a unique fusion of traditional *Popular art* with modern Cubism. Pastel colours dominate the artist's palette. But the yellows and blues offset by the dark brown and grey hues render a dramatic quality to the historic scenes.

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253 **McLeod, W.H;** 1995, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, The Scarecrow Press, London, p.119

Alongwith the Gurus, the women are foundational to Sikh institutions, so the calendar offers a balanced view of our history. Each month of the year has been devoted to a prominent lady and these include- ‘Mata Sahib Kaur’, ‘Mata Khiwi’, ‘Mata Gujri’, ‘Mai Bhago’, ‘Sada Kaur’, ‘Maharani Jindan’, ‘Bibi Nanaki’, ‘Bibi Bhani’, ‘Bibi Amro’ and ‘Mata Ganga’. This rich collection of paintings instinctively shows that spiritual quest and action are not disparate or antithetical; rather they are complementary states. For Sikhs today, these twelve historic females prove to be a self-affirming phenomenon. They serve as role models to build self-esteem and encourage fulfillment of individual potential. Simultaneously they provide insights into Sikh theology and ontology. The commitment and spirituality of the women displayed in these calendar images on our walls will guide us to recognize those qualities in all the women, we are in touch within our own lives, and our lips will utter the Granthian exaltation ‘*Dhan Janedi Maia*- blessed are the mothers (GGS: 513)’.

In today’s world, where lifestyle and traditions are rapidly changing, there exists a void in the field of art especially which relates to preservation and propagation of Punjabi culture and traditions. The man who filled this gap is artist **Jarnail Singh** (Plate-448), son of an illustrious artist Sardar Kirpal Singh, a renowned painter of Sikh history. Jarnail Singh has took upon himself to devote his life and creative impulses in bringing alive the vanishing cultural traditions of Punjab, as a large body of his work portrays various elements of Punjabi culture and traditions associated with Punjabi weddings, customs, fairs, festivals, ceremonies, rituals, daily activities of Punjabi life and men and women engaged in daily chores. It is an irony that despite Punjab’s monumental contribution towards stalling of foreign invaders to India and emerging as ‘The Sword arm of India’ due to its location as most of the invaders try to enter through Punjab and this state lagged behind in formulating cultural ethos like the southern states. Punjabi’s have a zest for life and their day to day activities are mostly concerned

with agriculture. The 'Green Revolution' and the amazing quantities of agricultural produce have earned this state the title of 'The Granary of India'. Though these two important epithets are enviable yet they may have lamently relegated other significant achievements of this state, so much so that many people seemed to believe that the only culture that Punjab can legitimately claim about is agriculture. Yet art, folklore, ballads of love and war, fairs, festivals, music and Punjabi literature, are what form characteristic expression of the state's robust cultural life. Notwithstanding the enviable martial cultural art and religious traditions of the state, there is a pitiable dearth of pictorial material of Punjabi way of life and its exemplary history. It is this inspiring background which impelled Jarnail Singh to attempt preserving what may soon will be lost to posterity, due to the rapid onslaught of industrialization. Thus Punjabi paintings are an artist's pictorial record of the glorious history and rich cultural heritage of Punjab.<sup>254</sup>

Jarnail Singh is the youngest of those few Punjabi artists who have been attracted to the state's lifestyle, art and culture. Perhaps, this is due to the influence of his artist father under whose competent guidance Jarnail Singh had his art training. He otherwise did not have any formal training and never joined any school of art as earning a livelihood through art was purely professional exercise. Jarnail Singh was born on June 12, 1956 at Zira, a small town in district Ferozpur, Punjab.<sup>255</sup> He graduated from Panjab University, Chandigarh and initially adopted his father's style of painting Sikh history depicting warriors and legendary personalities of the Sikhs.<sup>256</sup> Soon he realized that he cannot make his mark as an individual artist and he preferred attempting unique and varied themes pertaining to culture and traditions of Punjab, as his style reflects

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254 **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune  
255 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.91  
256 **Matharu, Archana;** March 17, 2011, *Cultural Strokes*, Hindustan Times

mellowed and decorative stance due to his temperament for more harmonious and peaceful phase of life. He devoted his time in having a good grasp on portrait painting too, which fetched him large assignments and artistic projects. Besides this, he continued participating in Annual Art Exhibitions of Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh since 1975 A.D. He held his three Solo Shows afterwards and is more convenient in painting in oils on canvas in the size 3'x4' and 2'x3'. The artist believes that there are three major categories in 'Punjabi Painting'- 'Historical', 'Punjabi way of life' and 'Portraiture'. Painting on historical themes requires deep study of the relevant reference material, costumes, weapons etc and an artist should have a general perspective of those turbulent times so that he could recreate the whole atmosphere and design the paintings in such a way that they infuse spirit of the event in the paintings. Characters should be painted in an idealistic manner so as to inspire the viewer.<sup>257</sup> Focusing on these important elements, he has succeeded in recreating the atmosphere of those turbulent times. In his paintings of historical themes based on battles so valiantly fought by the Sikhs under the distinguished leadership of the 'Saint Soldier'- **Guru Gobind Singh**. (Plate-449) His other important paintings are connected with the life of the Gurus.

Paintings of his **Punjabi Brides**(Plate-450) and **women engaged in the act of spinning wheel (*charkha*)**(Plate-451), **ladies working on embroidery work (*Phulkari*)** (Plate-452) and doing early morning chore of churning the milk for making butter, have become iconic 'Punjabi Paintings'. Though he was never short of work due to the subject of his paintings and a flair for fluent brushwork as most of his paintings are bought by Non-resident Indians especially Punjabis living around the world. They carry them as 'Souvenirs' of *Sikh art*. It is hardly a surprise that such works have been replicated and reproduced in a big way and turned into calendars for sale in emporiums, galleries and even in stalls, being

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257 **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune

run at the fairs and festivals. His work has generated a new interest even in the laymen who proudly display these prints on the walls of their houses. The other major impact of his paintings in bringing the third generation Punjabi settlers in the west is to acquaint them with the fast vanishing Punjabi culture.

Jarnail Singh shifted to British Columbia Canada in 2000 and is presently settled in Surrey and recognizing his talents as a preserver and promoter of Punjabi art, he received 'Artist of the Year' award from Indo-Canadian Cultural Association, Canada. Vancouver Sun's list of one hundred South Asians who are making a difference in British Columbia include this artist as he is appreciated for his endeavour to paint Punjabi culture for those who are forgetting it. His work has helped the young generation sons and daughters of migrants from Punjab to view it frequently and associate with their culture. Exhibitions of his vibrant paintings and reproduced calendars have been shown in many international exhibitions such as 'Diversity of local art' at Lanley Centennial Museum, British Columbia Canada and at 'Discovering Punjab' at Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry (U.K.).<sup>258</sup> His works have also been displayed at the Central Sikh Museum at Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar, Maharaja Ranjit Singh War Museum, Ludhiana, Museum of rural life of Punjab, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Sardar Bhagel Singh Museum, Gurudwara Bangla Sahib, Delhi, Embassy of India, Washington D.C. (U.S.A.), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjabi University, Patiala, India Tourism Development Corporation and Headquarters Western Command, Chandimandir, Haryana.<sup>259</sup> Despite producing only Sikh and Punjab centric paintings, he has sold so many paintings across the globe that he has lost count. Surviving as an artist has always been tough, but he was fortunate enough because of the quality of his work which reflects cultural heritage of Punjab as he saw an opportunity at

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258 **Matharu, Archana**; March 17, 2011, *Cultural Strokes*, Hindustan Times

259 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala**; 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.91

the right time, to focus his artistic endeavours on creating paintings on this genre, for Punjabis settled abroad.

After shifting his base to Canada, he grabbed the opportunity to showcase his creative talents and also his Punjabi roots. Canada offered a big platform for such ventures and he offered the Canadians a glimpse of Punjab. His other major artworks include 'Mural Painting' which has its traditions in Punjab and he was asked to replicate such murals in Gurdwaras of Punjab as this tradition did not get the necessary encouragement and popularity in Punjab. He started painting murals for Canadian Gurdwaras and drawing rooms of many Canadian homes are adorned with his works. Many Canadians of Indian and Punjabi descent have approached him to create detailed murals showing scenes of rural Punjab. As art runs in his family, his wife Baljit Kaur is also emerging as an artist. His daughter is a graphic designer and his son is a creative photographer. For the last 6 years, he had been annually organizing painting workshops under the 'Kirpal Singh Kala Sath', Zira, Punjab- an organization, he established in the memory of his father. His paintings are displayed in the Surrey Art Gallery titled 'From the Land of Five Rivers' and his major art project is on the story of 'Kamaghatamaru', which is showcased at Newton Cultural Center, Surrey.<sup>260</sup>

Jarnail Singh was honoured by many art organizations and his prominent awards include Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi Awards in 1979 and 1980, 'Award of Honour' by Sabhiacharak Manch- 1989, 'Sardar Sobha Singh Memorial Award'- 1991, 'Prof. Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation Award'- 1991, International Punjabi Sahit Sabha, London- 1992, 'Dr. Ravinder Ravi Memorial Award' by Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle- 1993, 'Dr. M.S. Randhawa Award'- 1995, 'Punjabi Sath Lambran', Jalandhar, 'Central Association of Punjabi Writers',

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260 **Matharu, Archana**; March 17, 2011, *Cultural Strokes*, Hindustan Times



Canada, 'Indo-Canadian Cultural Association', Canada and 'Maharaja Daleep Singh Centenary Trust', U.K.<sup>261</sup>

In a rare gesture, prominent corporations and establishments have reproduced calendars of his fascinating paintings and these calendars are in great demand and have become a collector's item. Amongst these corporations are 'Markfed, India', 'Bank of Punjab', 'Bank of India', 'PSB Finance, Punjab', 'Punjab and Sind Bank', 'Punjab Small Scale Industries & Export Corporation, India', 'The Ajit Daily (newspaper), Jalandhar', 'Punjab Health System Corporation', 'Mann Printers, Vancouver (B.C. Canada)', 'Van City Printers, Vancouver (B.C. Canada)', '35 Printers, Burnaby (B.C. Canada)', 'Vakil & Sons, Bombay', 'Red Cross Society, Punjab', 'Punjab Health System Corporation, Punjab' and 'Punjabi University, Patiala'.<sup>262</sup>

Jarnail Singh has been exhibiting his works at regular intervals in India and Abroad. The major art exhibitions include- 'Harrison Arts Festival, Ranger Station Art Gallery, Harrison', 'Painting Demonstration at Spirit of BC Celebrations- ARTS 2006', 'Juried Show, Surrey Art Gallery 2005,' Jarnail Singh- Discovering the Soul of Punjab, Surrey Art Gallery-ARTS 2003', 'VISAGES: The Human as Image Canadian Institute of Portrait Artists Show, Surrey Chamber of Commerce, December 2002 to January 2003 (Solo Show)', 'Artists at Work Event, Cloverdale Library, Cloverdale B.C. 2003', 'Surrey Public Library, Whally Branch, October 2002 (Solo Show)', 'June Juried Show, Federation of Canadian Artists, Vancouver 2002', 'World Punjabi Conference, Prince George B.C. 2000', 'Slide Show/Lecture on Punjab, University of California, Berkley, USA 1999', 'World Punjabi Conference, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, USA 1997', 'Jubilee Auditorium, University of Alberta,

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261 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.91

262 **Rani, Dr. Saroj;** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.73-82

Canada 1995 (Solo Show)', 'Rhythm of Life Exhibition of Photographers, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh', 'Hotel Samrat Teej Festival Exhibition, New Delhi 1994 (Solo Show)', 'Sikh Art Exhibition , St. John's Museum, Warwick, UK 1992', 'Punjabi University, Patiala 1992 (Solo Show)', 'Calcutta Information Center, Calcutta 1991 (Solo Show)', 'Phulkari Exhibition, Jahangir Art Gallery, Bombay 1989', 'Punjab-History & Culture, Taj Art Gallery, Bombay 1988 (Solo Show)', 'Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana 1984 (Solo Show)', 'Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar 1982 (Solo Show)' and 'Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh from 1979-1989'. Jarnail Singh has not only wielded the brush but has also used his pen to write a book on 'Punjabi Painters' published by Punjab State University Textbook Board and other articles on 'Painters of Sikh History', 'Punjab Museums', 'My Favourite Paintings and Painters', 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh' and 'Creation of Khalsa' published in 'Ajit Daily' and 'Punjabi Tribune'.<sup>263</sup>

Jarnail Singh's own liking is for a painting which portrays **Guru Hargobind in a combat with Pande Khan** who has betrayed him despite the fact that the Guru had himself trained him in the martial arts. The diagonal placement of the horse, figures and their contrasting colours creates a palpable visual tension so appropriate to the battle scene. But more than that, it is the expression of quite nobility on the Guru's face which brings into focus the treacherous fright of the impending doom on the Muslim betrayer's tense visage. Yet another painting belonging to the historical theme is the **Portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur**. Jarnail Singh has painted the ninth Sikh Guru, highlighting his mastery in martial arts more than his holy qualities. This is quite unusual because all other artists have painted the Guru as a 'Saint' absorbed in deep meditation. 'Tegh Bahadur' was a title which Guru Hargobind Sahib gave to his son who had

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263 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala**; 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.91

fought so valiantly against the Mughals even as a young boy. Impressed by his virtuosity in swordsmanship, the sixth Guru has called his son 'Tegh Bahadur' which means 'Gallant Swordsman'. Garments, sword and other details of the portrait are noteworthy.

Another commendable point of Jarnail Singh's paintings of the Punjabi way of life are the typical mud hamlets of the state's villages, wall paintings on mud walls, storage bins, indigenous shelves for household wares, 'Wicker-work' baskets, the biomorphic fenestration- above all a placid timelessness which pervades the Punjabi rural habitat. An impressive painting in this category which shows **A Village Belle wrapped in *Phulkari*** (Plate-453) sitting on an uncovered 'Wicker-work' *charpoi*. The composition, the colour scheme, the expression, the exquisite detailing, makes this work a masterpiece.<sup>264</sup>

A typical **Punjabi Village House** (Plate-454) has been painted by Jarnail Singh with an eye on authenticity and carefully executed details. The mud hamlet with wall paintings, oil lamp niches, open-air kitchen, a spacious front courtyard, the central tree and an outhouse for the cattle, etc brings out the robust authentic and infectious charm. In the similar category, Jarnail Singh has depicted various aspects of the zestful lifestyle of a Punjabi village. **Embroidery of *Phulkari*** (Plate-455), **Open air group-baking of loaves of bread (*roti*)** (Plate-456), **Indigenous mud ovens (*Tandoor*)** (Plate-457), **A *Banjara* selling glass bracelets to young girls** (Plate-458), **Curd Churning** (Plate-459), **Group singing on *Dholak*** (Plate-460), **Swinging in the *Sawan***, **A Bride's make-up** (Plate-461) and her reception by the ladies of the in-laws house and so forth, present a fairly wide range to capture the colour and variety which characterize the Punjabi lifestyle.<sup>265</sup> In all of these paintings, the most beautiful objects are the 'Wicker-work' baskets, indigenous sofa (*Pidha*), fans (*Pakhis*), and other household

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264 **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune  
265 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.193

furniture and utensils. These studies of folk motifs and handicrafts are evocative as well as original and authentic. The artist enjoyed portraiture work and handled the paintings of **Punjabi Brides** (Plate-462) in true to life realism laying stress on traditional Punjabi outfits and *Phulkari* work *dupattas* and shawls with intricate embroidery work. He excelled in drapery work and spent long hours giving authentic touch to the embroidery motifs and designs. His technical virtuosity and unfailing patience is visible in most of his work as he is a keen observer of Punjabi way of life and has used red, maroons and blues against the dull and rustic mud walls, beautifully depicted in ochres and variety of browns. Other noticeable feature in his paintings is the true depiction of sharp features of the girls and other characters, which clearly project the rugged and hardworking character of its people. The brides are shown in pensive mood and they are shy and coy, lost in the dreams of the future of their life. As he has a keen eye, the ornaments which he has painted depict ‘*Saggi Phul*’ (head ornament), ‘*Tikka*’ (forehead ornament), ‘*Kante*’ (earrings), ‘*Nath*’ (nose ring), ‘*Gani*’ (necklace), ‘*Chuddian*’ (bangles) and ‘*Jhanjhar*’ (foot ornament) are also visible in a few paintings.

Coming to his paintings on historical perspectives, a painting titled **Maharaja Ranjit Singh on Elephant** (Plate-463) sparkles with the splendour of ‘The Lion of Punjab’. His elephants are decked with golden seats and are laden with fascinating jewelry and silken covers (*Jhull*). Attendants and his bodyguards on the horseback are dressed in smart uniforms and carry the weapons and the ‘Nishaan-e-Khalsa’ (The Sikh flag). A beautifully embroidered brocade umbrella is being carried by an attendant standing at the back of Maharaja, who is engaged in shaking hands with Lord Bentick at Ropar. The picture portrays the majestic might of the Sikh army and rich formation of elephants and soldiers on the horseback. A few other paintings on the same subject project the grandeur of ‘Sher-e-Punjab’ - Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Jarnail Singh can be considered as an authentic pictorial chronicler of the matchless history of the people of Punjab, their art & culture and their unique life style, which is intense, robust and earthy.<sup>266</sup> His keen observation and love of the detail is matchless and he possesses uncanny sense of colour and composition and will be remembered as someone who revived the traditions and customs of Punjabi life.

It is a sincere and humble effort to demystify the true characters, lifestyles, achievements, awards, contributions and work ethics of front running artists whose contributions towards *Sikh Calendar art* is phenomenal and highly outstanding. These artists have pictorially chroniclised all major aspects of Sikh history, culture, traditions, spiritual and divine ethos, true tenets of Sikhism with the magic wand of their brush and have also done their sacred duty through art to project the lives of Sikh Gurus with an accent on portraying authentic historical episodes and events. They are the most popular amongst a large number of Sikh painters, whose individualistic and unique artistic contributions have enriched the *Sikh art* and have propelled the popularity of *Sikh Calendar art* to new dimensions. The credit for taking the *Sikh Calendar art* to distant lands around the globe is both an ennobling task and a way to spread the light of spiritual flame which was lit by Guru Nanak Dev and other Sikh Gurus and countless disciples.

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266     **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune

The study of various aspects of *Sikh Calendar art* proved to be an overwhelmingly enlightening and a revealing experience and it turned out to be an extremely enriching phenomenon encompassing all shades and hues of Sikh religion, history, philosophy, culture, traditions, social ethics- psychological and political dimensions in an array of multifarious perspectives. Though initially it may overtly appear to be a visual presentation of imagery employed by some promising Sikh artists to record and document the various episodes from Sikh history, mainly comprising of glorious pages from the lives of Sikh Gurus but it is a heartening revelation that the study of this most popular genre of *Sikh Calendar art* **forcefully brought to the surface a plethora of vistas which go beyond the mere visual depictions and eventually relate to the very soul of the religious, philosophical, psychological and ethical essence of the Sikh religion- nurtured by unmatched divine cultivation of thought processes built on supreme sacrifices and exemplary humble, noble and pious lifestyles of Sikh Gurus.** The process of propagation of the divine message of Sikhism had to encounter monstrous resistance from evil and tyrant rulers who abode the very idea of awakening of the masses as a crime fit for severe punishment. While reeling the veneer of visual stylization of these Sikh calendars, there appears underneath a reservoir of unfathomed dedication, artistic synergy and personal moral convictions of the stalwarts of *Sikh Calendar art* who reinforced the foundations of these wonderfully painted enchanting works of *Sikh Popular art* after deep contemplation and reinvention of their true selves. Each artist who devoted his lifetime to this genre has in fact tried to live the spiritual euphoria. The muse, inspiration and motivation behind their creations stemmed from divinity though the vehicles of imagery displays their own unmistakable personal styles and visual idioms dwelling on the moral values and spiritual ethics carefully cultivated by the Sikh Gurus. The rich and robust cultural traditions and atmosphere contributed to their enthusiasm, excitement and of course the

necessity to pursue a career which catered to their mental satisfaction by bringing an aura of spiritual achievement.

**The discerning exercise to scratch below the surface and go beyond the apparent offers an unlimited scope of study of psycho-analysis of a creative person and unearthing the source of inspiration and motivation leads the researcher to discover the potent aspirational elements which form the bulk of the visual vocabulary developed over the years. In short it lays bare the structure of his style and content. The popular preferences do play a part in shaping the thematic evolvement as it shares oneness with the popular taste and the cultural milieu in which the artist lives, dreams and paints.** In case of calendars of *Sikh art* which occupies a revered place in popular Sikh psyche, the reason why this genre is appreciated immensely is that it embodies the glowing spiritual manifestations cherished by the great Sikh Gurus. The main contribution of these artists lies in the development of a widely accepted iconography which is being faithfully followed and adored by the followers of Sikh faith. This arduous journey went through various stages of soul searching revelations and meditative stances during the creation of these mesmerizing works of *Sikh Calendar art*. Keen scrutiny justifies the proof that the stalwarts of *Sikh Calendar art* took it as a sacred mission to paint and record truthfully and with great sensitivity the currents and undercurrents of the thematic contents depicted in these appealing works, their personal idioms and degrees of artistic evolvements have also played a great part in achieving the conceptual consolidation of the fleeting movements of glorious events in Sikh history. The mere pursuance of this genre of art as a gainful profession for earning money and eking out a lavish livelihood out of this profession was not on the consciousness of these great artists. Though it may have provided them enough economic substance to sustain a life full of harmony and creative

exploration. As a matter of fact their sacred endeavours were instrumental in satisfying the creative as well as spiritual goals in a befitting way.

Digging deep into the consciousness of these artists by way of posing penetrative queries to find the answers in their interactive expressions and explanations, reading and meeting people who shared close bonds with these artists provided valuable convictions which triggered artistic impulses in their hearts and minds. The pearls of wisdom revealed in their pursuits and their behavioral leanings present the defined psyche responsible for invigorating layers of consciousness to reach pinnacles of professionalism in their works besides achieving ethereal presence that radiates a glow of spiritualism. Due emphasis was also placed in knowing the background and lifestyles of these artists as it is of immense importance to throw a glance on the day-to-day work routines to ascertain the quantum of energy and devotion they had attributed to their works during their lives.

**Artist Sobha Singh, the most prominent painter of Sikh Calendar art was a strict disciplinarian.** He had a fixed daily routine. He used to get up at 4 a.m. After a cup of coffee, he would start reading his favourite authors like Emerson, Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Ruskin, Krishnamurthi and Khalil Gibran. Then he would stroll and sit in his garden to welcome the dawn. After bowing to the sun, he would go to his easel and start painting. He used to complete the major part of his painting before the visitors started coming. After 10 a.m., he would be in a mood to relax and welcome all and sundry. Sobha Singh derived his philosophy of art from Emerson- the great American author. He believed that, *“Art is a branch of ethics and is an outcome of social-historical reality and it only serves its purpose if it pays due attention to the most potent influence of the world comprising of practical and moral values.”*<sup>1</sup> For Sobha Singh, the purpose

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1 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.5-6



of art in secular world is to invoke a sense of spiritual awareness and to provide inspiration. He further elaborating that, “*Art should exhilarate and throws down the walls of circumstances on every side, awakening in the beholder the same sense of universal relationship and the power which the work evinces in the artist, and its highest effect is to make new artists.*”<sup>2</sup> The prime reason why Sobha Singh devoted his lifetime in painting the iconographic images of Sikh Gurus especially those of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh after absorbing the philosophical and moral messages advocated during their lives go well with his own thought processes, he adored serenity, spiritualism and self-discipline in his life and creations.

In matters of art, Sobha Singh preferred Italy to France because in his opinion, “*Italian art is devotional while Paris highlights only emotion.*” He fully acknowledged the importance of deep study of the subject and devoted long hours to study the subject in totality analyzing all philosophical, social and psychological aspects besides giving due diligence to the historical perspective. He was a mystic and a conformist in religion in true spirit of the word. Apart from *Bani* (devotional poetry) of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (the religious scripture of the Sikhs), he evinced a special interest in Zen thought, Buddhism and writings of Chinese sage- Lao Tse.<sup>3</sup> ‘Solitude is the school of genius’, says Gibbon. One can unfathomed the depths of creativity by spending a considerable amount of time in solitude and hear the echoes of silence reverberating in a divine harmony. Sobha Singh achieved the desired creative pinnacle by enjoying isolation and discipline. The elements of nature which are vocal in the surroundings of *Dhauladhaars*- the majestic mountain range of the Himalayas, offered him its cozy lap and cradled the lonely child in Sobha Singh’s heart and

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2     **Atkinson, Brooks**; Ed. 1940, *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, The Modern Library, New York, p.312

3     **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.6

like an ascetic nurtured his philosophies and fulfilled his search for true wisdom. He moulded himself in the image of *Dhauladhaars* and stood like a *rishi* with chiseled features crowned by free flowing cluster of silver grey beard and hair. Perhaps this is the reason why he never indulged in painting war scenes and depicting mindless violence. He revealed to Dr. M.S. Randhawa- the ardent admirer and connoisseur of his art that, *“Paintings which depict war scenes would never allow men to forget tyranny and hatred, and blood cannot be cleaned with blood. The paintings of wars and religious intolerance widen the gulf among men. But the paintings of the martyrs of peace cover up the cleavages among human beings. Such a painting is comparable to a lighted candle which sends its glow to a limited area, but its reality becomes very significant.”*<sup>4</sup>

The psyche behind Sobha Singh’s art is beautifully narrated in a spell of conversation with his friend Balwant Gargi- a celebrated author and playwright. The artist avers that, *“I am not an artist. It is better to be a good man and shed light of humanity. Art is a powerful tool. It depends how it is used and who uses it. A gun is also a power. But who holds that gun? And who holds the brush? If you give a gun in the hands of a child he may shoot himself or he may shoot you down. If it is in the hands of a bandit, he will rob you. If it is in the hands of a saint he will protect you. It’s no fault of the gun. Depends on who uses it. The artist’s function is to beautify the world, to make it more livable, more healthy, more elevated in spirit. As a painter I know that if three men paint the same object, they will paint it in different perspectives, different lights, shades and colours and moods because all of them have individual philosophies, backgrounds and convictions.”*<sup>5</sup> ‘Grow More Good’ is the main motto painted on the front gate of his house set in the idyllic surroundings of a lovely village

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4 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** Nov.24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading.

5 **Gargi, Balwant;** 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.19-23

called Andretta in the Kangra valley. This sum up his message that life should be beautiful and we artists should make it more beautiful, more purposeful, more honest, pure and lovely.<sup>6</sup> He states that, “*That more is my purpose. I don’t pride myself as an artist. I want to prove nothing. I want to cut out ego from my being. When one wipes the ego then art is more honest. There is more flow and spontaneity in it.*”<sup>7</sup> He loved simple village folks, labourers, shepherds and farmers and always made it a point to visit their homes in the event of any merriment and adversity. He enjoyed their company as their innocent utterings solidified his convictions that God dwells in simple things and acts.

Sobha Singh once in the grip of inspiration, the world around him would fade into nothingness, his own physical needs of rest and sleep and food were reduced to the barest minimum, for then he would be a denizen of the land of colour and light, with incantation of his brush beckoning the spirit of beauty to this world of symbols and forms. For some of his paintings, he had worked for more than thirty-six hours at a stretch, without even resting on his seat, only a cup of milk and a toast at intervals was enough to relieve his exhaustion, and then at the end the job, with the strain too great even for an iron frame, he would fall into a fit of unconsciousness for hours together as a consequence of defying laws of physical nature.<sup>8</sup> Sobha Singh believed in the often repeated dictum that “*Life is everlasting and art is its compensation.*” He believed that the purpose of art is to arouse people to a higher awareness.<sup>9</sup> Sobha Singh had painted history indeed of the evolution of man’s soul and not only of prophets, saints and great men.

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6 **Kapoor, Dr. B.L.;** 1987, *Grow More Good*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.55-56

7 **Gargi, Balwant;** 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.23

8 **Singh, Shamsheer;** 1987, *Sobha Singh Artist*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.30

9 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.8

To a very interesting question posed by well known author and journalist-Sushil Kumar Phul to Sobha Singh- the doyen of *Sikh Calendar art* that why the artist has traveled from painting romance to painting religion. And what is the cause of this evolution. He bared his soul and described in depth that how an artist at various stages of consciousness shifts from one step to another with growing self-realization and by achieving a grasp on maturity and reality. He further averred, *“In the first phase of my artistic career, I thought only saints and sages are good. I was haunted by Trans-mundane love i.e. Ishk Hakiki. So I painted Sheikh Farid, Surdas and others of the clan. Gradually a realization dawned upon me. The sadhus and saints did not appear perfect anymore. They renounce the world for an ideal to meditate. I thought this was no lie. How can everyone renounce the world in a pursuit of an ideal. In the second phase of my growth, I felt that the lovers were the best people. They are true to each other. They had no ambiguity in their devotion. What is love? We love that which we cannot possess. I painted Sohni Mahiwal, Heer Ranjha and others. Lately it dawned upon me that has Sohni Mahiwal been bound down in wedlock, they might have desired separation in the end. Unfulfilled love only is charming. I forsook romance as an ideal. The women haunted me in the third phase of my evolution because of her devotion to her husband, children and other members of the family. She is transplanted from one family to the other, and sacrifices her everything for others. She is great, I thought the ‘Mother is always great’. To satisfy my desires for mother, I painted a few women like Punjabi Bride, Kangra Bride, Gaddan and others. I shifted to religion ultimately. Religion is nothing but faith. Masses cannot be educated through materialistic philosophy. They can receive wisdom through religion. It inspires them. I have painted Sikh Gurus to inspire people. Painting the Sikh Gurus is nearest to ultimate in evolution of my*

*real self. This I say because evolution has no end.*”<sup>10</sup> In a parental advice to his daughter Bibi Gurcharan Kaur and her son Hridaypaul Singh, the artist often underlined the need that the reproductions of his thought-provoking masterpieces whenever undertaken should be of superior quality and the sale outlets should be of high professional standard so that his paintings are not reduced to cheap quality products being sold on the pavements of *bazaars* as he had painted these works after great contemplation and meditation.<sup>11</sup>

**It is often stated by the noble wise men that God created man in his own image and more aptly it is true in the case of art that artists generally paint the paintings in their own images with qualities inherent in their beings.** The great masterpiece ‘*Eko Simro Nanaka*’ depicts Guru Nanak as an apostle of peace who after having attained enlightenment is emerging from the river *Kali Bein* at Talwandi Sabo. This painting if critically analyzed will stand the testimony that in the real sense this work of art acted like Sobha Singh’s own resurrection and after having struggled for long, he had been successful in capturing a subject which was metaphysical and beyond the touch of physical description. Such enlightening works emerge from the brush of an artist who is predominantly a saint and lives like a *Karam Yogi*. Sobha Singh believed that escapism from life, family and society is no permanent solution to the ever-emerging questions of one’s existence. Answers have to be found living in the thick of life and life cannot be avoided for any personal enlightenment or awakening. Spirituality is subtle which resides in the simple surroundings around us. One has to develop the sight and see this everlasting beauty. When asked how he could visualize Guru Nanak’s face, his reply was: “*I will not caption it as*

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10 **Phul, Sushil Kumar**; 1987, *Sardar Sobha Singh: Journey from Romance to Religion*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.84-85

11 **Kaur, Bibi Gurcharan** (Daughter of S. Sobha Singh, Legendary Punjabi Artist); October 2, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, S. Sobha Singh Art Gallery, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

*'Guru Nanak'; this is a manifestation of my meditation of the Guru.'* It is artist's sheer humility but it is a fact that no artist has been more successful in capturing the spiritual essence of the Guru as this saint artist- Sobha Singh has done.<sup>12</sup>

The artist was so devoted to the painting of Sikh Gurus, he would often admit that his soul aim of life was to paint the images of the Gurus. In his own words, he expressed that, *"Painting is my life- Gurus are my life-blood. Guru Nanak is a manifestation of my meditation. Guru Gobind Singh is inspiration incarnate."*<sup>13</sup> As the Sikh Gurus greatly influenced his very persona, he took upon himself to paint them in repeated versions and to convey to the people the lofty, humanistic and divine values which flowed from the lives of Sikh Gurus. The artist devoted his entire artistic potential in carrying forward the flame of piousness and illuminated and elevated harmony so that the coming generation may get inspiration and awakening from the wisdom of the Gurus. Absence of spiritual awakening and darkness of ignorance leads people to the barbaric and brutal ways. As a heart without kindness is virtually rendered cruel and can only perpetuate barbaric pursuits both physical and mental. In a very simplistic example, the artist has elaborated on this thought and narrates that, *"When a child cannot build his sand-house, he demolishes those of others. Mere glorification of one's physical is mortal while if you have found the essence of your life then you are immortal."*<sup>14</sup> His life is a glowing tribute to this conviction that his inner strength, self-realization and self-improvement will certainly give him a cause to live a happy and fruitful life, while using his brush to paint the mundane objects around him he endeavoured to place them on the celestial pedestal. An artist who has attained the caliber, to transform the daily fleeting

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12 **Vaidya, K.L.;** 1987, *Sardar Sobha Singh: An Artist in Kangra Valley*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.34

13 **Phul, Sushil Kumar;** 1987, *Sardar Sobha Singh: Journey from Romance to Religion*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.87

14 **Khokhar, Dr. Kulwant Singh;** 2002, *Soul and Principles*, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Exports, Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar, p.4

moments of life into highly cherished lofty and idealistic expressions, is indeed a saint and of course a crusader. Indulgence in spiritual pursuits has in fact polished the very essence of his art which radiates in divine eternity. The persona of Gurus is so soothingly portrayed that it applies balm to the tortured and parched souls of the beholders. His work develops an instant bond with the viewer and stirs the innermost chords of his minds and soul implanting the message of humanistic values in free-flowing impact of artistic undercurrents. The viewer is charged with an enigmatic energy which mesmerizes his soul and leaves an indelible mark on his innermost psyche. The lines which emanate from Sobha Singh's heart describe his art and mission in spellbinding truthfulness. The artist sums up his art in his own words as *"My art is my religion and my aim in it is to give a form to the formless. In my effort, I paint the Gurus, the avatars and the prophets. Sometimes, a painting of mine, keeps on growing with my growth and I keep on trying to make it more and still more perfect with new touches of my brush and by making changes in it. This way, I see integrated growth of my painting, exactly as I find my past in my present. The art may be of any type, but if it does not touch the inner self of the man and help in his evolution, then it is useless."*<sup>15</sup>

Many upcoming artists used to visit his studios at Andretta to have a first hand knowledge of his working style and his general approach to art as they were spellbound by his technical skills and superior craftsmanship in his each work. They observed him closely and occasionally. Sobha Singh used to give the much sought after advice urgently needed by this new generation of artists. It was his firm belief that in the real sense of the word, the artists cannot be made and they are born as artists.<sup>16</sup> However circumstances, surroundings, sound guidance can

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15 **Singh, Dr. Kulwant;** 1987, *Sobha Singh's Philosophy of Art*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.79-80

16 **Cole, Julian;** 1987, *Sage Paints the Way: An Interview with Sobha Singh (1972)*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.63

equip them with greater competence and can even improve their painting styles and infuse a new lease of life into their stagnating creative impulses. Literature and interaction also propels renewed impetus in an artist's mind and can open new doors to let in the fresh air of ideas and concepts. Similarly some artists he believed are inspired by music. While others are tuned to philosophical discourses and deep discussions. In his words of wisdom, he has explained that, *"I believe that an artist is born as such and that none can be taught to become one. The rose is a rose right from its beginning. The genes of an artist present from birth, keep on developing by sincere hardwork. The circumstances and the environment do play their part. In the domain of art, the inspiration is needed by the novices or by the ignorants at the initial stage. All that matters here is the single-mindedness of the purpose. Then the inspiration arises from within. The truth needs no inspirational consolidation. The seed of art in someone keeps on sprouting with right effort. I adopted no teacher to learn painting and I could not afford to join any such institution. I inherited painting from my father and aesthetic sense from my mother. I could draw and paint right from my childhood. I picked up the scale drawing from my brother-in-law, Sardar Mangal Singh. When at Basra, I had an occasion to observe Lt. Col. Glover and Lt. Rigden and a few more Europeans, who painted as a hobby. I kept an eye and mind open and my art kept on evolving. I have my own techniques of colour mixing, balancing, harmonising and of retaining the sensitivity of my paintings."*<sup>17</sup>

Another aspect admitted by the artist is the importance of extensive study of available literature on the subject and he used to deeply contemplate in it. For this purpose, he had created a small cottage away from his abode deep in the forest at Andretta, where silence and solitude reigned and he used to be engaged in contemplation to arrive at the final imagery of a specific work so that all

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17 **Singh, Dr. Kulwant**; 1987, *Sobha Singh's Philosophy of Art*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.80



aspect and elements of the creation are well thought after and a precise crystal like composition emerges on the canvas of his mind. Such meditative sessions put him in spiritual trance and he came out from the depths of the eternal oceans of his imagination with pearls of wisdom and ethereal comprehension of an artistic sojourn.<sup>18</sup> It is not surprising that due to deep indulgence, each work of Sobha Singh resonates with subtle divinity and his superb technical skills adds a charismatic ambience to his works. Colours, tones and hues danced at his synchronized ecstasy. The greatest compliment he ever got from a rustic native of Andretta was that, “*Sardar Sobha Singh takes out his own soul and puts that into the paintings. He possesses some magical powers and his paintings come alive at the touch of his brush.*” And yet another viewer was so mesmerized and enthralled on seeing him engrossed in painting of Guru Gobind Singh remarked that, “*Guru Gobind Singh himself comes and directs his hand to paint his pictures.*”<sup>19</sup> In the nutshell, he used to express that his prime artistic endeavour was to paint the qualities of a particular great man- a saint or a Guru and on this basis an image of that person emerged out of his canvas.

Andretta, the laid back sleepy village where he established his abode and studio, is surrounded by towering snow-clad *Dhauladhaar* mountains, murmuring brooks and a rich variety of flora and fauna, inhabited by simple and innocent *Pahari* folks, lies in Kangra valley, where other prominent figures from theatre and literary world like Mother of Punjabi Theatre- Lady Norah Richards and Father of Blue pottery- Sardar Gurcharan Singh, also established their homes and studios and they used to have frequent visitors like Balraj Sahni, Prithvi Raj Kapoor, Dr. M.S. Randhawa, Dr. Karan Singh, Amrita Pritam, Nanak Singh, Gurbaksh Singh *Preetlari* and Pandit Mangat Ram amongst them. This place has

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18 **Kaur, Bibi Gurcharan** (Daughter of S. Sobha Singh, Legendary Punjabi Artist); October 2, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, S. Sobha Singh Art Gallery, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

19 **Singh, Dr. Kulwant**; 1987, *Sobha Singh's Philosophy of Art*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.80

the magical beauty and charm of its own and these people found true solace in the lap of nature. Andretta certainly has played a great part in shaping the destiny of this ascetic artist who was in constant pursuit of real divine bliss so that the turmoils of life may cease to exist. He had tasted the noisy and crafty life in many cities where one-upmanship and selfishness ruled the roost. He did not have fancy for over clever money-minded self-proclaimed leaders of art and literature who hankered after laurels and honours only. Being a misfit in such circumstances he always yearned to live at a place where he could understand his real self so that whatever he painted came straight from his heart and is devoid of economic constraints. Living here in Andretta amongst the hard working folks, took away the unnecessary burden of professional competition and lightened his soul which ultimately wiped the dust off his innermost psyche and he could see the things in right perspective. This indeed was a boon for his career and artistic journey. Here he enjoyed whatever he did in his own inimitable manner.

Occasionally, Sobha Singh used to describe the sad trends in promotion of art and culture prevalent in modern times, he did not mince words to express his anguish at the sad and unreasonable happenings pertaining to the art world. He aired his views with sarcasm that, *“Mostly wrong people and third-rate artists are patronized by the government. Good artists are admired only after they die because they provide an occasion for a politician to make a good speech. He further mentions that Good artists are born when the artists go through suffering and starvation, while the government pampers some artists without going into their creative merit. This may be due to political considerations. To provide true patronage to art and culture, government should formulate a transparent and democratic policy where the only consideration for honouring an artist should be his dedication and creative merit. This way hordes of so called artists and poets who use their talents of sycophancy and glib talking will disappear into thin air. Politicizing the creative arts by the patrons is of immense destructive value and*

*in the long run genuine artists who wholeheartedly devote their lives towards the propagation of art stand to loose a great deal.” In a lighter vein, he once remarked in response to the question of this nature that, “Ninety per cent artists and poets are not genuine and to get rid of them they should be sent to jails. Thus the society would be cleared of manipulators and pseudo-artists.”*<sup>20</sup>

Sobha Singh often quoted relevant couplets from *Gurbani* beneath his paintings in an effort to reach out to the masses, so that these revered couplets by the Gurus, may instill a feeling of divinity and kindle a flame in their hearts for humanistic values as these values have the power to bring harmony and mutual respect for all mankind to usher in an era of peaceful co-existence in this world.<sup>21</sup> An artist is always in search of food for thought so that with his creative efforts the darkness of ignorance which is the root cause of hatred amongst the human beings is dispelled. Infact Sobha Singh’s life is a shining example of a visionary who took it as a sacred mission to spread harmony in society through his art. Basically he was a true messenger who portrayed the divine messages of the Gurus.

Running after awards and honours for self-glorification was not in Sobha Singh’s temperament and infact he found it quiet difficult to part with his paintings for the consideration of money. Thus he had devised a way to earn his livelihood through the sale of the reproductions of these great works. The best reward for him was people’s love and respect for his art which he got in abundance during his lifetime and even after death from art connoisseurs as well as common viewers. He did not like the idea that some people worship his paintings and burn incense-sticks and offer flowers before them. He considered it as a ritualistic act. He described that it would give him much more happiness and

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20 **Gargi, Balwant;** 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.19

21 **Vaidya, K.L.;** 1987, *Sardar Sobha Singh: An Artist in Kangra Valley*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.35

satisfaction if people improved their lives by getting inspired from his works. This will aid their mental upliftment and growth as human beings.<sup>22</sup>

The fertile soil of village Verka in Amritsar district of Punjab though generally associated with the production of milk, butter and ghee has also produced an artist who came to be known as ‘John Constable of India’<sup>23</sup> due to his immense love for nature. This was artist S.G. Thakur Singh who created some records of sorts which remain unbroken till today. He was primarily the first artist who was awarded a handsome cash award and a medal in the British Empire Exhibition in London in 1924.<sup>24</sup> He was a frontrunner in following the painting techniques brought to India by the British artists. He added a Midas touch to every artistic creation and his canvases were so versatile and vibrant that these touched vast realms of subjects from nature to life, to cultural manifestations stretching beyond the boundaries of Punjab in his magnificent works. He received lavish praise and laurels from all over India and abroad. Though he had very humble beginnings and could not afford the systematic institutional academic study in art yet his determination and dedication enabled him to stand amongst the most creative and aesthetically sound artists of his day as one of the tallest stalwart of his times. Even as a child, he was always engrossed in observing the bounties of sunrise and sunsets and stood in the fields all alone marveling at the beauty of nature. Trees, plants, animals and birds became his chum-friends and he enjoyed being in their company and started sketching them often on the mud walls of *Katcha* houses of his village as he could barely afford a sketchbook due to dire poverty and deprivation. He had such a powerful imagination and skill that he could draw from memory the faces

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22 **Bhagal, Hridayjeet Singh;** 1987, *Chitrakar Sobha Singh naal Khulian Gaalan (Punjabi)*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.141-142

23 **Bhatti, S.S.;** May 1, 2011, *Art under Attack*, The Tribune.

24 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer;** 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2

of the people and lazily grazing cattles in the fields and each tree offered him a mode of fascination and provided him blissful ecstasy in painting it in charcoal made out of burnt wood. These moments laid a solid artistic foundation in his heart and his sensitive portrayal of the surroundings strengthened his grasp on nature painting. Each passing day added to his caliber as an artist and Nature became his school of art and his teacher.<sup>25</sup> The love of nature never betrayed him till the end of his life; he loved it, touched it, felt it and painted it in its enigmatic divinity. Infact he lavishly captured the very essence of nature and experienced the subtle presence of God in his nature study, as he had the good opportunity to travel far and wide on the soil of this great country. He expressed his enchantment of his country in the following words: *“This ancient land of India, so vast in her extent, so varied in her loveliness, has lured from time immemorial the footsteps of the greedy conqueror as well as the inquisitive visitor from lands far remote. But face to face with her irresistible magnificence the conqueror found him disarmed, and instead of ransacking her fair bosom, was forced to lay at her lotus feet the best gift of his own exotic culture and civilization. The dazed visitor went back with his incredible tales of wonder and romance and was instrumental in manipulating a fresh wave of invasion with results not a whit different from those in the past. This endless process of time has thus made India the treasure-house not only of natural beauty but also of works of supreme artistic excellence. Even her minutest particle of dust instinct with some mystical, mythical or historical tradition or association. In the busy life of today, it is given only to a very few lovers of nature and art to have the luxury of visiting all such places and having a first hand impression of their fadeless splendour.”* In recording the bewitching scenes, landscapes, seascapes, historical monuments, places of pilgrimage and a vast variety of ethnic inhabitants, the subjects which

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25 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.17

were close to his heart- he had infact left behind an artistic legacy for those not fortunate enough to have the luxury to travel to these incredible places to have a first hand artistic interaction. He narrates that, “*I have been motivated by a desire to be of service to the less fortunate among the art lovers who neither time nor convenience permits any chance to embark upon a holy pilgrimage to the eternal shrines of beauty.*”<sup>26</sup>

**S.G. Thakur Singh not only documented the myriad glimpses of landscapes of this country in an aesthetic manner, he also endeavoured to publish a few multicoloured publications of his works with suitable descriptions so that the coming generations may have a chance to have the glimpses of India which had been capturing the imagination of kings, emperors, travelers and settlers.** The remarkable work compiled in these albums have immense educational value and art lovers and upcoming artists can fire their imagination to create wonderful works. This great artist had a photographic eye and memory and well versed in architectural aspects like perspective and foreshortening. Another highlight of his work is that he infused his soul into the subjects he painted and his works do not look like mere imitations of the original spots but there reigns an aura of divinity in these outstanding works and they are bathed in a light that transmits awakening and spiritualism in one’s mind. An ardent admirer of ‘William Wordsworth’- the renowned Nature poet, he sought to express visually what Wordsworth described in his lucid literary style and we can admiringly characterise him as a William Wordsworth who wrote his poems in colour and brush.<sup>27</sup> The love of nature is treasured in the hearts of a few people whose roots are well-grounded in the soil and whose heads are above the clouds. Analyzing his psyche and philosophy,

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26 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties* (Artist’s Note), Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.7

27 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.45

behind the arresting of the fleeting moments of nature lies a proof of ample glow of spirituality and his love for the divinity. Infact people like him are philosophers in their own rite. In a very commendable remark written by the Great Russian painter- Nicholas Roerich in which Roerich has praised the works of S.G. Thakur Singh and he says: “*S.G. Thakur Singh loves his great motherland. He travels and depicts various aspects of Indian life. From realistic studies he turns to landscapes full of harmony in colours. We should be grateful to the artist who gives us the beauty of India.*”<sup>28</sup> The humble boy from Verka received appreciation and accolade for his enchanting works from people as great as the Nobel Laureate- Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore praises his unparalleled efforts in capturing the beauty of his Motherland in the words: “*The representations of the Landscapes, temple scenes and some striking aspects of Indian Cities done by Mr. S.G. Thakur Singh have given me pleasure and I can recommend them to all lovers of beauty in nature and human works of art.*”<sup>29</sup>

James H. Cousins- the vice-president of the Kalakshetra, Adyar, Madras has scholarly disseminated the innermost psyche of this artist and has analyzed his work in a critical manner which has brought out the essence and the essential sensitivity of this artist in a vivid fashion. He writes: “*To those who have seen something of the spectacle of India, this admirably reproduced selection from the paintings of Sardar S.G. Thakur Singh will be a happy perpetual reminder of past pleasure. The reproductions will also enable one to realize features, delineated by the patient artist that had been over-looked or only glanced at among the moving distractions of actual life. To those who have not actually visited the country, the reproductions will reveal something of the beauty and distinctiveness of the Indian scene, architecturally, naturally and humanly. This*

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28 **Roerich, Nicholas;** n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties*, Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.6

29 **Tagore, Rabindranath;** n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties* (Foreword), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.5

*double service comes out of the artist's extraordinary fidelity to what the eye sees. There is no technical freakishness in his art; no interposing of what is called self-expression between the subject matter and the beholder. To Hamlet 'the play is the thing'; to Thakur Singh 'the picture is the thing.' This is not putting his work in the category of colour photography. The latter is usually hard, needs to be excessively lighted and is not absolutely true. But Thakur Singh has a gift of selection, arrangement and reserve in colouring that bears its testimony to his own vital and individual sensitiveness and delicacy of response to the visible world and his joy in the unsophisticated depiction of beauty.*"<sup>30</sup>

There is a glint of romanticism in S.G. Thakur Singh's works as whatever he painted had a certain degree of rhythmic expression and movement with pleasing soft tones and hues, he understands the sensitivity of the subject like a mother naturally understands her child. There appears an added dimension to his work which has the palpitation of a living heartbeat. The subjects are life-like in depiction and they transcend a visual magic which moves the heart of the beholder, gently touching the innermost chords. The authenticity of the composition and the technical overbearing does not overpower the lyricism lit large on his canvases. Infact, this mysterious lyricism lifts his works to the domain of visual ecstasy and fills them with ethereal charm. He had a good command over the medium of oil colours, water-colours, drawing and sketching, the basic fundamentals of western style painting appear to be adopted by him in abundance.<sup>31</sup> The clarity and realism are certainly akin to the western painting style yet if closely monitored it will reveal that the fineness of execution makes it cousin-brother to the Rajput and Mughal era of Indian painting. The element of movement goes hand in hand with the stationary elements of his compositions.

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30 **Cousins, James. H;** n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties* (Preface), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p. 4

31 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.19



The artist has a remarkable control over the movement and the same becomes an integral part of the painting. Figures are made to operate in the composition as they would be actually moving in the actual natural scene with no undue concentration or accentuation. This is a result of his keen observance and quick visualization. His works are an epitome of blissful flavour which casts the aromas of a poetic justification as sensitivity is a grand tool in this artist's hand and the brushwork has magical touch soothing, enthralling and captivating in the same breath. The broken line of sunset gold in a sea-piece is painted with such industrious trust that the eye moves from wavelet to wavelet so quickly as to induce the delightful feeling of rhythmical light.<sup>32</sup>

For S.G. Thakur Singh, the nature was an eternal beloved whose moods and tantrums sent surges of untamed energy in his veins and he poured his heart at every whim and fancy of this beloved. In pursuit of his muse, he wandered from valleys to the mountains, crossed brooks and rivers, gazed at the surfs of the dancing waves in the ocean and filled his heart with magical moments and transferred them onto his ever enchanting canvases. S.G. Thakur Singh is fully himself when he arrests with his powerful brush the fleeting colours that play upon the sublime face of nature. To him she is endowed with a personality which is swayed by different moods at different times. Sometimes it is gay, at other times melancholy; sometimes it is turbulent, at other times tranquil. But he loves to paint her more generally in her grave and somber moods. In the manner of William Wordsworth, he takes scenes from real life, but without impairing their individuality and local colouring, he transforms them with the aid of his romantic imagination into a visionary world of wonder and enchantment.<sup>33</sup>

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32 **Cousins, James. H;** n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties* (Preface), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p. 4

33 **Singh, S.G. Thakur;** n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.9

Commenting on the thought-process and laying his inner psyche thread-bare, renowned author and admirer of S.G. Thakur Singh's work- Principal Shamsheer Singh has thrown light on the essence and sensibilities of this great artist's work in a very truthful and precise manner and he avers that, "*In landscape painting, he is essentially a lyricist. Some of his scenes without exaggeration, be styled as symphonies in colours like the Greek sculptor, who could carve in stone the movement of the wind and the breeze.*"<sup>34</sup> Such magnetism emanates from the works of a man who swims in ecstasy of philosophical vision and who is relentlessly engaged in pursuit of something as spiritual and divine as the presence of a celestial splendour called the Milky Way.

Celebrated art historian Krishna Chaitanya had disseminated the works of S.G. Thakur Singh in an alluring description: "*In an age when so much humbug can intimidate so many people into shaking their heads with admiration at bizarre forms on canvas, on the significance of which the men who painted them preserve a discreet silence, it is good to come across an artist like Thakur Singh, whose art communicates itself to us with the same simplicity with which the hour of dawn or twilight can communicate its mood.*"<sup>35</sup> The critic correlates the works of Thakur Singh to the Dutch painters of still life and he expresses that the mention of Vermeer brings to mind Thakur Singh's affinity with them. He further explains: "*The art of seventeenth century Netherlands and Flanders renovated the vision of civilized men by awakening the mind to the consciousness of the beauty of every day surroundings. The modern age, it would seem, is not eager to recover this frame of mind. The immense difference between a portrait by El Greco and a portrait by Chardin distinguishes a still life by Braque from*

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34 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.3

35 **Chaitanya, Krishna**; 1951, *The Art of S.G. Thakur Singh*, *Roopalekha*, Vol.22, No.2, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.19

*one by a Dutch painter like Van Der Meer. But while we have gained in psychological depth, we have lost in familiar charm and a catholic taste should not reject either of these values. Thakur Singh recovers the simpler frame of mind. Pomegranates, green and ripe, provide contrast of colour, the perfect round of a Thali insinuates itself gracefully into the compositional scheme and a brass Lota catches all the light in one of his pictures, a rare instance of a still life painting which has managed to be genuinely Indian in spirit.”<sup>36</sup>*

Dr. B.N. Goswamy, a renowned art historian and art critic, fondly remembers that during his youth, when he was a student in Amritsar, he used to pass by ‘S.G. Thakur Singh Academy of Art’ on his bicycle and had an irresistible desire to go inside this academy and see what was displayed there. He paid repeated visits to this place and was astonished to find some paintings of unparalleled artistic charm. But more than that, he came to know that, these remarkable works were done by a rustic lad from the village of Verka in Amritsar district. He was fascinated by the struggle and the spirit of enterprise that ran like a thread through the lives of this artist and his mentor- Mohammad Alam. Both of these men of untiring spirit were possessed with a will to create a niche in the Indian art world wherein those days Bengal school and Bengalis had captured the coveted place of art promotion in India and it was next to impossible to invade their bastion. Dr. B.N. Goswamy came across an old sepia-coloured photograph of Thakur Singh, in his mid-thirties perhaps, posing, seated on a European style sofa, dressed in a three-piece suit with an ivory-handled walking stick positioned close to his legs and the walls behind him covered with paintings- his own work, apparently- some in gilt frames, others half-finished: an actress dressed up as a character from a *Parsi* play, some smaller portraits, a young woman holding on to a branch, a view of possibly of the Golden Temple,

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36 **Chaitanya, Krishna**; 1951, *The Art of S.G. Thakur Singh, Roopalekha*, Vol.22, No.2, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.21

and what looks from a distance as a framed testimonial. This was an astonishing transformation for an artist who till a few decades back was toiling in the fields of his village. This represents the determination and a will to succeed in his profession without being bogged down by adversities and economic support. He had a rare gift of enterprise and a sense of urgency in his character which stood him a good stead throughout his brilliant career.<sup>37</sup> He not only made a name for himself but had dreams about providing an institution where the young generation of artists could come and study art without hardships through which he had to go during his early years. This dream was realized because of his unstinted hardwork and vision.

**It seems that G.S. Sohan Singh had licked colours in a silver spoon instead of honey by his illustrious father Sardar Gian Singh Naqqash- a well known fresco painter of Golden Temple at Amritsar. Art runs in his veins.** He spent his early childhood, looking at his father engaged in producing marvelous scenes from Sikh history for the murals and thus he used to be engaged in doodling and sketching even as a he was a toddler. Sardar Gian Singh saw a spark in his son's creative engagements and encouraged him to follow his foot-steps after only studying up to middle class. This young lad took up assignments in sign painting, illustrations, calligraphy, book illustrations and designing of book jackets.<sup>38</sup> Later on, he came to be called as an all-rounder in each department of art and emerged as a pioneer in not only painting elaborate scenes from Sikh history but producing *calendar art* works and its reproductions in his own studio, which he established, after learning all technical aspects of litho- print making, letter-press publishing and efficiently managed an art studio, which even had a section for framing and promotion of sales for advertisements. He even made illustrations for newspapers and magazines as he had a

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37 **Goswamy, B.N.;** December 12, 2010, *Risen from the soil*, The Tribune.

38 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.63

considerable amount of efficiency in illustration work and had obtained the much needed caliber to visually interpret the Sikh history in its right perspective.<sup>39</sup> He soon developed a pleasing style of his own which was both decorative and rich in detail. His paintings have the hallmark of decorative elements, beautiful floral margins and frames which he learnt from his father who was considered to be a master of this art. His paintings have a distinct flavour oozing with glowing vibrant colours and have a mass appeal- prerequisite element for a piece of good *Calendar art*. He based his paintings on glorious events of Sikh history with suitable titles and couplets from Gurbani.

Coveted credit for reproducing *Sikh Calendar art* goes to G.S. Sohan Singh, an enterprising artist who produced fabulous calendars on not so common themes of Sikh history and these printed calendars were made available in the market at very nominal prices. Thus he became a household name in this field and soon people started displaying his works reproduced in calendars, in their homes, shops and other institutional buildings. Infact, he was able to reach out to the masses through these Sikh calendars. These captivating calendars were in great demand as they caught the imagination of Sikh masses due to their religious content and skillful painting techniques endowed with elements of floral design and ornamental stylization.<sup>40</sup>

After retirement from the Golden Temple as a *Naqqash*, Gian Singh joined his equally creative son and their business flourished by leaps and bounds. They had also started the business of framing, designing of labels, pamphlets, brochures and booklets for various trading companies and business houses. G.S. Sohan Singh's first *Sikh Calendar* on the unusual theme of Banda Bahadur was well received as a calendar. This encouraged him to go deep into the minute

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39 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.98-99

40 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.64

details of Sikh history and dig out some rare episodes. He then used to select three themes in a year for his calendars and reproduced them after getting the printing plates from Lahore.<sup>41</sup> This artist will be remembered as the first *Sikh Popular art* artist who tasted true professional success in producing hundreds of reproductions of his work for consumption in the market. This indeed is a remarkable initiative which strongly established him as the full-fledged front-running painter of *Sikh Calendar art*.

G.S. Sohan Singh spent considerable amount of time studying the reproductions of Renaissance art, Persian and Mughal paintings, thus he acquired a clear impression of floral patterns and his indulgence for depicting details in costumes, jewellery, accessories, weapons, flora and fauna was noticeable. He organized the compositions in such an immaculate manner that they were devoid of chaotic presentation inspite of his preference for introducing scores of figures in a scene. The overpowering aspect of his deft handling infused a tender and pleasing appeal to the eye. He had developed a penchant for drawing accurate features, movements and gestures in superb understanding of perspectives and proportions. The skies and clouds with paleish hue and swirling effect resemble to Claude Lorrain and Poussin's work.<sup>42</sup> In the forefront, he loved to add rich floral patterns as these were rich specimens of botanical element which he had mastered drawing scientific charts for his clients during the early days of his career as a master illustrator.

Sardar Sobha Singh in his frank opinion about the work of this artist describes him as a gem of a person, who had the disciplined training and the required devotion and dedication towards painting scenes portraying Sikh ethics and the wisdom of the Gurus in his typical gentle and tender style with lyrical bold lines and sweet and soft tones of colour. This amply explains the man that

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41 **Walia, Varinder**; December 1, 2005, *The rich life of an artist who was a pauper*, The Tribune.

42 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.27

his life was full of harmony and he was ready to put in long hours of labour into his masterpieces which were appreciated and adored by a large section of society. Sobha Singh further explains that, *“I am inclined to believe that Art expression is the crystallization of the Artist’s continued ‘Sadhna’ and ‘Tapasya’ spread over a large number of years. It is heartening to find, in this age of escapist-materialism, that there are among us sincere and selfless devotees of art like G.S. Sohan Singh. The spirit of noble thoughts, cultivated through continued study of human values, is amply evident in and through his paintings. In his own way, he has successfully depicted his visions and feelings through the medium of sweet colours and delicate but bold lines.”*<sup>43</sup> This artist breathed the air deeply scented with the fervour of Gurus divine messages which applied soothing balm on the souls of human beings mired in the dust and grime of bewilderment and illusions. He felt that he had a role to play in quenching the thirst of masses through the calendars of *Sikh art* which are capable of infusing mystic transformation in their minds and souls. Thus he channelised his creative talents towards producing calendars of rare spiritual beauty and divine charm. For the first time a calendar on the theme of *‘Gagan Mayi Thaal Ravi Chand Dipak....’* The *Aarti* adopted by the Sikhs came to the market and it became so immensely popular that it had to be reprinted in many editions.<sup>44</sup>

A renowned artist Ajaib Chitrakar defines G.S. Sohan Singh’s deep sensibilities and intense understanding in portraying a formless subject into a visually powerful presentation, without losing the complex meaning and the essence of the thought. He further explains: *“G.S. Sohan Singh was a deeply religious person, gentle in temperament and sensitive at heart. Before starting a new creation, he would sit in silence and contemplate on the subject so that whatever he painted would have the touch of philosophical fervour and deep*

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43 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.65

44 *Ibid*, p.66

*inherent meaning in a symbolical form. He stressed upon aesthetic excellence and dwelled upon the significance of intricacies of the creation. Each work carried the aroma of his meditative stance and glowed in the halo of celestial charm. Sacred couplets from Gurbani were his main inspiration and motivation as he had a phenomenal grasp on the Sikh ethos, traditions and culture. His hand on the pulse of common man enabled him to create paintings of everlasting beauty based on day-to-day happenings of Punjabi way of life. He painted colourful fairs, festivals, ceremonies and scenes from daily chores of Punjabi rural life. He had a fascination for painting common folks engaged in different ethnic trades like a Bangle-seller, a juggler, a Banjara, a farmer toiling in his fields, a snake charmer entertaining an amazed crowd- a Punjabi woman churning milk and Women at the spinning wheel (Charkha) spinning snow-white cotton flakes.”<sup>45</sup> All these subjects bring to the fore his love for traditional Punjabi culture where the fragrance of the soil and mud houses can be felt and seen by the viewer.*

**It would not be an understatement that artist Kirpal Singh wrote the Sikh history with the vibrant and versatile touch of his brush. Truly his brush seemed to carry the dynamic and untamed energy of a lightening blaze which sent waves of powerful and pulsating tremours in portrayal of visually charged glimpses of the bygone era of Sikh history which was written in the blood of the countless martyrs. Though this great artist rose from the humble beginnings, he generated a vision and a resolve to portray each and every episode of the struggle and sacrifice of the Sikhs for whom the protection and propagation of high Sikh values was more important than their own lives.<sup>46</sup> Seeds of this sacred mission were sown in his heart when**

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45 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 66-68

46 **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune



he was merely a teenager and had a chance to go through an absorbing book titled ‘Sundri’ written by Bhai Vir Singh. This inspiring book stirred a sense of pride in his heart for the Punjabi valour and bravery. The characters and events written in this book had left an indelible impression on his mind. He was so engrossed in these characters that he started visualizing them in his mind’s eye and felt the urgency to bring them out on his canvas.<sup>47</sup> The other great influence on his art was the tales from the lives of Sikh Gurus which were narrated to him in his early childhood days and he remembered each and every moment in such detail that he felt an overbearing task to transfer these glorious episodes in his paintings and sketches in order to make the people aware of such unparalleled sacrifices enshrined in the pages of Sikh history written in the ink of divinity and spirituality.<sup>48</sup> The glorious lives of Sikh Gurus which abounded in high moral values and ideals and above all the significance of martyrdom in Sikhism set him on a sacred mission to perform that is to paint and record the revolutionary influences which were responsible for changing the very course of Sikh history.<sup>49</sup>

Kirpal Singh expressed his views on the authenticity of his paintings and explained that, *“Unless an artist devotes his time to study the written historical literature in depth and familiarizes himself with the true causes and motives of a particular happening which leave an overbearing effect on the collective psyche of a nation and develops a capacity in himself to correlate with the manifestations generated by historical, religious and political dimensions; he is unable to bring to life the very soul and essence of the events. The exercise of creating various versions of a subject or composition felicitates an artist’s capacity to narrate a theme by organizing the elements in various juxtapositions*

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47 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.126

48 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.96

49 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

to achieve a final product is of utmost importance. It serves the purpose in finalization and consolidation of a work of real high standard with full justification to its ideology. This task needs concentrated focus and determination coupled with unmatched technical skill and an eye for aesthetics.”<sup>50</sup> His own persona and body language amply illustrated this factor that he was bestowed with the required determination and energy of highly charged spirit and strength of character. He considered himself to be a crusader in his own right; he shunned many luxuries of a modern day life enjoyed by the contemporary artist. He generally donned a black robe and wore a white turban symbolizing his interest in Sufism which advocated piousness and purity of thought and action. His most discernible strength lies in utmost dedication to hardwork.<sup>51</sup> He enjoyed working till midnight and invested his time and energy in bringing to life an enchanting work of great historical significance in phenomenal expression. He was a man of few words and did not relish ideal gossip. Joining art groups or attending gatherings of poets and painters where ultimately the artistic energies directly or indirectly get hijacked towards petty politics was not his forte. He considered his work as the real award which provided him genuine satisfaction of accomplishing it in creditable creative way.<sup>52</sup>

In Kirpal Singh’s sumptuously illustrated war compositions, the sturdy horse occupies the central feature which lends a kinetic energy and an irresistibly eye-catching presence. A deep study of anatomy of horses is apparently the result of his long association with this subject. He professed his love for horses in a piece of conversation with an art critic: “*My village had seen violent clashes*

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50 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.96

51 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

52 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.104

*between various factions of people and the mounted police paid regular visits to this village to dispel their angry quarrels and clashes. This provided me a good opportunity to study the horse in all postures and movements as the police horses were usually fabulously well-build, sturdy and very alluring. I enjoyed sketching them in detail.”* The second reason he explained: “*Near my village lies the Ferozpur Military Cantonment which had cavalries, mounted police and polo players, to watch them in action, gave me a lot of excitement and sketching them in my sketchbook was even greater source of joy and a matter of great artistic satisfaction.*” Thus the presence of sturdy horses was etched in his subconscious mind and he comfortably filled large canvases with galloping and jumping horses being ridden by the Sikh warriors. His interest in horses was so overpowering that his father had to purchase a young mare for his son which became a source of joy for him and the mare was proudly trained by his elder brother.<sup>53</sup>

The glow of pride on the faces of brave and valiant Sikh warriors was passionately depicted by Kirpal Singh in his dynamic style in the paintings literally reverberating with action in the war-fields.<sup>54</sup> He successfully captured the roar of a lion in the war cries of *Jo Bole Sau Nihaal Sat Sri Akal* chanted by majestic Sikh soldiers while challenging the tyrant and shrewd oppressors. These paintings lifted his own spirits and he felt a strange artistic satisfaction and a sense of gratitude to the Sikh Gurus who he felt guided his artistic vision to portray the essence of a sacred struggle against the inhuman and barbaric Mughal rulers. Painting these war scenes, he felt that he was one of those dedicated and devout soldiers of the great Gurus. The scenes brought alive on these canvases, instantly developed a rapport with the viewer and the artist successfully transported their attention to the era, when these glorious episodes of unparalleled bravery

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53 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.50

54 **Randhawa, M.S**; 1971, *Sikh Painting, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.32

and sacrifices happened.<sup>55</sup> He shared the same zeal with the viewer which he himself found in portraying dynamic compositions of Sikh history. He was a man who had a great respect for the value of time and there was an apparent urgency in his actions as he painted large mural-like paintings in the courtyard of his house which gave the appearance of an army camp.<sup>56</sup> In the nutshell, he had earned the coveted place in the world of *Sikh Calendar art* by dedicating his entire life in writing the Sikh history with his magical brush. His own persona is indicative of a man possessed with glorious traditions of selfless service and deep reverence to his faith.

**Sardar Jaswant Singh though physically a short-statured man was infact a hard core professional artist who believed in the dictum of less talk and more work. He possessed an infinite creative energy which stood him in good stead, when engrossed in his work he could go on painting for long stretches of time and was never let down by his physical strength and fantastic artistic indulgence.**<sup>57</sup> His disciplined approach to his career brought him proficiency and imagination to excel in all departments of commercial art, be it sign board painting, calligraphy in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and English, designing of book jackets, creative illustrations of high aesthetic standard, eye-catching labels, brochures and catalogues. After establishing his studio with a renowned artist friend- Sarfaraz in Lahore, he soon realized that it would be better to have his own individual studio as he was considered one of the top-notch designers and artists during this period.<sup>58</sup> His creative impulses were not restricted to the purely commercial art projects but his love for literature and

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55 **Kessar, Urmi;** June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.126-127

56 **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

57 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.83

58 **Singh, Prem;** 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings* (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.3

music immensely influenced his thought processes and he enjoyed producing works of imaginative substance wherein he could satisfy his creative hunger for creating works of exceptional merit in terms of lucid visual narration and bewitching aesthetic charm. The expertise which he had attained in illustration widened his artistic vistas and within a short span of time he started creating excellent specimens of paintings in all mediums such as water-colours, crayons, pen and ink, oil colours etc. In the company of musicians, art lovers and writers, he enriched his vision and developed a keen insight which is visible in most of his masterpieces.<sup>59</sup> The brush danced at his will and his realism was laced with superb artistic melody and harmony. The lyrical and poetic stance appeared frequently due to his love for music and divine presence of blissful colours. It is noteworthy that a man of nearly 5 feet height had the strength to paint large mural-like paintings sometimes in the size of 10 feet x 20 feet. This artist with a musical muse strived hard to visualize the temperament of sounds and notes in his mesmerizing works and provided life-like forms to the *Ragas* and *Raginis* in Indian classical musical traditions.<sup>60</sup> Though such attempts are only seen in Pahari and Rajput paintings but a close analysis will reveal that his *Raagmala* paintings were attempted in surrealist and contemporary styles. Each *Raga* he represented in his works had his own individual stylized version. The great art connoisseur and patron of art- Dr. M.S. Randhawa granted him a project on *Raagmala* series as he was fully convinced that, “*Jaswant Singh with his vast knowledge of music will do full justice to this subject as he himself was a musician of no less merit and fully understood the intricacies and fine nuances of music.*”<sup>61</sup> Jaswant Singh’s poetic temperament and a zest for fresh and noble ideas was instrumental in the creation of such fascinating and wonderful works

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59 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.84-85

60 **Randhawa, M.S**; 1971, *Sikh Painting, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.32

61 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.84

of art which have no parallel in Sikh painting. The forms and mannerism employed in these great works speak volumes of the fountain of creativity this man had cultivated in him.

Besides these surrealistic *Raagmala* paintings, the other remarkable works by Jaswant Singh are portraits and paintings of Guru Nanak done in a fashion altogether different from the usual paintings on this theme. 'Guru Nanak- the Pilgrim' is a work of supreme aesthetic dimensions which has usually recorded the process of Nanak's *Udasis* (Missionary Travels). Yet in this excellent painting, he did not paint the portrait of the great Guru but has symbolically conveyed this significant mode of Nanak's life. Use of symbolism with appropriate colour schemes is his highpoint and thus created a benchmark for others to emulate.<sup>62</sup> His deep interest in philosophy, psychology and musically tuned creations introduce the viewer to charismatic and pleasing masterpieces and the viewer travels with him to the depths of deep imagination and conceptualization. M.S. Randhawa- a renowned art connoisseur expressed his appreciation for this artist: "*Jaswant Singh had the grip on his convictions and used his imagery to follow the new trend in Sikh painting which was quite a departure from the accepted iconography. He established himself as a serious surrealistic painter with a marked individual style. His inspiration is largely Indian.*"<sup>63</sup> Dr. Charles Fabri- the renowned art critic and art historian described that: "*I find enjoyment and creative satisfaction viewing the dreamworld of this unassuming soft spoken gentle artist who has a true surrealistic vision which rides on the wings of Indian symbolism and mythology.*"<sup>64</sup> His inner vision and psyche is exposed in a marvelous work titled 'Me and My Self' which reveals

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62 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.147-150

63 **Randhawa, M.S;** 1971, *Portraits of Guru Nanak by contemporary artists*, *Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.5

64 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.88

some distorted lines of his face on a canvas placed on an easel at the sea shore and behind this canvas is shown roaring oceanic waves summing up that he harboured an ocean of imagination in his heart but he is still standing on the shore and yearning to touch the tide.<sup>65</sup>

Jaswant Singh bared his soul on the definition of ‘Abstract Art’ which is generally interpreted as a convenient way to do whatever one wants without attaining even the basic fundamental knowledge of painting, its essential elements, the grammar and the visual vocabulary. He avers: “*Such non-serious assaults on the canvas by novices of art in fact is sacrilege of art and most young artists think it a shortcut and a way to escape the hardwork required to paint a meaningful picture which relates to human beings in a befitting manner. I call it utter nonsense and a shrewd gesture on the part of modern artists for whom distortion and bad drawing means the same whereas in the real sense ‘Abstract Art’ has some rules and fundamentals and should be attempted when your cup is full and over-flowing with creative talent and deep study.*”<sup>66</sup> The paintings of this artist bear his inimitable signature as each work stands testimony to the power of individualistic mannerism and symbolism through which he conceptualized his works and defined it in a lyrical and contemporary version.

**Artist Trilok Singh’s gentle and saintly persona hardly indicates that this humble and unassuming man is infact, a walking encyclopedia of Sikh history. A devout preacher he possessed knowledge of a vast reservoir of divine gems of wisdom enshrined in the Gurbani. His mission was to understand and demystify the mystic and eternal messages veiled in the sacred hymns of Gurbani and to explore visual idioms so as to showcase the pearls of wisdom in order to create an awakening for the masses to dispel the darkness of ignorance. Thus each heart and mind will be illuminated with**

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65     **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.89-90

66     Ibid, p.91

the divine ideals of the Gurus. His deep faith and reverence in Sikhism charged his imagination as an artist. He embarked upon a lifelong crusade to convey the strength of Gurbani in truthful and meaningful terms through his paintings laden with evocative messages of humanism as preached by the Gurus. He employed symbols and a powerful visual imagery to bring the message to the common man in simple yet meaningful stylization. His paintings prove that he lived and swam in the unfathomed depths of lofty ideals and fervently believed that only these supreme ideals will help the unenlightened souls to cross the ocean of mysterious existence. He always stressed that the words of Gurbani can bring true salvation to the heart and mind of a person embroiled in worldly turmoil.<sup>67</sup>

Trilok Singh took the initiative to convey the essence of Gurbani in symbolic terms to make it more effective. He further adds that, “*Merely creating work of art without any meaning or moral message is of little use for the mankind as visual expression should be used to spread the light of truthful and pious living which remains the ultimate message of Gurbani.*”<sup>68</sup> His works dwell on the virtues of hardwork, faith, sacrifice and service to mankind. His mission and message is amply clear even in his first painting which he painted, narrating the story of a hungry wolf who did not eat a person though he was on the verge of death due to pangs of hunger simply because the man he encountered never worked with his hands, never walked to a religious place to pay obeisance, never spoke truth and did not recite the Name of the Almighty. Such philosophical connotations are portrayed in every painting he did.<sup>69</sup>

Trilok Singh a social reformer to the core used his artistic passion to the optimum level to express his anguish at the cruel and sad traditions, customs, practices and evil acts like caste system, drug addiction, mindless violence,

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67 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.107

68 Ibid, p.109

69 Ibid, p.107



drinking, domestic violence and religious bigotry prevalent in society which hampers its progress and comes in the establishment of a forward looking honest and truthful society. A patriot at heart and tirelessly work for eradication of social injustices triggered by chaos, hatred and communal violence. He was of firm belief that art is a powerful tool which should be used in bringing about reforms in society so that reign of harmony, peace and joy prevails in the world where all human beings should live like a human fraternity. Besides painting thematic scenes from Sikh way of life, he made countless illustrative calendar-like paintings which directly impacted the viewer in the promotion of a just and dignified society based on the moral values as preached by our great Sikh Gurus.<sup>70</sup> His works on the themes of national unity and patriotism were greatly appreciated by our national leaders like ‘Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru’ and others. Pandit Nehru aptly described him a very useful artist of this country whose tireless efforts were directly channelised towards removing the sufferings of a common man and who had a dream of India as a powerful nation where each and every citizen gets justice and knows about his rights and responsibilities.<sup>71</sup>

Artist Trilok Singh harboured in his thoughts that, “*Art for Art sake is a hollow concept and it is considered supreme if it is instrumental in changing the society and the world.*” He further felt that, “*Artists should not shun this sacred duty to bring about a healthy change in the life of a common man. The voice of the common man resonates in the paintings of a serious and sensitive artist. Art acts as a sieve through which unsavoury practices and unhealthy mental blockades can be removed so that the establishment of a free frank and civilized society is achieved.*” The source of his inspiration according to him lies in the divine words of Bhai Gurdas and Gurbani and he based his paintings on this plank. Thus his thirst for portraying the spiritual aspects of the divine literature is

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70 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.128-129

71 Ibid, p.66

quenched. Literary works of Waris Shah, Ferozdin Sharaf, Charan Singh Shaheed, Munsha Singh Dukhi and Hira Singh Dard, prodded him to perform the responsibility to serve his Mother tongue (Punjabi) with utmost devotion and dedication. The path he had chosen doubly satisfied his creative urges on the one hand and on the other hand, he experienced a blissful state of mind in pursuing a path of pious living.<sup>72</sup>

In a very moving letter, Sardar Sobha Singh recognized the uprighteous realm of this saint artist, whose art and persona were the same, there were no contradiction in what he practiced and preached. He further writes that, “*It is not a big deal to be an artist today but to be a man of conviction and mission is certainly rare in society. The Almighty has bestowed upon you unfathomed wisdom and faith in the tenets of Sikhism. I feel proud to be amongst the real friends you have. You have earned the reward of Waheguru by entrusting your whole life in His service. I bow my head before you for your unparalleled and unprecedented devotion towards the propagation of the message of the Sikh Gurus through your paintings drenched in spiritual nectar.*” Like all great artists, sometimes anxiety gripped him with the thought of fate of his paintings after he is gone. He has named his abode as “Chitralok” situated in Patiala. This is the place where he used to sit in contemplation and churn his soul to bring to the surface meaningful yet visually bewitching works of art.<sup>73</sup> He developed glaucoma in both eyes and became sad that his desire to paint till his death may not be fulfilled. In the next moment, being a believer of Gurbani he used to resign to the fate in the true meaning of ‘*Tera Bhana Meetha Lage*’.<sup>74</sup>

**Master Gurdit Singh was a contemporary of artist S.G. Thakur Singh and he too shared the same vision to pledge his life and creative energies to**

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72 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.109-110

73 Ibid, p.114-117

74 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.130

the promotion and propagation of the true tenets of Sikhism through his emotive and appealing paintings. The course of life he chartered for himself was not easy as painting the Sikh history in right perspective with utmost authenticity demanded a deep and continuous research. He immersed himself in available literature to study the root causes of the historical events during the rule of the Mughals and the period thereafter, to polish his intricate knowledge he used to hold discussions and discourses with the noble and literary persons. The paintings he produced depicting the carnages and massacres reveal his mastery over the subject and his matured capacity in portraying the eventful scenes in rare artistry.

Master Gurdit Singh, who was born in Amritsar, had received his art education from the Royal School of Arts, London and had naturally adopted some of the finer nuances of western painting in terms of academic excellence.<sup>75</sup> The finished appeal in his work is reminiscent of Renaissance painting. Portraiture was his another interest and he had received numerous commissions from the rich and aristocratic patrons besides regularly pursuing the painting commissions offered to him by the Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar.<sup>76</sup> Master Gurdit Singh was fortunate enough to see various art galleries, museums spread across India and Europe. He was amazed to see how the art of the regions was respectfully displayed and documented in a systematic way. His visit to a number of art schools and academies encouraged him to establish a flourishing academy of art that would be instrumental in imparting professional training in art besides such an academy would also offer privileged chances to the upcoming and established artists to exhibit their works. In this direction the credit for

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75 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; 2008, *Exhibition of Paintings of 'The Great Masters of Amritsar'* (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.3

76 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurudwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.97

establishing a full-fledged professionally managed art gallery and academy goes to this celebrated artist. Thus we see the coming up of prestigious Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar where due consideration was used to be given to the systematic academic training in art. This academy enabled the new generation artists to equip themselves with all technical as well as aesthetical aspects of painting in different mediums and styles.<sup>77</sup> After establishing this landmark academy, Gurdit Singh devoted his relentless efforts in establishing the Central Sikh Museum in the precincts of Golden Temple, Amritsar which houses the largest collection of historical paintings and portraits of Sikh Gurus and Sikh personalities who carved a niche for themselves in the cause of Sikh religion. The museum also has professionally maintained and displayed weapons and other artifacts relating to the Sikh Gurus. This is perhaps Gurdit Singh's most commendable contribution towards the propagation and preservation of *Sikh art*. The masterpieces displayed in this museum have inspired a whole lot of new generation artists to come in direct contact with these works and get inspired for continuing the missionary task of promotion of *Sikh art*.<sup>78</sup> In-depth study of the historical material and scrutiny of the period costumes, weapons, architecture and interiors complete with furniture items and artifacts enhance the realism in his works which reveal his matured grasp on the composition of a particular subject. His main mission which impelled him to paint the remarkable works is primarily the documentation and propagation of Sikh history and ethos. He had the capabilities of a good administrator and excelled in organizational works. His disciplined hand and faith in the Sikh ideology propelled his energies towards establishing gigantic tasks in dedicating these monumental institutions. These two institutions are a source of inspiration in guiding the spirit of young talents.

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77 **Sharma, Shivani**; November 14, 2009, *City set to get haven for budding artists*, The Tribune.

78 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar* (Keynote), Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurudwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.6

The magnificent collection of paintings preserved here has set up a benchmark and most of these works can be considered as excellent specimens of *Sikh Calendar art*.

**A true artist understands his duty to portray the real picture of a society and the social set up around him in right perspective. It is a matter of pride for him to portray the glorious historical events of bygone era. To pay his humble tribute to the great men and women who without any selfish ends had devoted and sacrificed their whole lives for bringing transformation in humanity by virtue of their deep vision and a sense of service to the mankind. These thoughts always resounded in artist Amolak Singh's mind and amply explain his innermost psyche where he harboured a burning desire to further the cause of Sikh tenets and philosophy.<sup>79</sup>**

Showering of the universal messages of humanism, love, faith and hope on the whole human race by Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh impelled this unassuming artist to embark upon a task of painting the ideologies and priceless values gifted to the devout Sikhs by the saints and Gurus. He in a rare gesture of gratitude started his quest for depicting these ideals in mesmerizing works of art. He felt that each human being can raise the mental stature of his mind and soul by truthfully following the virtuous examples set by these great preachers of Sikhism who always practiced what they preached. An artist can repay the debt by devoting his creative impulses to familiarize the common man with the oceans of wisdom bestowed upon us through the spiritual hymns contained in the Gurbani. This divine task he thought can be accomplished by an artist using his creative talents and devotional energies. He touched upon some rare events in the life of Sikh Gurus after carefully studying them and having discourses with the learned and enlightened individuals.

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79 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.157

Amolak Singh was open to new and fresh ideas and did not restrict his expertise in learning of new techniques in painting. He experimented with free flowing brushstrokes and even adopted the use of knife painting to create certain textures and effects in his large mural-like paintings. The main element in these fabulous works is the power of his imagination and virtuosity in experimenting with elements of the composition emphasizing on diverse angles and perceptions. The marvelous control over his work was the result of handling large banners which he painted in Delhi and Bombay to earn a living but his heart was always engrossed in creating works of everlasting spiritual beauty for which he yearned earnestly and he came back to Punjab to take up the painting of Sikh history after getting advice and training from the doyen of *Sikh art*- Sardar Sobha Singh. He sat at his feet and observed him keenly and silently. He wanted to grasp each moment of this union with his master. Sobha Singh was very appreciative of his dedication and devotion and blessed him profusely. He usually found himself stuck in the rut of doing cheap commercial art and nursed a desire to free himself from such useless pursuits. He found his real satisfaction in the work he did while painting the portraits of Sikh Gurus and episodes from the Sikh history. He found creative salvation by visiting Andretta, the abode of Sobha Singh and he used to come back charged with magical energies. Thus Amolak Singh proved himself and was a true follower of the great master in letter and spirit. In response to a question that which work of his is the greatest masterpiece. The artist replied: *“An artist never preconsiders painting a masterpiece. Each work demands utmost attention, love and affection of the artist. But generally it is seen that the works which are immensely popular and widely accepted as masterpieces are painted during the period when all falseness of your hair fades away and an artist is left with silver grey hair.”*<sup>80</sup> This explains that in simple

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80 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.158

terms an artist has to paint picture after picture to reach certain creative pinnacle. It is like the meditation of *Yogis* who lose themselves to their meditation and come out with some enlightenment.

Amolak Singh considered the works that relate to the viewer and form an instant bond with him is infact a painting of some value. An artwork which does not capture the imagination of the viewer can hardly be described a work of high merit. Mutual harmony between a viewer and a work of art is established only after it has the power of mesmerization and if it offers food for thought. People find that his works had the same quality that is why his work reaches out to the masses in a big way. Their repeated reproductions genuinely establish the fact that they are immensely popular amongst the masses. Major patrons of *Sikh Calendar art* like Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, Dharam Parchar Committee: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi, Bank of Punjab, New Delhi, Markfed, PNB Finance have bestowed upon his work the well deserved attention and reproduce it in large numbers in the form of calendars. A self-respecting artist does not care for any awards and honours given by academies and organizations as he had a bitter experience witnessing the inner functioning of these academies so-called art promotion organizations where the curse of nepotism and groupism prevails. Genuine artists are seldom considered for awards by such institutions. For him the true award is the acceptance of his works by innumerable people who cherish to adorn the walls of their houses and business establishments with his paintings and calendars. Commenting on this ideology in art, Amolak Singh shares that: “*I found true spiritual satisfaction in the paintings of Sikh Gurus whose lives were like lighthouses guiding the ships of humanity sailing in the rough and rowdy oceans of ignorance.*”<sup>81</sup>

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81 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.158-159

**Before the partition of India, a journey which started from Lahore took young and energetic artist Mehar Singh to various paces in search of a true master who would show him the real path to achieve success in the field of art. Even in his teens, Mehar Singh was raring to fly as his mind was surging with dreams for accomplishment in art but he had no clue how to proceed further till he reached Andretta and sat at the feet of great artist Sardar Sobha Singh who after seeing his genuine enthusiasm and a spark of dedication adopted him as his disciple.** The basic fundamentals of art, its philosophy, essence and the technicalities of painting were learnt at this village in the solitude of *Dhauladhaars*. Sobha Singh poured his soul and guided him to enhance his conceptual imagery. Here he learnt the value of disciplined life and experienced that there was no shortcut in achieving excellence in art. After the partition of India, there was chaos and social and political upheaval all around, which disturbed the mind of this young artist as everything was in turmoil and turbulence. People were rendered homeless, friends turned foes and the barbarism in man bared its fangs. No one was left untouched from the suffering of devastation and forced departure from their homes and hearths. The blooming career of this young artist was disturbed and in the milieu he had to shift to Delhi alongwith his family where there was a large concentration of refugees who had lost everything. He picked up the threads of his life and slowly and steadily started his artistic career again. But he had very limited opportunities and he thought it best to pursue a diploma course in art from the Delhi Polytechnic so that he could get a suitable government job. Thereafter he joined ‘American Embassy’ as an artist and received accolades due to his good grasp at portrait painting and illustration. He reinvented himself and started working in all branches of commercial art and design. A turning point came to his artistic career as here at the Embassy Library he was exposed to works of art done by



contemporary painters from all over the world.<sup>82</sup> This exercise sharpened his acumen as an artist and he found a new meaning and versatility in art. He started dabbling in imaginative compositions and soon mastered the skill of handling works commissioned on varied subjects by rich and famous people. He used to visit museums and art galleries to update his artistic caliber, studying new concepts and styles. The urge to work independently without any constraints took deep root in his mind and he decided to have his own studio. In the studio work, he excelled in commercial and promotional aspects of applied art which brought him in contact with prominent patrons of art who were appreciative of his fabulous and free flowing brushwork and his keen sense of colour.

Besides painting portraits, Mehar Singh attempted paintings on Sikh themes and thus new openings provided him some commissions from Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. He alongwith the help of other artists was instrumental in establishing small art galleries in the premises of the Gurdwaras. This much needed exposure introduced him to Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi and other Regional Lalit Kala Akademies. He became very popular artist and was rewarded by a number of leaders from all walks of life. Later on he shifted his base to Chandigarh and Department of Cultural affairs, Government of Punjab nominated him as Chairman of the Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi.<sup>83</sup> Whenever he was offered a project he used to devote days and weeks in researching the historical, social, psychological and religious angles related to a particular subject and did rough sketches to arrive at the final product in his mind. After due visualization he would start the painting and would devote his creative energies to capture the soul of the subject. This is the very reason why each work

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82 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.116-117

83 *Ibid*, p.51

done by him is of utmost artistic merit and is infused with aesthetic richness.<sup>84</sup> He had a great fascination for the magnificent works of some European artists who had painted large works relating to Lahore *Durbar* but while painting on the similar lines, he added some new dimensions by experimenting with more bright and vibrant palette. The element of the *Sikh Calendar art* entered in his works as he started using various features normally employed by the artists of this genre like depiction of drapery, time furniture, ornaments and other artifacts associated with Sikh culture and traditions which provided a majestic look to the painting. He duly recognizes the influence of European art on his painting yet he successfully retained the flavour of Indianness in his fascinating works by organizing the conceptual preferences in his compositions.

Portrait painting according to Mehar Singh is not merely painting the physical appearance of a person but a real portrait has the inbuilt strength of capturing the essence of the character. In pursuance of this aspect, he is in the habit of spending sometime with the character and knowing his/her mental attributes and talents so that he is able to capture the person in totality.<sup>85</sup> This showcases his respect and reverence for personalities who have made their mark in literary and artistic domains. Mehar Singh did a series of portraits of such stalwarts as Prithvi Raj Kapoor (actor), Nanak Singh (novelist), Kartar Singh Duggal (writer), Balraj Sahni (actor) and other theatre personalities and well known decorated Army Generals. Today Mehar Singh stands in the front row of portrait painters of Punjab who have inherited the glorious traditions of portraiture from Sardar Sobha Singh- the legendary father figure of Sikh painting.

**Artist Bodhraj is one such meritorious artist whose artistic creations were immensely utilized by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee,**

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84 **Rani, Dr. Saroj;** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.118

85 *Ibid*, p.122

**Amritsar, Dharam Parchar Committee: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi for bringing numerous multi-coloured publications for the purpose of propagation of Sikh religion, traditions and culture. He is perhaps the most published painter of *Sikh Calendar art*.** Bodhraj was born in Jalandhar and had the good fortune to sharpen his artistic talent while working with Hari Singh Studio at Amritsar. His mentor was a man of many multi-faceted artistic dimensions, had worked for decades with Bengali masters at Calcutta and achieved acclaim and name as foremost painter of backdrops for theatrical companies. Hari Singh founded his own company under the name of Maiden Theatrical Company at Calcutta. His work was also utilized in the 'Alam Ara', the very first Hindi movie.<sup>86</sup> While entrusted with the task of illustrating pages from Sikh history and elaborating on symbols of Sikh faith for colourful brochures, booklets and calendars, Bodhraj was initiated into the deep study of Sikh history and about the lives of Sikh Gurus. He brought out the divine manifestations enshrined in the teachings of Sikh Gurus in his bewitchingly painted canvases. These paintings are a true testimony to his supreme talent and establish him as a painter of aesthetically invigorating masterpieces. He had developed a capacity to narrate a particular episode in effortless visual description and his paintings are richly endowed with natural details, skillfully painted landscapes and superbly composed trees and foliage with ever-changing moods of the skies. His phenomenal skill in portraying the scenes in poetic manner mesmerize the viewer and arrests his attention to carry home the message intricately illustrated in a specific work. The palette he used has a touch of realistic charm and a fully controlled perspective both linear and colour. Study of surroundings and architectural details enhances his paintings which capture the authenticity in vivid terms. Bodhraj was both

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86 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; 2008, *Exhibition of Paintings of 'The Great Masters of Amritsar'* (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.2

industrious and versatile painter whose prolific contribution to *Sikh Calendar art* is truly commendable and well recognized by the patrons of art who promoted this genre of art. A man of simple living and high thinking devoted most of his time in the pursuit of excellence and was able to establish his own style and mannerism.

**Artist Devender Singh received his initial training in art from his father Sardar Sewak Singh who was a successful commercial artist in Amritsar. The assortment of jobs in commercial art which his father used to do very effectively included illustrations for books, catalogues, brochures, magazines and other publicity material like poster, banner, logo design and sign board designs.** Devender Singh's early interest in art was visible as he was merely seven years old when he started helping and assisting his father. Sewak Singh was thrilled to see his young lad taking to painting as a fish takes to swimming.<sup>87</sup> Devender Singh was admitted to a course in art at Government College of Art at Chandigarh but his heart was somewhere else.<sup>88</sup> He wanted to take up the commercial art work instantly without wasting a number of years in the art institution as he was confident of the earlier guidance and training given to him by his illustrious father and there seem to be no necessity of any academic diploma for pursuing a full-fledged career in art in his mind.<sup>89</sup> After spending a few years with his father he soon realized that this type of commercial art did not satisfy his creative urges and he chanced upon seeing some masterpieces by Sardar Sobha Singh in calendars as well as in original. These paintings of the Sikh Gurus done by Sobha Singh greatly influenced him and he took a resolve to devote his life and art towards the portrayal of Sikh history through his paintings as this was the kind of work he always wanted to pursue.<sup>90</sup> To reach his goal he

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87 **Rashid, Parbina;** April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune.

88 **Menon, Rathi A;** June 22, 1998, *The hand that gives form to Sikh history*, Indian Express.

89 **Rashid, Parbina;** April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune.

90 **Singh, Nonika;** August 6, 1999, *Brush with Sikh history*, The Tribune.

spent long hours in studying the Sikh historical literature and the hymns of Gurbani especially 'Baramaha' by Guru Nanak moved him deeply and he painted on this theme in his own individualistic semi-abstract and pleasingly captivating style. This experimental work was adopted by Punjab and Sind Bank for their desk calendars. These works received commercial success and soon he was offered more assignments by a number of patrons and connoisseurs of art to paint scenes from Sikh history based on hymns in Gurbani.<sup>91</sup> But he realized that the semi-abstract style he has chosen would not do justice to the historical paintings where episodes and stories have to be narrated in realistic manner so that the message reaches the masses directly. As he was fully equipped with the technical and aesthetic aspects of the painting, he developed his own expressive style which was pleasing to the eye and had all the dimensions of *Sikh Calendar art*.

Today Devender Singh is considered to be one of the front rank painters of Sikh history who has created a niche for himself. There is a great demand for his work and new projects and commissions keep on pouring especially from Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, Dharam Parchar Committee: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi, Bank of Punjab, New Delhi, Markfed, PNB Finance, Gurudwara *Ajaibghars* (museums), institutions, libraries and many private collections specially Non-resident Indians are fond of his work which he painted in the colours of faith and lofty ethos of Sikh religion.<sup>92</sup> He has touched upon many new and unusual episodes from the lives of Gurus and has devoted considerable amount of his dedicated creative endeavour to pay a tribute to the prominent Sikh women who have influenced the Sikh history and faith greatly by way of painting their portraits in unparalleled style. His dexterity and control

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91 **Menon, Rathi A**; June 22, 1998, *The hand that gives form to Sikh history*, Indian Express.

92 **Rashid, Parbina**; April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune.

over the medium of oil on canvas is remarkably expressive and each year new calendar art works are required by the promoters of *Sikh art* and culture.

Devender Singh is a man of quite persona and shuns publicity. Painting to him has become his only mode of communication and dialogue with the viewers. A disciplinarian to the core, he devotes considerable long hours of his daily routine to the painting of Sikh history. Though his forte being the Sikh history, the facts he knows cannot be twisted around. To recreate the momentous moments in the glorious past and the epic battle scenes, he however delves deep into the voluminous pages of history and at times frequents the relevant places where events had occurred hundreds of years ago. He avers: "*Painting is a voice of his soul as it stems from within my heart.*" He further admits that, "*Painting is an obsessive preoccupation and also acts as an act of self-expression as well as livelihood for me.*" On the question of commercialization of Indian painting, Devender Singh believes that this rat race has no end and the only sufferer in this exercise is the real art. The real art is affected if an artist harbours envy and jealousy for artists who make millions by selling their works in auctions, art shows and art fairs. For him painting is not only a business preposition but a responsibility left on the shoulders of an artist to contribute the high moral characteristics to the society around him as he owes of his existence to the society. Performing the sacred duty of bringing about a healthy change in the mindset of people to bring love, hope and harmony in society is of prime value and the main aim of good art.<sup>93</sup> Commenting on the wise words of Henry Ward Beecher, Devender Singh is of the firm belief that, "*Every artist dips his brush in his own soul and paints his own nature into his pictures.*" Till today his main mission is to translate the *Banis* of the Sikh Gurus into paintings so that the coming generations may be able to take pride in the wise words and actions of the Sikh Gurus. His canvases are not in the nature of a '*Satsang* in colour' but

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93     **Singh, Nonika**; August 6, 1999, *Brush with Sikh history*, The Tribune.

carry meaningful delineation through the countenances of Gurus. He admits that, “I focused on realistic art, not only because the orders I get are for such work but because it is drawn from life.”<sup>94</sup> Devender Singh will be remembered as an artist who had a brush with Sikh history.

Whereas artist Kirpal Singh excelled in recording the Sikh history with a missionary zeal and has a coveted place amongst the most popular painters of *Sikh art*, his equally talented son Jarnail Singh chose to embark upon an altogether different dimension of *Sikh art* that is his main interest lies in capturing the art, culture and traditions of Punjab.<sup>95</sup> A mild mannered sensitive person Jarnail Singh after doing his graduation from Panjab University, Chandigarh received no formal academic training in any art institution.<sup>96</sup> He was engaged in assisting his father and he inherited some of the finest nuances of painting in terms of technique and execution. But he soon realized that war scenes and portrayal of gory torture and mindless brutal violence did not appeal to his heart. He developed a vision to paint the fast disappearing Punjabi culture and heritage due to the onslaught of technology and industrialization. His mission is to record the mélange of fairs, festivals, ceremonies, myriad traditional aspects of rural Punjabi way of life.<sup>97</sup> Today he is well known for his beautiful paintings of Punjabi brides, women engaged in daily chores of life like churning the milk, busy with the spinning wheel and deeply engrossed in embroidery work. Besides these themes, the other subjects which have caught his imagination are women performing *Giddha*, women working at *Sanjha Chulah* (kitchen/tandoor), group of women indulging in gossip. The rich Punjabi culture is overflowing with zest and enthusiasm for life. Dancing and

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94 **Menon, Rathi A**; June 22, 1998, *The hand that gives form to Sikh history*, Indian Express.

95 **Bhatti, S.S**; 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune

96 **Matharu, Archana**; March 17, 2011, *Cultural Strokes*, Hindustan Times.

97 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.135-142

singing is the most natural exercise performed by men and women.<sup>98</sup> He has painted fascinating works of Punjabi customs and a few works on the theme of *Teeiyan* that is women enjoying the swings, dancing during the monsoon season are painted in the true spirit of fun and frolic which is the hallmark of Punjabi festivals.<sup>99</sup> As Jarnail Singh saw around him that the real Punjabi way of life is fast vanishing and westernization of customs, habits and traditions is setting in with every passing day. There was a kind of apprehension and anxiety that if this trend goes on this will pose a great setback to our centuries old culture of warmth and hospitable exuberance. In his own words, he states that, *“I have been documenting with the intent to preserve in my paintings the traditional Punjabi way of life which is fast vanishing in the villages of Punjab. I use art to depict our rich culture and heritage and show the next generation of Punjabis the beauty of our culture. I don’t want them to forget our history, culture and traditions.”* As he has shifted his base to Canada where he is working persistently and holding a number of art exhibitions especially for the third generation Punjabi settlers to make them aware of the richness of our culture. He says that, *“My work is frequently viewed by the third generation Punjabis living in Canada and North America. My paintings help them discover their cultural roots. Usually their grandparents take them along to my exhibitions and explain to them the traditions showcased in the paintings.”*<sup>100</sup> His style of painting is vibrant in colours and his versatility impacts the viewer due to the variety of subjects he chooses to paint. His works done in painstakingly detail portray the authenticity of an event or a character in visually appealing style. His paintings have the flavour of mild mannerism he himself possesses in his character. The gigantic task he undertook to portray and preserve the Punjabi culture has received

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98 **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh’s ‘Punjab Paintings’*, The Tribune

99 **Rani, Dr. Saroj;** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.77

100 **Matharu, Archana;** March 17, 2011, *Cultural Strokes*, Hindustan Times.



appreciation and honours from varied quarters as his innumerable works are adorning the walls of Punjabis in all continents. He has been successful as a crusader to bring the rich culture and traditions of Punjab to Punjabis and others who had migrated from India decades ago. Analyzing his inner psyche and an irresistible urge to paint he explains that, *“I strive to create images of everlasting beauty. It is a humble effort to capture on canvas the beauty and grandeur of everyday life of bountiful Nature of our land, so that it gives joy and inner peace to viewers and instills in them a sense of gratitude for the gift of life and for Nature’s never ending generosity. I can paint forever the beauty of nature and the simplicity and innocence of native and indigenous cultures of Punjab which ultimately will be consumed by soulless consumerist culture in this fast changing world.”* These words amply explain the mission of this great artist and his deep love for cultural roots of Punjab. **The galaxy of artists who devoted their lives to the cause of portraying the history, cultural ethos, spiritual and religious manifestations, social and psychological aspirations, struggles and achievements, turmoils and victories of the Sikhs in right historical perspectives have accomplished a phenomenal task by painting magnificent masterpieces which showcase the essence of Sikh psyche, religion and lofty sacred mission of their Gurus in bringing about a transformation in the minds and hearts of mankind.** The missionary zeal of these artists is commendable and during the course of accomplishing this sacred endeavour they had to face resistance and hardships in evolving a certain visually accepted iconography and carrying out their goodwork despite many odds especially financial difficulties. The most heartening aspect of this creative struggle highlights their inner strength and their faith in the humanistic values preached by the Sikh Gurus in the hymns of Gurbani. The sheer strength of their character and moral values sustained them through all adversities and yet produce works of spiritual and divine dynamism.

The fountainhead of *Sikh Calendar art* springs from the early illustrations of *Janam Sakhis* done in line drawings with occasional touch of bright colours and are mainly contained in the painted *pothis* (manuscripts). These were created by the *Pracharaks* (preachers) with the help of local artists and had a distinctive yet simple stylization which stands on the cusp of line drawings of Rajasthani and Pahari paintings. However the emphasized content was the portrayal of Guru Nanak's personality aspect as it prevailed or as it underwent changes in people's mind from time to time. These illustrations usually carried suitable labeling of the characters and a brief description of the episode or the story behind the scene. Initially there was less stress on ornamentation of the *hashias* (borders and margins) and the backgrounds were rarely crowded with elements of nature. With the spread of Guru Nanak's message of humanism and universal brotherhood, interesting and engaging works on the subject were produced in great numbers, slowly yet steadily, there was a marked adoption of symbols and elements of high aesthetic value from the paintings of Rajasthani, Mughal and Persian styles. The Decorative murals and frescoes appeared simultaneously on the walls of shrines, *deras*, *sarais*, *dharamshalas*, *akharas* and landmark *havelis* owned by devout followers and preachers of Sikhism. The drawings and paintings on Sikh themes flourished as a number of renowned painters from Rajasthan migrated to Punjab hills during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as there was greater patronage and protection for these painters who had fled the kingdoms of Rajasthan due to perennial turmoil and wars between the Mughals and Rajput rulers. To seek greater patronage from the Sikh ruler- Maharaja Ranjit Singh, these painters from Rajasthan started working on themes relating to Sikh religion, the Sikh nobility and aristocracy and they infused the fundamental parameters of aesthetic richness as well as visual stylization akin to the classical style of miniature painting richly decorative, sprayed with elements of nature- flora and fauna, landscape and architecture. They glorified the valiant Sikh

warriors and generals of Sikh army and created impressive portraits and elaborately descriptive compositions underlining the essence of Sikh religion, art and culture. Usually the rich elite class and aristocrats engaged these master artists to create works of exquisite beauty either to record and highlight their personal accomplishments or to chroniclize the historic events around them.

The Lahore *Durbar* which had great splendour and grandeur attracted hordes of European artists, travellers, historians and generals to the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as the stories of his fabulous wealth and imperial power transcended the boundaries of the Punjab. The Europeans harboured a yearning to visit this exotic empire which offered great opportunities in trade and cultural affairs. These European artists brought with them new techniques and technologies, the extremely generous ruler of Sikh empire, who was a great patron of art, embrace them in his fold. Thus the Sikh painting underwent a sea-change and saw the introduction of various styles and painting techniques. These painters of extraordinary artistic caliber produced magnificent paintings in charcoal, chalk, crayon, water-colours, tempera, gouache, oil colours and even initiated the technique of wood-cut, lithography and zinc etching. Seeing the potential of their works being acquired by rich natives at fabulous rates, they saw it as a great commercial proposition and introduced the printing presses to India. From now onwards, they shifted their attention to the painting of the splendour of the Lahore *Durbar* and produced numerous portraits of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his family members, courtiers, generals, ministers, aristocrats and other prominent personalities. Large mural-like paintings in oil on canvas technique generated incredible interest due to the realism, fascinating depiction of backgrounds and visible mastery over the presentation of colour and linear perspectives. The three-dimensional aspect of these paintings complete with scenic landscapes and architectural marvels like forts and palaces captured in photographic realism enthralled the viewers. This was the trendsetting artistic

accomplishment of these great western painters. As the commissions poured in great numbers, the European artists sometimes employed local art assistants and craftsmen to help them in their studios for menial jobs like for the job of a *pankha* man, a water carrier or a carpenter. Interestingly, the enterprising Sikh artists and craftsmen were quick to learn their techniques by merely observing these western artists. Their painting techniques were exposed from one local artist to another- from Lahore to Amritsar.

After attaining considerable expertise and skill in handling of western painting styles and techniques, the most poignant and landmark endeavour which revolutionalised the *Sikh Calendar art* was the initiation of painting portraits of Sikh Gurus, episodes from Sikh historical perspective, narration of Sikh ideology, ethos and culture in western styles and mannerisms by the Sikh artists. The manuscript-like drawings and paintings which were being painted earlier by hand in limited numbers were being produced now in large numbers by using the wood-cut and lithography printing techniques. This facilitated availability of reproduction of the original specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* in large quantities and thus it propelled mass production of *Calendar art* works amply serving the purpose of propagation of *Sikh Calendar art* which is aptly referred to as '*Bazaar*' or '*Popular art*'. Interestingly, it brought these calendars within the reach of common man at nominal rates. The popularity of these calendars/prints primarily was due to the religious content which highlighted Sikh religion. These calendars expressively depicted scenes from the lives of Sikh Gurus and martyrs. The mushrooming of small printing presses in the lanes of Amritsar and Lahore aptly justify the popularity of these colourful prints. The business establishments and traders freely utilized them for their emotive mass appeal in promoting their respective trades by advertising their products and services underneath the fascinating paintings of these calendars. These calendars were made available for

sale in crowded fairs and festivals on the roadside stalls and in front of the shrines.

**J.Lockwood Kipling, Principal of the Mayo School of Art, Lahore (1875-93) and also Curator of the Central Museum, Lahore, chanced upon seeing these unusually exotic Sikh calendars being sold on the footpaths of Lahore and evinced a keen interest in these calendars so much so he started collecting each available specimen of this art form for his own personal collection which was later on donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London by his son Rudyard Kipling.** This stylized art form passing through the creative hands of Kehar Singh, Kishan Singh, Bishan Singh, Azim, Jeevan Lal, Lahora Singh, Malla Ram, Sri Ram Lal, Hussain Buxe, Allah Buxe and others, saw many phases of transformation from elaborately decorative to photo-realistic versions. Subsequently the touch of individual artistic approach and mannerism exalted expression of divinity and spiritualism, a deep exploration of conceptual essence and visualization marked resonance of the emphasis on visually powerful narration, was witnessed in the works of Sobha Singh, S.G. Thakur Singh, G.S. Sohan Singh, Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh, Master Gurdit Singh, Trilok Singh Chitrakar, Amolak Singh, Bodhraj, Mehar Singh, Devender Singh and Jarnail Singh. These artists emerged as torch-bearers of the genre of *Sikh Calendar art*.

**During the last four decades, the prominent patrons and promoters of *Sikh Calendar art* whose contribution is significant and astounding are: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, Dharam Parchar Committee: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi, Bank of Punjab, New Delhi, Markfed, PNB Finance, other Sikh institutions like Sikh Foundation, Miri Piri Foundation and museums established in the premises of historical Gurdwaras.** However earlier the process of production of Sikh calendars was prevalent at such centres which are famous for printing and publishing business, namely Ravi Varma Fine

Arts Lithographic Press (1894), Calcutta Art Studio, bow bazaar street, Calcutta; Chitrashala Steam Press, Poona near Bombay (1878); Hem Chand Bhargava, Chandni chowk, Delhi (1900); S.S.Brijbasi (1927-28); Sivakasi National Litho Press, Tamilnadu (1954); Chor Bagan Art Studio, Calcutta; Lakshmibilas Press, Cawnpore; Kununyalal Lachoomal, Delhi; Anant Shivaji Desai, Bombay; Anandeshwar Press; Arya-Bhushan Press; P.S.Joshi Kalbadevi, Bombay; Rising Art Cottage, Calcutta; Battala Press, Calcutta; Harnarayan & Sons. The popularity of these calendars provided a flourishing and lucrative business to the printing houses as a large number of Sikh calendars were being produced and sold every year not only in Punjab but whole of north India. These were basically copies of the earlier calendars being produced at Amritsar and Lahore. The calendars which truly stand out as authentic specimens due to greater focus on correct historical perceptions, objectives and religious perspectives, duly display the individualistic stylization and religious content based on Sikh ideology, Sikh identity, Sikh *maryada*, Sikh history and philosophy, thereby establishing a true Sikh image, were brought out with a missionary zeal by prominent Sikh patrons responsible for the promotion of Sikh religion and Sikh way of life. These did not look like the cheap commercial versions of the earlier works being printed by printing presses. Primarily due to the fact that artists engaged in this genre had acquired magnificent control over painting techniques. They used new methods and technologies to improve the quality of artistic and aesthetically sound paintings. The creative elements used by these artists further enhanced the appearance and quality of these *Sikh Calendar art* prints. These patrons of *Sikh Calendar art* selected artists very discerningly after carefully analyzing their works and their personal dedication and commitment in furthering the cause of Sikhism through their creations. These promoters have institutionalized a clear-cut policy regarding professionalism in assigning commissions to painters of repute and have channelised a systematic procedure to acquire the paintings on

specific themes depending upon their capacity to relate to the viewers and deliver the intended divine messages which can bring transformation of soul and the spirit. The sale viability and popular demand are carefully assessed for promotional aspects. The prime objective of these deeply committed patrons remains preaching and promotion of Sikh religion and familiarizing the masses with highpoints of Sikh history and philosophy through visually moving Sikh calendars and paintings. With the result, Sikh history and ideology has been documented in a befitting way. The *Sikh Calendar art* works have gained immense popularity and some of them are considered a collector's item due to their artistic merit and lofty religious content. No doubt they have earned the well deserved adoration and appreciation of a large populace in India and far-flung foreign lands wherever Punjabis have migrated and settled. These calendars serve the purpose of familiarizing the non-resident Punjabis with their religion, culture and heritage and demystify the mystic layers of spiritual strength and depths of divinity.

**During the study of *Sikh Calendar art* genre, it is vehemently revealed that the artists, who dedicated themselves to this form of art, had acquired deep reverence and faith in Sikh religion and practiced its ideologies in letter and spirit. Most of them had developed a saintly persona and had cultivated a deep interest in Sikh history and culture.** They possessed unwavering faith and pride in Sikh marshal heritage and always professed thankfulness to the brave and valiant soldiers who nurtured their creative impulses. The real source of their inspiration to develop and create *Sikh Calendar art* works stems from the light of divinity and awakening of human soul shown by Guru Nanak Dev. The artists who pursued this occupation had a legendary zeal of a crusader due to deep insight and vision they had attained from the in-depth study of scriptures of Sikh religion and Gurbani. The sacred task of kindling the faith in the hearts of these artists by learned *pracharaks*

(preachers), *granthis*, missionaries, scholars, writers, historians and researchers paid rich dividends in terms of comprehension of Sikh philosophy and history in right perspective. The thought-provoking expressions and narration by pious men endowed with uncommon literary merits bore fruits in invigorating the artists to enable them to visualize in their mind's eye the exact happening as it happened on a particular page from history.

**Consolidation of Sikh ideology and formulation of widely accepted Sikh iconography was crystallized after the emergence of Singh Sabha Movement which gave emphasis on preservation and propagation of clear Sikh identity separate from that of the Hindus.** A complete Sikh identity and *Sikh Rehat Maryada* drives its strength from the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and advocates shunning of rituals and idol-worship. They presented a charter of conduct for the Sikhs in pursuance of their duties and responsibilities as true Sikhs. It is tempting to locate the origin of contemporary *Sikh Calendar art* on this polarity. Out of this matrix emerged a group of Sikh painters who produced easily accessible and demonstrably Sikh images for all of whom the question of Sikh identity became a central concern throughout their careers. Today we have works of exquisite spiritual endowment created by these stalwarts of *Sikh Calendar art*.

The paintings which are seeped in divinity of Guru Nanak and colours of valour and sacrifices of the tenth Sikh Guru- Guru Gobind Singh present a dominant theme and subject matter. Other significant paintings provide a peep into the history of Sikhs projected in various versions and visual representations. Glorification of martyrdom, respect for humanistic values and service to mankind were the inspirational planks of numerous works of art under this genre of art. These calendars present a complete package of Sikh ideology, philosophy, symbolism and faith. 'Ek Omkar' (God is One), 'Sarbat Da Bhala' (Welfare of the whole mankind), 'Degh Tegh Fateh' (Always ready for fight against tyranny



and injustice), 'Tera Bahana Meetha Lage' (Sweet is Thou will) and 'Ekam Pitah Ekas Ke hum Barik (God is One and all Humanity is His children) are the universal messages portrayed in these calendars. An analytical study of these calendars reveal that there is a common thread which runs through various thematic contents qualifying for good specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* and these can briefly be classified in the following categories: *Portraits of Guru Nanak*-from head to bust, full length, seated or standing alongwith Bala and Mardana in varying versions. Scenes from *Janam Sakhis* have been tastefully depicted pertaining to Bal Nanak showing his *kotaks* (astonishing childhood miracles) like episode of *Sarp Chhaya*, *Miraculous restoration of the fields destroyed by grazing buffaloes*, *Amazed Rai Bular recognizing the element of divinity in child Nanak*, *Bal Nanak being rebuked by his father- Mehta Kalu*, *Nanak debating with a teacher Gopal Pandit*, *A tender depiction of Bebe Nanaki's affection for Nanak* , *Guru Nanak at a Madrasa writing Ek Omkar on his takhti*. Then comes the narration of episode of *Sacha Sauda*, *Nanak uttering Tera-Tera shows Nanak at a grocery shop at Sultanpur Lodhi*, the scene from *Nanak's marriage*. In addition to that prominent events that took place during the four *Udasis* (Missionary Travels) of Guru Nanak also became a preferred and popular subject matter for Sikh calendars such as *Guru Nanak's visit to Kuaru-desh and meeting Nuri Shah, the female sorceress*, *Siddha-Goshti*, *Guru Nanak meeting Pandits at Har-ki-Pauri, Haridwar*, *Encounter of Guru Nanak with the demon 'Kauda'*, *Enconuter of Guru Nanak with Wali Qandhari at Panja Sahib*, *Reetha Meetha* episode, *Guru Nanak drawing milk from Bhai Lalo's bread*, *Guru Nanak Dev's visit to Piri Pur (Multan)*, *Guru Nanak meeting Kalyug*, *Visit of Guru Nanak to Baghdad, Mecca Pherna* (revolving of Mecca), *Self-rotation of the chakkies* (stone grinding wheels) *in Babar's jail*, *Guru Nanak visiting a leper's house*, *Guru Nanak traveling with Bala and Mardana on the back of a fish in the ocean* and *Guru Nanak alongwith Bala and Mardana seated under a Banyan tree lost in*

deep meditation. The themes of these calendars were selectively chosen as stories projected one or the other reformatory messages conveyed for dispelling the darkness of ignorance. These were not mere stories but these carried messages to bring the desired transformation in the mindset of people indulging in meaningless rituals and evil practices. The role of a true Guru and a preacher is justified in these events and episodes adopted in the calendars of *Sikh art*. The social revolution being brought by Guru Nanak has been aesthetically illustrated by the artists in superbly illuminating visuals and their impact carry an indelible impression on the minds of the masses. These episodes are so popular today that their message is enshrined in each and every heart. Yet a large number of calendars dwell on the essence of Nanak's philosophy of universal brotherhood and harmony. This apostle of peace laments the sentiment in *Eti maar payi kurlane- Tein ki dard na aya* (religious intolerance shown by Mughals on innocent people), *Nanak naam jahaz hai jo chade so uttare par* (the true Name or *Nam* of God is like a ship whosoever boards it crosses the sea of life and attains enlightenment), *Sau kyun manda akhiye jis jamme rajaana* (Equality of Gender), *Ujad Jao Base Raho* (good people should spread and bad should remain contained to one place). Through the medium of these calendars, Guru Nanak's comments on the prevalence of destruction of human rights, sectarian violence, religious bigotry, low esteem for female gender, inequality in the society based on caste, creed and religion have been highlighted sending an imploring message to the mankind to get rid of these curses. Nanak's crusade and mission in bringing peace, justice, hope and harmony to the troubled populace soul reeling under the dark and dreary spell of turmoil, tyranny, violence and repression perpetuated by tyrant rulers aptly install Nanak's persona as that of a saviour.

In the similar fashion significant popular subjects related to the lives and teachings of other nine Sikh Gurus which throw light on their mission include: Guru Angad Dev's establishment of institution of *Langar* or Community kitchen

in a painting showing Mata Khiwi serving *kheer* and *Langar* to the devotees. These Sikh calendars bring out the missionary zeal with which the second Sikh Guru carried forward the message of equality and service to mankind. Guru Amar Das- '*Amru Nithawan*' (a person who has no place for shelter): Guru Amar Das being blessed by Guru Angad Dev as 'A shelter for the homeless', Selfless service or *Sewa* and sacrifice for the comfort of his Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amar Das conferring equal rights to the women to conduct and perform Sikh missionary and parish work, Guru Amar Das giving a bath to a leper named '*Prema Chaudhari*', Guru Amar Das forbidding the practice of *Sati* and *Gurmukh is always humble*. In such symbolic works, the importance of dedication and devotion to the Guru is projected as a 'Selfless Service' and can be defined as true mode of meditation which culminates in salvation. Removal of social evil customs against women such as a calendar relating to dramatically descriptive happening done on the practice of *Sati* is a fine example. Guru Ram Das- Guru Ram Das laying the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar, *Kar Sewa* (Self-help) rendered by devotees for digging the holy *Sarovar* and *Guru Ram Das Sarovar nahate sab uttare paap kamate* (whosoever takes a dip in this *Sarovar* washes off all his sins). During Guru Ram Das's times, establishment and consolidation of fundamentals of Sikh faith were strengthened by establishing the holy city of Amritsar and construction of Sri Darbar Sahib- the holiest of the holy shrines of the Sikhs. Guru Arjan Dev serving the lepers at Taran Taran, Construction of a leper's home (*Pingalwara*) at Taran Taran Sahib, Compilation of Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan Dev and Bhai Gurdas, Guru Arjan Dev initiating the use of six-channel Persian wheel (*Chhcharta*), Guru Arjan Dev encouraging his followers to learn the skill of horse riding and also advocating the business of buying good horses and Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev at the hands of tyrant Mughals are portrayed in fabulous calendars underlining the consistent endeavours of the Guru towards the establishment of a

just and truthful environment where devotees from every religion enjoyed complete freedom to worship their respective religions and faiths. Guru Hargobind- *The invincible Guru*: showing Bal Hargobind overpowering a poisonous snake, Guru Hargobind proclaiming the concept of Miri (Temporal power) and Piri (Spiritual power), *Bandi Chhor Guru*: Guru Hargobind leaving the Gwalior fort with fifty-two *Rajas*, Visit of Mughal emperor Jahangir to Golden Temple, Amritsar to pay obeisance to Guru Hargobind Sahib, Guru Hargobind giving audience to queen Nur Jahan and Guru Hargobind blessing Mata Sulakhani. These events depicted in calendars narrate the importance of self-defense, the concept of humility, love for nature and the propagation of Miri (Temporal power) and Piri (Spiritual power). The establishment of Miri and Piri concept was to counter the onslaught of inhospitable narrow-minded tyrant rulers who indulged in inhuman acts against the innocent people. Guru Har Rai- *Tread with care*: Guru Hargobind advising his grandson Guru Har Rai to walk gently since flowers and plants are also living organisms and Guru Har Rai curing Dara Shikoh- the elder son of Shahjahan. The message drives from this advice shows respect for humility and sensitivity to mankind. Many other such lofty ideals are captured in the themes of numerous calendars. *Guru Harkishan dhayaiye jis dithe sab dukh jaye* showing Guru Harkishan eradicating epidemics and curing the worst cases with his kind and dedicated approach to serve the mankind and Guru Harkishan making a mute and illiterate poor water carrier name *Chhajju* to recite *Salokas* from *Gita* and explaining its true meaning by just placing a stick on his head. Thus the snobbery and arrogance of Brahmanical preachers was curtailed with words of divine wisdom explained by the eighth Sikh Guru who devoted his life in the service of ailing and suffering humanity. Kashmiri Pandits meeting Guru Tegh Bahadur, a heartrending portrayal of martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi, Bhai Jaita respectfully carrying the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur from the place of martyrdom, Guru Gobind

Singh embracing Bhai Jaita and uttering the words '*Rangretta- Guru ka beta*': Rangretta is the son of the Guru. Ninth Sikh Guru sacrificed his life for the protection and upholding of one's right to profess one's faith and religion thus this supreme sacrifice paved the way for a full-fledged struggle to stand against the unreasonable oppressors who perpetuated a reign of unparalleled brutality.

Horrifying scenes depicting the Mughal brutality and torture are demonstrative of Execution of Bhai Mati Dass whose body was split into two parts with a saw, gory details of Bhai Sati Dass being wrapped in cotton and burnt alive, Bhai Dyala being burnt alive in a cauldron full of hot oil, Mutilating of body parts of Bhai Mani Singh, Execution of Bhai Taru Singh whose hair were being removed alongwith his skull showcase the gritty resolve of these disciples of Sikhism who had no fear of death. Guru Gobind Singh- *Establishment of Khalsa Panth at Anandpur Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh choosing Panj Pyaras* (five beloved ones) *from the congregation who are ready to sacrifice their lives, Amrit Sanchar Ceremony: Guru Gobind Singh baptizing the Panj Pyaras* (five beloved ones), *Neela ghoda banka joda hath wich baaj sajaye chalo singho prabh darshan kariye Guru Gobind Singh aye* representing a picture of Guru Gobind Singh as a bold valiant warrior with a deep resolve on his face yet the eyes beam with sensitivity and tenderness yet a haloed divinity gives a hint of a Saint Soldier- '*Sant Sipahi*', *Chidiyon se mein baaj ladaun tabhi Gobind Singh naam kahaun* (Call me Gobind Singh only when I transform the sparrows to fight an falcon) illustrating the concept of Guru's power of character building, *Sura sau pehchaniye jo lade deen ke het* showing Guru Gobind Singh as a saviour of the oppressed and the down-trodden, Guru Sahib embracing his sons (*Sahibzadas*), *Uch da Pir Banana* showcasing Guru Sahib being dressed as a *Pir* by his Muslim admirers to get out of the dense forest of Machhiwara, Guru Sahib tearing the resignation submitted by the forty *Muktas* in the battlefield, Bhai Kanhaiya serving drinking water to the wounded and the thirsty Turk

soldiers alongwith the Sikh soldiers, Bricking alive two younger sons (*Sahibzadas*) at Sirhind by Wazir Khan, *Sirhind di gadhi* showing two elder sons (*Sahibzadas*) sacrificing their lives for the sake of the nation and their faith, *Thande Burg di kaid* (Jail in cold tower) illustrating the sufferings of two younger sons (*Sahibzadas*) who were jailed in the cold tower alongwith their grandmother Mata Gujri before their execution, The battle of Bhangani (Paonta Sahib), The fortress at Chamkaur and Darbar of Sri Guru Gobind Singh. The artists adopted scenes from life and times of Guru Gobind Singh and justifiably glorified the concept of being a saint and a soldier who is considered as ‘*Sarbans Dani*’ (a man who sacrificed his whole family for the protection of religion, faith and ideology). The *Sikh Calendar art* in right earnest has recreated the deep humanistic bond entrenched in spirituality and divinity of Sikh religion.

Amongst the large number of calendars which deserve solemn mention are true examples of tribute to the sacrifices of Baba Deep Singh Shaheed and Banda Singh Bahadur, who besides being the pillars of Sikh militant strength were carriers of glorious traditions of Sikhism who placed their lives at the ideals of Sikh Gurus. Tumultuous scenes of Wada and Chhota Ghalughara, Sikh wars and battles, Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, Kuka movement and Carnage at Panja Sahib also inspired the artists to record these movements in their remarkable works in a celebration of martyrdom. Apart from several calendars of Golden Temple, Amritsar in myriad moods and angles, portrayal of historical Gurdwaras and places of pilgrimage occupy a special place due to their mass popularity and sacred sanctity. Portraits of *Bhagats* and saints, whose literary contributions are enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, too reserved a coveted place in the paintings relating to *Sikh Calendar art*. As the Punjabis are spread all over the globe, an urge to capture the rich and vibrant colours of culture, traditions and heritage of Punjab is being felt specially amongst the new generation Non-resident Indians who possess a keen desire to acquaint themselves with their cultural roots and

religion. Lately some artists of repute have contributed considerably towards this end and produced breathtaking paintings of the Punjabi way of life depicting the rich cultural fabric in shades of authenticity and rustic flavours.

**The journey of *Sikh Calendar art* has passed through various terrains in terms of adopting new techniques and stylizations from Line drawing Woodcuts to Lithography, Multi-block Printing, Colour Lithography, Oleography, Half-tone blocks, Albumen prints, Bromide prints, Photo-lithography, Offset Printing and Digital Printing.** It celebrates the ingenuity and incredible spirit of enterprise of the Sikh painters who were always ready to stay ahead and strived hard to remain open-minded to learn and adopt latest techniques for improving the quality of reproductions thereby creating a large market for these *Calendar art* works. Today these calendars are available globally and command immense popularity. These *Sikh art* calendars have emerged as a single most popular mode of *Sikh art* which exudes essence of Sikh religion, history and vibrant culture. The interest in this form of art can be gauged from the fact that innumerable websites are projecting and popularizing it on the internet and dedicated efforts by foreign based *Sikh art* cultural associations and organizations are promoting and printing the finest specimens of this genre. The themes of *Sikh Calendar art* are now being printed digitally on articles of daily use such as plates, mugs, T-shirts, keychains, wall hangings, dairies, banners, book covers, stickers, lockets, wall clocks, pen stands, mouse pads, necklaces, notebook covers, paper-weights, dials of watches, artifacts of decoration and several gift items. The future of *Sikh Calendar art* is bright as it manifests the soul of Sikh ethos and psyche, Sikh cultural traditions and heritage and the spiritual and divine messages of the great Sikh Gurus. It aptly projects the true characteristics of this proud, valiant and industrious community. It is a heartening sign that strengthens the fact that this genre of art is well founded in the fertile soil of Sikh psyche and more and more artists of various

denominations, calibers and backgrounds are fully engrossed in creating innovative and imaginative works of art rooted in this genre, even the remote hamlets of towns and cities of Punjab have become hubs of artists who identify themselves with the ideology of these calendars and are creatively engaged in artistic pursuits to satisfy their aesthetic impulses and yearnings. It provides them a steady livelihood too. **As a matter of fact this form of art has attained wide acceptance and is raring to spread its wings in limitless expansion.** Due to its ever increasing demand even highbrow connoisseurs of art have started evincing a keen interest in *Sikh Calendar art* as a vivid and serious form of art. It is indeed the most visible genre of *Sikh art* which has crossed national boundaries and found a respectable place in every nook and corner of the globe.



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## AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SIKH CALENDAR ART

The bright and vibrant calendars of the Sikh Gurus always offer an enigmatic charm and fascination to the viewer and due to a spiritual aura around them the presence of a calendar on the wall of Punjabi household almost becomes an essential decorative element which possesses the capacity to inspire and move the onlooker to be drenched in divinity and piousness. Thus a *Sikh Calendar* is not only an ordinary painting but a prolific amalgamation of lofty ideals of Sikhism which often provides a peep into the glorious historical episodes of Sikh history seeped in valour and divinity and this decorative article is infact a mirror to the plethora of ideological, philosophical and ethical developments of Sikh tenets and a visual treat which portrays the artistic and aesthetical saga of the artists, writers, thinkers, preachers and philosophers. Deeply stung with their mystical charm and evocative stance the analytical study of *Sikh Calendar art* became the topic of my research work. As a plethora of facts pertaining to this captivating genre of *Sikh Calendar art* remained to be unraveled and explored, this most popular form of *Sikh art* is deeply rooted in the very psyche of Sikhism which further prodded me on a sacred endeavour to understand its genesis and its progressive journey to the present day. The whole experience of demystifying the true soul and essence of these calendars has enriched the research work as the elements and conceptual contents of these vibrant Sikh calendars derived their mesmerizing power from an array of factors pertaining to Sikh history, ideology, philosophy, spiritual, divine and ethical perspectives. Simultaneously the study has provided sumptuous revelations about its artistic, aesthetical and creative manifestations and influences. This study has covered the period when after the first appearance of *Janam Sakhis* in 1658 to the present 21<sup>st</sup> century when this genre is at its pinnacle and enjoys the world-wide popularity as a representative object d'art of Sikh history, art and culture. It was a pilgrimage of sorts to pass through each and every magnificent element of the deep and engrossing study

examining the manuscripts, specimens of original Sikh paintings, books and journals on the subject written by scholars and preachers and engaging interactions with artists, printers, scholars and experts to dig deep into the ocean of mystical aspirations behind these mesmerizing objects of art. These sources provided valuable information and knowledge which guided me to onward exploration of the subject. The visits to museums, art galleries, institutions, corporations, banks and other places of interest related to this art form added a new impetus in holding a firm grasp on this appealing subject. A remarkable treasure of the sources have infact offered an unfathomed vision and urgency with which several generations of artists and historians have poured in their valuable mental and physical faculties for the development and popularization of this genre of art which has its admirers in all the continents of the globe. This research work is divided into eight significant chapters which deal with various aspects of *Sikh Calendar art*. The following passages contain chapter-wise summary of the focus of this research work which revealed numerous valuable and absorbing factors instrumental in the present day popularity of this genre of *Sikh Calendar art*:

## **CHAPTER: 1**

### **I**NTRODUCTION TO SIKH CALENDAR ART

**D**uring the course of research the fundamental and basic introduction and definition was dealt with and efforts were directed towards the condensation and explanation of the very meaning and definition of *Sikh Calendar art*. Having done that the search was pointed towards finding the genesis of this genre of art which has become the most popular form of *Sikh art*. *Popular art* as the more general term is used to refer to all those art forms of India that have a mass audience and use mechanical reproduction in their creation and distribution. *Calendar art* is a generic name for a style of *Popular Print art*. It was discovered that the popularity and mass appeal of Sikh calendars lies in the themes chosen by the artists which showcases spiritual, religious, literary and historical perspectives. It was further revealed that *Sikh Calendar art* has

accomplished the position of being the most admired genre of *Sikh Popular art* as it has successfully and emphatically captured the imagination of millions of people inhabiting the northern states of India for decades and decades, due to the spiritual and historical content, stylised form, decorative and ornamental appeal one finds these calendars respectfully and prominently displayed on the walls of the religious places, households, shops and other commercial as well as social establishments. The Sikh calendars carrying the images of Sikh Gurus, Saints and Sikh martyrs are revered as if they are the embodiment of spiritual and religious empowerment. Episodes treasured in the popular imagination of *Sikh Calendar prints* are legends and manifestations of the religious, spiritual, cultural and traditional values and ethos of the Sikhs. The bright and colourful collection of these absorbing calendars depict scenes from the Sikh history from the Gurus to the Maharaja Ranjit Singh, *Janam Sakhis*, Gurdwara Reform movement, *Baramaha Tukhari* and sagas of valour and bravery of Sikhs, Sikh martyrs and episodes of Sikh wars which took place during the course of glorious Sikh history. The research work took me on a sojourn to see the fabulous collections and specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* done in myriad stylizations and techniques adopted by the stalwarts of this genre of art and many minute and fascinating factors and elements came to light while analysing them critically in terms of their aesthetic as well as thematic contents portraying the philosophy, ethos and ethics of Sikh religion which is the hallmark of these calendars. The *Sikh Calendar art* is a true tribute to the valiant and spiritual essence of Sikh religion and is a vivid pictureisation of the visual content contained in the Gurbani and Sikh history. Though many critics may opine and predict that *Sikh Calendar art* will be on the decline in popularity and in churning out fresh talent in this field. But it gives us a sense of great satisfaction and hope that this wave of *Calendar art* which was started at the emergence of *Sikh art* in *Janam-Sakhis* is alive and flourishing today. The ideals of Sikhism are universal and have the capacity to inspire the fresh talent which is found in abundance in small cities and towns and the pivotal creative contribution of the stalwarts of this art acts as a source of

inspiration and motivation for coming generations to further strengthen the vigorously flowing stream of *Sikh Calendar art*. Patronage of Sikh religious bodies, academies, institutions and non-resident Indians who are keenly interested in the preservation of Sikh heritage, culture, religion, art and language deserve praise. Streams of new painters of *Sikh Calendar art* are emerging and silently yet steadily working towards carrying forward this genre of art which brings financial support and artistic satisfaction to the new painters who are establishing small studios in their homes and markets. The role of bodies like Punjab and Sind Bank, Bank of Punjab, Markfed, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), Art Academies, Museums, Art Galleries, Printing presses, Publishing houses, Advertising agencies and Animation and Graphic design houses is of immense significance and in fact the introduction of new printing techniques like Digital and Offset printing have made it easier to spread the popularity and scope of *Sikh Calendar art*.

## CHAPTER: 2

### THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF SIKH CALENDAR ART

While dealing with the chapter of emergence and development of the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* it was established through sustained study that the study of the emergence and development of *Sikh Calendar art* will not be complete without understanding the development of *Sikh art*. While defining the term *Sikh art* the basic ingredients and elements, which have contributed towards its emergence, may primarily be the works of art specifically done by Sikh artists, on Sikh themes patronized by Sikhs or produced within the territory governed or otherwise dominated by Sikhs. To explain the explicit version of *Sikh art*- the early *Sikh art* was a myriad combination of the Sikh religious themes, the life events of Guru Nanak as illustrated in *Janam Sakhis*, portraits of Sikh Gurus, ideals of Sikh life and canons of Sikh faith. At this stage, the Sikh themes were the essence of *Sikh art* rather than style. While *Sikh art* was essentially thematic in content and spirituality was its all-adoring

flavour during this period. The 'song' and hymns were the reigning elements in the spread of Sikhism and its values yet the gradual emergence of visuals in the *Janam Sakhis* aptly and emphatically started establishing the new genre of *Sikh art* catering to the devotional needs of the faithful. *Sikh art* was born in the *Janam Sakhis* and apart from an isolated series of portraits, it was evidently confined to this context for well over a century. *Janam Sakhis* are hagiographic accounts of the life of Guru Nanak, popular narratives that have enjoyed a considerable popularity throughout the history of the Sikh *panth*. It was discovered that the first attempt to illustrate *Janam Sakhis* was made as early as 1658 during the pontificate of the seventh Guru Har Rai. The pioneers who endeavoured in this direction were chiefly *Udasi*, *Ramraiya* and *Sodhi Deras* all offshoots of the mainstream of Sikhism. With the development of illustrated *Janam Sakhis*, *Sikh art* saw the emergence of thematic extension, imaginative expansion, fictional dimension, spiritual concern, devotional aura and artistic manifestation. Simultaneously the appearance of frescos and murals on the walls of *deras*, *dharamshalas*, temples, *akharas*, shrines, *havelis* and palaces depicting the life events of Sikh Gurus, their portraits and those of *Mahants* and priests established and further channelised the propagation of the emerging genre of *Sikh art*. Fresco paintings enlarged the scope of *Sikh art* and at the same time became instrumental in spreading the teachings of Sikh Gurus, Sikh way of life and ethos, amongst all sections of the society. The drawings and paintings on Sikh themes flourished as a number of renowned painters from Rajasthan migrated to Punjab hills during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as there was greater patronage and protection for these painters who had fled the kingdoms of Rajasthan due to perennial turmoil and wars between the Mughals and Rajput rulers. To seek greater patronage from the Sikh ruler- Maharaja Ranjit Singh, these painters from Rajasthan started working on themes relating to Sikh religion, the Sikh nobility and aristocracy and they infused the fundamental parameters of aesthetic richness as well as visual stylization akin to the classical style of miniature painting richly decorative, sprayed with elements of nature-

flora and fauna, landscape and architecture. The Lahore *Durbar* which had great splendour and grandeur attracted hordes of European artists, travellers, historians and generals to the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as the stories of his fabulous wealth and empirical power transcended the boundaries of the Punjab. These European artists brought with them new techniques and technologies, the extremely generous ruler of Sikh empire, who was a great patron of art, embrace them in his fold. Thus the *Sikh painting* underwent a sea-change and saw the introduction of various styles and painting techniques. These painters of extraordinary artistic caliber produced magnificent paintings in charcoal, chalk, crayon, water-colours, tempera, gouache, oil colours and even initiated the technique of woodcut, lithography and zinc etching. Seeing the potential of their works being acquired by rich natives at fabulous rates, they saw it as a great commercial proposition and introduced the printing presses to India. After attaining considerable expertise and skill in handling of western painting styles and techniques, the most poignant and landmark endeavour which revolutionised the *Sikh Calendar art* was the initiation of painting portraits of Sikh Gurus, episodes from Sikh historical perspective, narration of Sikh ideology, ethos and culture in western styles and mannerisms by the Sikh artists. The manuscript-like drawings and paintings which were being painted earlier by hand in limited numbers were being produced now in large numbers by using the woodcut and lithography printing techniques. This facilitated availability of reproduction of the original specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* in large quantities and thus it propelled mass production of *Calendar art* works amply serving the purpose of propagation of *Sikh Calendar art* which is aptly referred to as '*Bazaar*' or '*Popular art*'. Interestingly, it brought these calendars within the reach of common man at nominal rates. J. Lockwood Kipling, Principal of the Mayo School of Art, Lahore (1875-93) and also Curator of the Central Museum, Lahore, chanced upon seeing these unusually exotic Sikh calendars being sold on the footpaths of Lahore and evinced a keen interest in these calendars so much so he started collecting each available specimen of this art

form for his own personal collection which was later on donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London by his son Rudyard Kipling. This stylized art form passing through the creative hands of Kehar Singh, Kishan Singh, Bishan Singh, Azim, Jeevan Lal, Lahora Singh, Malla Ram, Sri Ram Lal, Hussain Buxe, Allah Buxe and others, saw many phases of transformation from elaborately decorative to photo-realistic versions. Subsequently the touch of individual artistic approach and mannerism exalted expression of divinity and spiritualism, a deep exploration of conceptual essence and visualization marked resonance of the emphasis on visually powerful narration, was witnessed in the works of Sobha Singh, S.G. Thakur Singh, G.S. Sohan Singh, Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh, Master Gurdit Singh, Trilok Singh Chitrakar, Amolak Singh, Bodhraj, Mehar Singh, Devender Singh and Jarnail Singh. These artists emerged as torch-bearers of the genre of *Sikh Calendar art*. Their unstinted efforts were pointed towards finalizing the iconography of *Sikh art* thereby establishing a separate genre of *Sikh Calendar art*. Around India's independence two major developments in *Sikh art* were taking roots, one was the availability of mass-produced colourful stylised pictures produced by painters in Amritsar and some of them were even carrying on the *Bazaar style Calendar art* in Delhi and other places which chiefly had paintings of Sikh Gurus, Gurdwaras, prominent Sikh martyrs and warriors. The other development that was taking shape was the emergence of painters who were highly skilled and were able to produce paintings for the more sophisticated patrons though they had started towards this direction much before independence. The main plank of their work was painting portraits of Sikh Gurus from imagination and depicting events in Sikh history underlining the Sikh psyche and ethos which may glorify the ideals of Sikhism. As by now the actual portraits of Gurus had been lost to oblivion and these painters were essentially painting the spiritual and much adored qualities of humanism, piousness and valour enshrined in Sikhism. Though some section of the society in Sikhs were not very much impressed with painting the portraits of Sikh Gurus from imagination. Each one of these artists had endeavoured to



paint the portrait of Sikh Gurus and events related to their life in their own individualistic and specific styles. These artists were successful in attempting to express Sikh history and underlying ideals in a way that they appealed to large audience. The source of the river of *Sikh Calendar art* essentially and pre-eminently is the slow and steady emergence and development of the art of illustrating *Janam Sakhis* drifting from one artistic characteristic to another like small rivulets and brooks passing through many rough and uneven terrains but always retaining its essence and undercurrent of this flowing sacred river being the Sikh religious history, spirituality, truthfulness and universal brotherhood which was preached by Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus spreading the aroma of these divine qualities amongst the people of this land. The river got momentum with the advent of printing press and introduction of many printing techniques and technical advancements brought in by the Europeans to Punjab. The works of art which were earlier available to a few rich and aristocratic connoisseurs or patrons of art were made available to the masses in the form of colourful reproductions at a very low cost. There is a glorious and unmatched valuable contribution of the local artists primarily the Sikhs, who strove hard and were quick to learn and pursue the newly introduced marvels in painting and printing techniques. Each one has immensely devoted his life in pursuance of refining the *Sikh art* in content, style and visual narration of popular Sikh themes by mingling Sikh historical perspective and ethos with European painting trends. Today the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* is a mass movement and innumerable amateur and professional painters are seriously engaged in covering new grounds in the spread of this most popular branch of *Sikh art*. A full-fledged iconography of *Sikh Calendar art* is well recognised and individual and specific artists are busy in their artistic pursuits to pay their distinctive tributes in their own yet collective artistic endeavour using even the digital technology and multi-media processes. The popularity of *Sikh Calendar art* is increasing leaps and bounds and is covering some strange surfaces and objects, which hitherto were not even thinkable. The forms of *Sikh Calendar art* are painted and

printed on- notebook covers, diaries, lockets, key chains, pocket calendars, wall calendars, panels, murals, hoardings, T-shirts, mugs and objects of daily use. No doubt the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* has a bright future as now it is popular not only in Punjab and India but in such parts of the globe where Punjabis had made their homes.

### **CHAPTER: 3**

## **SUBJECT MATTER, PROCESSES, TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS OF SIKH CALENDAR ART**

The third chapter is devoted to the study of subject matter, processes, techniques and materials of *Sikh Calendar art* where strenuous emphasis was laid on the study of these calendars in relation to the subject matter and other significant factors and processes which have resulted in the culmination of providing a new *avatar* to the visual appeal and aesthetic sensibilities to this genre of art. Thus the deep study was directed towards analysing the subject matter which provided the essential soul to the content of this genre of art and due consideration was also laid in discovering processes, techniques and materials involved in the enhancement of this art form during the decades. The subject matter of *Sikh Calendar art* which has travelled through a long capsule of time has attained the fragrance of divinity and spirituality. In fact it has been enriched with values of valour, saga of martyrdom, significance of selfless service and the essence of ‘Miri and Piri’ (Temporal and Spiritual power); further entrenching and fortifying the very humane ideals, preached by Guru Nanak Dev and other Sikh Gurus, *Bhagats*, *Bairagis* and Saints whose spiritual compositions or *Bani* are respectfully compiled in the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Further digging deep into the subject has revealed that these fascinating calendars painted by various artists infact dealt with many known and unknown episodes and themes of Sikh history and other significant paraphernalia of Sikh religion, art and culture and these include subjects such as Events from *Janam Sakhis* and *Udasis* (Missionary Travels) of Guru Nanak Dev, Significant Popular subjects related to the other nine Sikh

Gurus, Iconic Portraits of Ten Sikh Gurus, Pillars of Sikh Militant strength, Selfless Service (Nishkaam Sewa) or 'Sarbat Da Bhala', Sri Harimandir Sahib- The Supreme Sanctorum, Historical Gurdwaras, Bhagats and Saints, Sectarian Mahants, Saints and Nath Yogis, Barahmaha Tukhari Chhant Mahala-1, Royal portraits of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his courtiers and Punjabi Culture and Traditions. Tumultuous scenes of Wada and Chhota Ghalughara, Sikh wars and battles, Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, Kuka movement and Carnage at Panja Sahib also inspired the artists to record these movements in their remarkable works in the celebration of martyrdom. The paintings which are steeped in divinity of Guru Nanak and colours of valour and sacrifices of the tenth Sikh Guru- Guru Gobind Singh present a dominant theme and subject matter. Other significant paintings provide a peep into the history of Sikhs projected in various versions and visual representations. Glorification of martyrdom, respect for humanistic values and service to mankind were the inspirational planks of numerous works of art under this genre of art. These calendars present a complete package of Sikh ideology, philosophy, symbolism and faith. 'Ik Onkar' (God is One), 'Sarbat Da Bhala' (Welfare of the whole mankind), 'Degh Tegh Fateh' (Always ready for fight against tyranny and injustice), 'Tera Bahana Meetha Lage' (Sweet is Thou will) and 'Ekam Pitah Ekas Ke hum Barik (God is One and all Humanity is His children) are the universal messages portrayed in these calendars. An analytical study of these calendars reveal that there is a common thread which runs through various thematic contents qualifying for good specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* and these can briefly be classified in the following categories: *Portraits of Guru Nanak*- from head to bust, full length, seated or standing alongwith Bala and Mardana in varying versions. Scenes from *Janam Sakhis* have been tastefully depicted pertaining to Bal Nanak showing his *kotaks* (astonishing childhood miracles) like episode of *Sarp Chhaya*, *Miraculous restoration of the fields destroyed by grazing buffaloes*, *Amazed Rai Bular recognizing the element of divinity in child Nanak*, *Bal Nanak being rebuked by his father- Mehta Kalu*, *Nanak debating with a teacher Gopal Pandit*, *A tender depiction of Bebe Nanaki's affection*

for Nanak , *Guru Nanak at a Madrasa writing Ek Omkar on his takhti*. Then comes the narration of episode of *Sacha Sauda*, *Nanak uttering Tera-Tera shows Nanak at a grocery shop at Sultanpur Lodhi*, the scene from *Nanak's marriage*. In addition to that prominent events that took place during the four *Udasis* (Missionary Travels) of Guru Nanak also became a preferred and popular subject matter for Sikh calendars such as *Guru Nanak's visit to Kuaru-desh and meeting Nuri Shah, the female sorceress, Siddha-Goshti, Guru Nanak meeting Pandits at Har-ki-Pauri, Haridwar, Encounter of Guru Nanak with the demon 'Kauda', Enconuter of Guru Nanak with Wali Qandhari at Panja Sahib, Reetha Meetha* episode, *Guru Nanak drawing milk from Bhai Lalo's bread, Guru Nanak Dev's visit to Piri Pur (Multan), Guru Nanak meeting Kalyug, Visit of Guru Nanak to Baghdad, Mecca Pherna* (revolving of Mecca), *Self-rotation of the chakkies* (stone grinding wheels) *in Babar's jail, Guru Nanak visiting a leper's house, Guru Nanak traveling with Bala and Mardana on the back of a fish in the ocean and Guru Nanak alongwith Bala and Mardana seated under a Banyan tree lost in deep meditation*. The themes of these calendars were selectively chosen as stories projected one or the other reformatory messages conveyed for dispelling the darkness of ignorance. These were not mere stories but these carried messages to bring the desired transformation in the mindset of people indulging in meaningless rituals and evil practices. The role of a true Guru and a preacher is justified in these events and episodes adopted in the calendars of *Sikh art*. The social revolution being brought by Guru Nanak has been aesthetically illustrated by the artists in superbly illuminating visuals and their impact carry an indelible impression on the minds of the masses. These episodes are so popular today that their message is enshrined in each and every heart. Yet a large number of calendars dwell on the essence of Nanak's philosophy of universal brotherhood and harmony. This apostle of peace laments the sentiment in *Eti maar payi kurlane- Tein ki dard na aya* (religious intolerance shown by Mughals on innocent people), *Nanak naam jahaz hai jo chade so uttare par* (the true Name or *Nam* of God is like a ship whosoever boards it crosses the sea of life and attains

enlightenment), *Sau kyun manda akhiye jis jamme rajaan* (Equality of Gender), *Ujad Jao Base Raho* (good people should spread and bad should remain contained to one place). Through the medium of these calendars, Guru Nanak's comments on the prevalence of destruction of human rights, sectarian violence, religious bigotry, low esteem for female gender, inequality in the society based on caste, creed and religion have been highlighted sending an imploring message to the mankind to get rid of these curses. Nanak's crusade and mission in bringing peace, justice, hope and harmony to the troubled populace soul reeling under the dark and dreary spell of turmoil, tyranny, violence and repression perpetuated by tyrant rulers aptly install Nanak's persona as that of a saviour. In the similar fashion significant popular subjects related to the lives and teachings of other nine Sikh Gurus which throw light on their mission include: Guru Angad Dev's establishment of institution of *Langar* or Community kitchen in a painting showing *Mata Khiwi serving kheer and Langar to the devotees*. These Sikh calendars bring out the missionary zeal with which the second Sikh Guru carried forward the message of equality and service to mankind. Guru Amar Das- '*Amru Nithawan*' (a person who has no place for shelter): *Guru Amar Das being blessed by Guru Angad Dev as 'A shelter for the homeless', Selfless service or Sewa and sacrifice for the comfort of his Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amar Das conferring equal rights to the women to conduct and perform Sikh missionary and parish work, Guru Amar Das giving a bath to a leper named 'Prema Chaudhari', Guru Amar Das forbidding the practice of Sati and Gurmukh is always humble*. In such symbolic works, the importance of dedication and devotion to the Guru is projected as a 'Selfless Service' and can be defined as true mode of meditation which culminates in salvation. Removal of social evil customs against women such as a calendar relating to dramatically descriptive happening done on the practice of *Sati* is a fine example. *Guru Ram Das- Guru Ram Das laying the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar, Kar Sewa (Self-help) rendered by devotees for digging the holy Sarovar and Guru Ram Das Sarovar nahate sab uttare paap kamate* (whosoever takes a dip in this *Sarovar* washes off all his sins).

During Guru Ram Das's times, establishment and consolidation of fundamentals of Sikh faith were strengthened by establishing the holy city of Amritsar and construction of Sri Darbar Sahib- the holiest of the holy shrines of the Sikhs. *Guru Arjan Dev serving the lepers at Taran Taran, Construction of a leper's home (Pingalwara) at Taran Taran Sahib, Compilation of Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan Dev and Bhai Gurdas, Guru Arjan Dev initiating the use of six-channel Persian wheel (Chhcharta), Guru Arjan Dev encouraging his followers to learn the skill of horse riding and also advocating the business of buying good horses and Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev at the hands of tyrant Mughals* are portrayed in fabulous calendars underlining the consistent endeavours of the Guru towards the establishment of a just and truthful environment where devotees from every religion enjoyed complete freedom to worship their respective religions and faiths. *Guru Hargobind- The invincible Guru: showing Bal Hargobind overpowering a poisonous snake, Guru Hargobind proclaiming the concept of Miri (Temporal power) and Piri (Spiritual power), Bandi Chhor Guru: Guru Hargobind leaving the Gwalior fort with fifty-two Rajas, Visit of Mughal emperor Jahangir to Golden Temple, Amritsar to pay obeisance to Guru Hargobind Sahib, Guru Hargobind giving audience to queen Nur Jahan and Guru Hargobind blessing Mata Sulakhani.* These events depicted in calendars narrate the importance of self-defense, the concept of humility, love for nature and the propagation of Miri (Temporal power) and Piri (Spiritual power). The establishment of Miri and Piri concept was to counter the onslaught of inhospitable narrow-minded tyrant rulers who indulged in inhuman acts against the innocent people. *Guru Har Rai- Tread with care: Guru Hargobind advising his grandson Guru Har Rai to walk gently since flowers and plants are also living organisms and Guru Har Rai curing Dara Shikoh- the elder son of Shahjahan.* The message drives from this advice shows respect for humility and sensitivity to mankind. Many other such lofty ideals are captured in the themes of numerous calendars. *Guru Harkishan dhayaiye jis dithe sab dukh jaye* showing Guru Harkishan eradicating epidemics and curing the worst cases

with his kind and dedicated approach to serve the mankind and *Guru Harkishan making a mute and illiterate poor water carrier name Chhajju to recite Shalokas from Gita and explaining its true meaning by just placing a stick on his head*. Thus the snobbery and arrogance of Brahmanical preachers was curtailed with words of divine wisdom explained by the eighth Sikh Guru who devoted his life in the service of ailing and suffering humanity. *Kashmiri Pandits meeting Guru Tegh Bahadur*, a heartrending portrayal of *martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi*, *Bhai Jaita respectfully carrying the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur from the place of martyrdom*, *Guru Gobind Singh embracing Bhai Jaita and uttering the words 'Rangretta- Guru ka beta': Rangretta is the son of the Guru*. Ninth Sikh Guru sacrificed his life for the protection and upholding of one's right to profess one's faith and religion thus this supreme sacrifice paved the way for a full-fledged struggle to stand against the unreasonable oppressors who perpetuated a reign of unparalleled brutality. Horrifying scenes depicting the Mughal brutality and torture are demonstrative of *Execution of Bhai Mati Dass whose body was split into two parts with a saw*, gory details of *Bhai Sati Dass being wrapped in cotton and burnt alive*, *Bhai Dyala being burnt alive in a cauldron full of hot oil*, *Mutilating of body parts of Bhai Mani Singh*, *Execution of Bhai Taru Singh whose hair were being removed alongwith his skull* showcase the gritty resolve of these disciples of Sikhism who had no fear of death. *Guru Gobind Singh- Establishent of Khalsa Panth at Anandpur Sahib*, *Guru Gobind Singh chosing Panj Pyaras (five beloved ones) from the congregation who are ready to sacrifice their lives*, *Amrit Sanchar Ceremony: Guru Gobind Singh baptizing the Panj Pyaras (five beloved ones)*, *Neela ghoda banka joda hath wich baaj sajaye chalo singho prabh darshan kariye Guru Gobind Singh aye* representing a picture of Guru Gobind Singh as a bold valiant warrior with a deep resolve on his face yet the eyes beam with sensitivity and tenderness yet a haloed divinity gives a hint of a Saint Soldier-'*Sant Sipahi*', *Chidiyon se mein baaj ladaun tabhi Gobind Singh naam kahaun'* (Call me Gobind Singh only when I transform the

sparrows to fight an falcon) illustrating the concept of Guru's power of character building, *Sura sau pehchaniye jo lade deen ke het* showing Guru Gobind Singh as a saviour of the oppressed and the down-trodden, Guru Sahib embracing his sons (*Sahibzadas*), *Uch da Pir Banana* showcasing Guru Sahib being dressed as a *Pir* by his Muslim admirers to get out of the dense forest of Machhiwara, *Guru Sahib tearing the resignation submitted by the forty Muktas in the battlefield*, *Bhai Kanhaiya serving drinking water to the wounded and the thirsty Turk soldiers alongwith the Sikh soldiers*, *Bricking alive two younger sons (Sahibzadas) at Sirhind by Wazir Khan*, *Sirhind di gadhi* showing two elder sons (*Sahibzadas*) sacrificing their lives for the sake of the nation and their faith, *Thande Burg di kaid* (Jail in cold tower) illustrating the sufferings of two younger sons (*Sahibzadas*) who were jailed in the cold tower alongwith their grandmother Mata Gujri before their execution, *The battle of Bhangani (Paonta Sahib)*, *The fortress at Chamkaur* and *Darbar of Sri Guru Gobind Singh*. The artists adopted scenes from life and times of Guru Gobind Singh and justifiably glorified the concept of being a saint and a soldier who is considered as 'Sarbens Dani' (a man who sacrificed his whole family for the protection of religion, faith and ideology). The *Sikh Calendar art* in right earnest has recreated the deep humanistic bond entrenched in spirituality and divinity of Sikh religion. Amongst the large number of calendars which deserve solemn mention are true examples of tribute to the sacrifices of Baba Deep Singh Shaheed and Banda Singh Bahadur, who besides being the pillars of Sikh militant strength were carriers of glorious traditions of Sikhism who placed their lives at the ideals of Sikh Gurus. Tumultuous scenes of *Wada and Chhota Ghalughara*, Sikh wars and battles, *Jallianwala Bagh Massacre*, *Kuka movement* and *Carnage at Panja Sahib* also inspired the artists to record these movements in their remarkable works in a celebration of martyrdom. Apart from several calendars of Golden Temple, Amritsar in myriad moods and angles, portrayal of historical Gurdwaras and places of pilgrimage occupy a special place due to their mass popularity and sacred sanctity. Portraits of *Bhagats* and saints, whose literary



contributions are enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, too reserved a coveted place in the paintings relating to *Sikh Calendar art*. As the Punjabis are spread all over the globe, an urge to capture the rich and vibrant colours of culture, traditions and heritage of Punjab is being felt specially amongst the new generation Non-resident Indians who possess a keen desire to acquaint themselves with their cultural roots and religion. Lately some artists of repute have contributed considerably towards this end and produced breathtaking paintings of the Punjabi way of life depicting the rich cultural fabric in shades of authenticity and rustic flavours. The analytical study of *Sikh Calendar art* is also directed towards ascertaining the processes and techniques which have enriched the painting and printing techniques of these calendars. The journey of *Sikh Calendar art* has passed through various terrains in terms of adopting new techniques and stylizations from Line drawing Woodcuts to Lithography, Multi-block Printing, Colour Lithography, Oleography, Half-tone blocks, Albumen prints, Bromide prints, Photo-lithography, Offset Printing and Digital Printing. In the absence of highlighting these techniques the study of *Sikh Calendar art* would have been incomplete as the techniques and new processes have propelled the very availability of these calendars in the open market thereby flooding the households and other establishments. The main cause for mass popularity and ever-increasing demand was initiated by adopting the technology, techniques and processes in an appropriate manner.

#### **CHAPTER: 4**

### **SOURCES OF SIKH CALENDAR ART**

**T**he sources of *Sikh Calendar art* are both diverse and numerous as being a popular genre of *Sikh art*, it has been successfully catering to the manifestations of humanism and essence of its content is embedded in the high annals of Sikh history, culture and traditions which proliferate a long saga of valour and sacrifices. The hallmark of

Sikhism disseminates spirituality, service to mankind and upholding of high moral and ethical personal piety in day-to-day living, as preached and practiced by the Great Ten Sikh Gurus. The art which has taken upon itself to carry forward the flame of spirit of Khalsa has cut a special sacred task for its promoters, propagators, artists and collectors. Thus the all encompassing spirit of Sikhism was primarily featured in the *Janam Sakhis* (traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak) - the perennial source of themes, imagery and content of *Sikh Calendar art* which later spread to more elaborate frescoes and wall paintings depicted in a stylized form impacting the minds and souls of a large populace with divine messages of spiritual manifestations. As the lofty aromas of Sikh faith spread far and wide, more and more artists and creative persons contributed in the development of visual presentation of themes related to Sikhism in varied styles and conceptual adaptations. This saw the rapid development of illustrated *pothis* (manuscripts) which covered the plethora of essence of Sikhism. To further promote the visual messages of the Sikh Gurus and episodes related to their lives, the artists/painters adopted the then technologies in vogue that is mass production of these Sikh calendars started in Woodcut and Lithography Printing techniques. With the advent of western techniques in painting and arrival of printing processes, the domain of *Sikh Calendar art* expanded both vertically and horizontally as fantastic works of art on Sikh themes were mass produced and reached both masses and classes at nominal rates. The role of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar is unparalleled in the context that it established itself as the pioneer agency in promotion of *Sikh Calendar art* by engaging well-known artists to paint remarkable works of art depicting Sikh history, ethos and philosophical perspectives. Another landmark contribution is the establishment of *Ajaibghars* (museums) attached to historical Gurdwaras in many cities and towns. The intellectuals and literary stalwarts who anticipated the importance of collecting, preserving and promoting the Sikh heritage and art formed a core committee to establish a towering 'Central Sikh Museum' in the precincts of The Golden Temple,

Amritsar which has the largest collection of paintings and other artifacts relating to the genre of *Sikh Calendar art*. Many other prominent Gurdwaras followed this example and these set up museums on the similar lines. Due credit should be given to Sir J.Lockwood Kipling, Principal of Mayo School of Art in Lahore (1875-1893) and also Curator of the Central Museum, Lahore who in the initial stages of *Sikh Calendar art* understood its value and collected all available specimens of this genre which are housed in Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The Dharam Prachar Committee, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar performed the sacred duty of propagation of Sikhism by publishing aesthetically illustrated books, brochures, calendars, pamphlets etc. Pursuing the same crusade, many government and corporate houses, corporations, banks and educational institutions did tremendous task of producing and publishing Sikh calendars in a big way. During the last four decades, the prominent patrons and promoters of *Sikh Calendar art* whose contribution is significant and astounding are: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, Dharam Parchar Committee: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi, Bank of Punjab, New Delhi, Markfed, PNB Finance, other Sikh institutions like Sikh Foundation, Miri Piri Foundation and museums established in the premises of historical Gurdwaras. The all inspiring and prominent motivational source ofcourse remains the sacred Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Gurbani and the other Sikh scriptures where the essence and soul of Sikh philosophy, thought and religion is respectfully enshrined. The lives of Sikh Gurus and exemplary episodes of martyrdom, valour and sacrifice have always emerged as sources of inspiration to the Sikh intellectuals, literary persons, Sikh painters, preachers and scholars of Sikhism. Infact *Sikh Calendar art* is the visual testimony of universal message of humanism which projects a Pan-India philosophical thought by adopting literary works from saints and *Bhagats* without the consideration of caste, creed and religion. Glorious Sikh history peeps through the colourful and vibrant Sikh calendars in a monumental manner and universal perspective.

## CHAPTER: 5

### MAIN FEATURES OF SIKH CALENDAR ART

To identify the main features of *Sikh Calendar art* due consideration was devoted to highlight the basic features and characteristics employed by the artists in context to their stylisation and use of iconic symbols related to Sikh religion vis-à-vis martial and spiritual aspects. These features amply illustrate the very essence of this art which is embedded in Sikh philosophy and ideology. The main features pertaining to these calendars are benign presence of the sacred scripture Sri Guru Granth Sahib, solo and group portraits of Ten Sikh Gurus in profile and frontal poses, use of the *Ik-Onkar symbol* in many forms, designs and manifestations, presence of a Khalsa symbol (*Khanda Kirpan*), Nishan Sahib, depiction of *Karah Prasad*, depiction of Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar, portrayal of presence of all five Takhts and other historical Gurdwaras related to particular Sikh Gurus, depiction of holy inscription Satnam Waheguru and couplets or verses from Gurbani. While talking about the dominance of two main colours in Sikh calendars that is blue and saffron crystallised in earlier iconographic compositions. There is also an abundance of red, maroon, deep green and deep blue shades specially shown in the costumes of important figures and in relatively later calendars there is a touch of natural colours subdued shades of grey, white, pale, blue and light green for attires of common people composed in these compositions. A relative feature which attracts the eye in these calendars is of the understanding of Sikh architecture or the shape of rural structures, houses made of small bricks or of mud walls with typical wooden doors and street scenes. The facial cuts and features of the Punjabi people and their skin tones have been keenly observed and painted in masterly strokes. Means of transport and agricultural implements are among the other spheres of life frozen in these Sikh calendars. Walking on foot was the commonest mode of travelling in those times. People from different strata of society used horses, bullock-carts, chariots and palanquins (*Dolis*) as means of transport according to their need and economic conditions. Women shown in these

calendars with their heads covered with heavy *Dupattas* and *Chaddars* wearing *Kurtis*, *Ghaghras*, *Chudidaar Pajamas*, *Salwar Kameez* and are generally not wearing any heavy jewellery firstly because they used to lead simple and solemn lives and secondly there was a general fear and anxiety that prevailed due to perpetual invasions by the Mughal, Afghan and Turkish invaders and looters in Punjab being the gateway to India. Saintly people are shown wearing wooden clogs (*Padukas*) while ordinary people are generally depicted as bare footed. The common footwear was the *Desi Juti* (country shoe), though the better off classes made use of costly slippers laced with gold and silver thread embroidery. There is also a reference in these calendars to a variety of caps worn by people belonging to various religious sects. The caps were mostly in vogue among the diverse Hindu religious orders of the *Sants*, *Siddhs*, *Yogis* etc. Among the Muslim religious orders, the '*Dastar*' (large sized *Pugree*) was more in vogue than the cap. This was why the *Ulema* were called '*Dastarbandan*' and the Sayads who tied their turbans around '*Kulas*' (conical caps) were known as '*Kulas-Daran*'. The rulers and the chiefs generally used the *Pugree*. Among the vast population of people too, the *Pugree* was worn by those popular persons who were more respected than the others. The artists have recorded the use of richly embroidered drapery especially in red, green and maroon velvets and the presence of canopy (*Chandni*) provide a vivid cluster of tinsel, garlands and coloured textiles and in the similar fashion rugs, carpets and other spreads have been painted in the scenes to portray royalty and riches accompanied by intricately carved wooden furniture with inlay work such as *Takhts*, thrones and foot-rests covered with a soft pillow which usually had golden or silver tinsels. Interiors of '*Shamiyanas*' (temporary camping fabric structures) have also been decorated with the display of pieces of weaponry-shields, crossed spears and swords mounted on the walls. Depiction of iron bowl (*Bata*) an article usually carried by *Nihangs* is a sacred utensil to the Sikh soldiers as Guru Gobind Singh had prepared the first *Amrit* in such a utensil (*Bata Sahib*) for baptism of Panj Pyaras on the auspicious day of the birth of Khalsa. Guru Gobind

Singh, at the time of creation of Khalsa with 'Khande Bate di Pahul', ordered everybody to wear five Kakars to initiate as Khalsa. These five Kakars, known as symbol of Khalsa, beginning with the alphabet 'K', are essential for every baptised Sikh. The set of these five symbols present the distinctive features of the Khalsa, which set them off from the followers of any other religious faith. These are 'Kes' (long uncut hair), 'Kangha' (comb), 'Kara' (iron bracelet), 'Kachhahera' (shorts reaching up to the knees) and 'Kirpan' (sword) are prominently used in these vibrant and ornamental calendars with various frames and in oval and other geometrical shapes. Sikh calendars of war scenes generally show 'Nagara' mounted on horsebacks or elephants. 'Nagara' is believed to be a thunderous musical instrument of war. Similarly a large brass musical instrument known as 'Ransingha' is a 'S' shaped, huge windpipe which is blown by the warriors leading the troops to announce the arrival of a procession. A stringed musical instrument called 'Rabab' is also shown in many Sikh calendars specially the ones related to Guru Nanak Dev where his constant companion Mardana is shown playing this musical instrument. Other musical instruments shown in calendars which were popularised by Guru Gobind Singh for his sightless disciples such as 'Tabla', 'Saranda', and 'Taus'. 'Dhad' is an ancient musical instrument in the shape of a tabor (*Damru*), which is played with the finger's strokes of the hands. Many contemporary calendars showcase this element in quite appealing form thereby registering their valuable contribution towards the propagation of Sikh history. Repetitive use of symbols such as *halos* or auras, *simarini*, *lota*, *Chauri*, wooden clogs, *bairagan*, *kamarkasa*, *chola*, *kalgi*, *katar*, swords and spears, bows and arrows, turbans and eyes half-closed lost in divine meditation and contemplation are most visible features which are composed in these calendars. The earlier printed calendars were very decorative and ornamental in presence and had magnificent use of compositional juxtapositions alongwith intricately decorative oval and other geometrical shaped frames. Another noticeable feature is the inscription and description of a particular person or a group of persons, their names and designations/titles and the purpose for

their congregation at a particular place either a religious place or a palace are mentioned in Gurmukhi script. This practice was even evident in earliest woodcuts and Sikh calendars. A place of pride is also reserved in the calendars for religious couplets or *Bani* from the Holy Scripture to impress upon the devout to understand and follow the essence of wisdom enshrined in the couplet. Sometimes these couplets are used as an indication to highlight the sanctity of an event, person or place. The practice of labelling the characters helps in tracing the gist of anecdotes featured in the calendars and to summarise the long episode in few precise stanzas. In the later calendars, the dramatic portrayal precedes realistic and surrealistic presentation of numerous subjects and symbolism.

## **CHAPTER: 6**

### **DESCRIPTIVE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF IMPORTANT SIKH CALENDARS AND THEIR ARTISTS**

**I**n this chapter a sustained effort was made to make a descriptive and critical analysis of important Sikh calendars and their painters revealing the psyche of the artists in the creation behind a particular calendar and the creative and aesthetic mode the painter employed to express the specific thought in pertinent visual manifestations and stylisations using his mastery in the study of the content and transform the thematic essence to the visual form and at the same time the technical aspects which were the hallmarks of a particular artist and why a specific theme is depicted in a manner which transcends from the very life-style and thought-process of a particular artist. It also deals with the artist's interest in Sikh religion and his spiritual aspirations and manifestations. Descriptive visual elements used by the artists have been fully analysed to bring in sharp focus the study of Sikh historical material and books on Sikh philosophical dimensions. These calendars are the embodiment of the vibrant spirit of Sikhism and their lofty spiritual as well as temporal values and achievements. The genre of *Sikh Calendar art* has seen numerous painters during the last century

whose valuable artistic contribution is well acknowledged but the present study has focussed on twelve stalwart painters of *Sikh Calendar art* who are truly instrumental in its progression, development and popularisation. These artists have created magnificent calendars and this study has been devoted in analysing closely the detailed elements and features, techniques, symbolism, popular subjects in portraying the soul and essence of Sikh religion and culture. As each artist possessed a different temperament and background and has developed his own individualistic inimitable style and mannerism which make these calendars all the more appealing and endearing to the masses and the classes. It is discovered that the popular genre of *Sikh Calendar art* which has crossed the national boundaries and reached in all the continents of this globe owes acknowledgment and deep appreciation to the artists included in this research work. The artists included in the study are Sobha Singh, S.G. Thakur Singh, G.S. Sohan Singh, Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh, Master Gurdit Singh, Trilok Singh Chitrakar, Amolak Singh, Bodhraj, Mehar Singh, Devender Singh and Jarnail Singh. The critical analysis of the calendars created by the above mentioned prominent painters of *Sikh Calendar art* which have been widely circulated in the large populace are based on various themes and subjects dear to the artists. The following calendars mentioned in this study are: **Sobha Singh**- Nam Khumari Nanaka, Eko Simro Nanaka, My Meditations on Guru Nanak, Iconic Portrait of Guru Nanak in *Ashirwad* pose, Guru Nanak with Bala and Mardana, Iconic Portrait of Guru Gobind Singh in head to bust style, Portrait of Guru Gobind Singh with falcon perched on his gloved hand standing besides a horse, Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh riding a galloping horse, Iconic Portrait of Guru Hargobind, Portarit of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Sohni Mahiwal, Heer Ranjha, Sohni in Heaven, Punjabi Bride, Kangra Bride, Gaddan, Last Desire of Mumtaz Mahal, Shaheed Bhagat Singh in his cell, Portrait of Baba Sheikh Farid, Bhai Kanhaiya depicted in his own perception quenching the thirst of the whole universe, *Let art be to refine the swine and divine the refine*, *Art is the language of heart*; **S.G. Thakur Singh**- Aurora, Parting Kiss, Her



Last Desire, After the Bath, Morning Prayer, The Innocent, Finishing Touch, Tulsi Seva, Old Memories, Whispers of Love, Punjabi Bride, Indolence, Monzat, Expectation, Ganesh Puja, At the Temple Door, The Secret Letter, Torments of Love, Compassion, The Golden Temple at Amritsar, The Golden Temple on the Pool of Nectar, The Golden Temple with a group of devotees entering the gates, The Qutub Minar in Delhi, The Taj, Tear Drops, East Gate of Sanchi Stupa, The Minakshi Temple (Madurai), Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta, Manikarnika Ghat, Benaras, Dasaswamedh Ghat, Benaras, The Vishram Ghat, Mathura, In the Valley of Gods, Heaven of the Poor, Women of Kangra; **Kirpal Singh**- Guru Gobind Singh at Chamkaur Sahib, Guru Ka Seena, Martyrdom of Bhai Mati Dass, The Sacrifice of Bhai Subegh Singh and Bhai Shahbaz Singh, Martyrdom of Taru Singh, Sacrifice of Bhai Mani Singh, Reward for killing the Sikhs, Faith above family, Baba Deep Singh Shaheed, Nawab Kapur Singh, Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Bhai Praga, Bhai Bota Singh, Bhai Garja Singh, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Bhai Sukha Singh and Bhai Mehtab Singh, Bhai Kanhaiya, Singh-An Embodiment of Mercy, Battle of Chamkaur; **G.S. Sohan Singh**- Guru Gobind Singh on horseback, The Bounteous Guru Har Krishan, *Sarp Chhaya*, Bal Gobind Rai, *Avatardharan* of Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Gobind Singh's call to the Sikhs, Guru Nanak's encounter with cannibal *Kauda*, Guru Nanak's visit to Kuarudesh, *Satguru Nanak Pargatya Miti Dhundh Jag Chanan Hoya*, Guru Amar Dass, Baba Deep Singh Shaheed, *Tumre Greh Pragtega Jodha Jan Ko Bal Gun Kino Na Soda*, Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia; **Trilok Singh Chitrakar**- Significance of respect to the elders and parents, *Sarabi Da Maut Nu Sada*, *Jhutha Mad Mool Na Pijayi*, *Duniya Te Asi*, *Dharam Chalawan*, *Sant Ubharan-Dusht Saban Ko Mool Uparan*, Bhai Jaita carrying the holy head of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Trees as Protector; **Jaswant Singh**- Guru Nanak- an Eternal Pilgrim, Guru Nanak, Guru Nanak- the Devotee, Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, The Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, The Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, Bhai Jaita taking the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur from the place of martyrdom, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur in spiked

cage, *Raagas*' and '*Raginis* (Raag Dipak, Raag Mal Kauns, Rag Hindol, Raag Bhairavi, Ragini Bhopali, Ragini Bhairavi, Ragini Bagesari and Ragini Gaud Malhar); **Master Gurdit Singh**- The Valour of Moti Mehra, *Chotta Ghalughara*, Bhai Dyala, Carnage of Nankana Sahib, The Sacrifice at Panja Sahib, Massacre of Jallianwala Bagh, Bhai Gurdas, Sain Mian Mir; **Amolak Singh**- Portrait of Guru Hargobind Sahib, Portrait of Guru Gobind Singh, Portrait of Guru Ram Dass, Portrait of Guru Har Rai, *Khalsa Mero Roop Hai Khaas*, Guru Nanak curing a Leper, Compiling of Guru Granth Sahib, The invincible Guru, Bhai Bidhi Chand, Guru Hargobind giving audience to Noorjahan, Mutual conflicts result in utter destruction, Helping The Helpless, The Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Kesri (Saffron) Flag on the Red Fort; **Bodhraj**- Cobra provides the Shade, Bhai Mardana receiving *Rabab* from Bebe Nanaki, Eradication of Poverty, Selfless service to Mankind, Blessing, A Gurumukh is always humble, The Guru's Word is the Panacea for all ills, Installation Ceremony of Granth Sahib at the Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar, Tread with Care, Baba Sheikh Farid, Bhagat Kabir, Bhagat Pipa, Bhagat Namdev; **Mehar Singh**- Robe of Honour, Visit of Jahangir to the Golden Temple, Mai Bhago- the Fearless Lady, *Nanak di Chaddar*, Portrait of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Portrait of Maharaja Sher Singh, Portrait of Maharaja Dalip Singh, Portrait of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Portrait of Prithvi Raj Kapoor, Portrait of Gurmukh Singh Musafir, Portrait of Sobha Singh (his Guru), Portrait of Balraj Sahni; **Devender Singh**- Mata Khiwi preparing *kheer*, Mata Khiwi distributing *kheer* amongst the people sitting in rows, Women Parishes, Behold all Human Race as One, Guru's Blessings, Bhai Manjh, Baba Buddha blessing Mata Ganga, Guru Arjan Dev helping the peasants, Bhai Banno, *Bandi Chhor Guru*, Kashmiri Pandits meeting Guru Tegh Bahadur, *Rangretta: Guru Ka Beta*, All Human beings are Equal, Hard and Soft hands, Baramaha Tukhari Chhant Mahala-1 (Chetu, Vaisakhu, Jethu, Asaru, Savan, Bhadau, Asuni, Kataki, Manghar, Pokhi, Maghi and Phalguni), *Kar Sewa*, Twelve Great Sikh women (Mata Sahib Kaur, Mata Khiwi, Mata Gujri, Mai Bhago, Sada Kaur, Maharani Jindan, Bibi Nanaki, Bibi Bhani, Bibi Amro and Mata Ganga);

**Jarnail Singh-** Guru Hargobind in a combat with Pande Khan, Portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Village Belle wrapped in *Phulkari*, Punjabi Village House, Embroidery of *Phulkari*, Open air group-baking of loaves of bread (*roti*), Indigenous mud ovens (*Tandoor*), A *Banjara* selling glass bracelets to Young Girls, Curd Churning, Group Singing on *Dholak*, Swinging in the *Sawan*, A Bride's make-up, Bride's Reception by the Ladies of the in-laws house, Painting of a Punjabi Bride, Maharaja Ranjit Singh on Elephant.

## CHAPTER: 7

### PSYCHO-ANALYSIS OF THE PROMINENT PAINTERS OF SIKH CALENDAR ART

The study of various aspects of *Sikh Calendar art* proved to be an overwhelmingly enlightening and a revealing experience and it turned out to be an extremely enriching phenomenon encompassing all shades and hues of Sikh religion, history, philosophy, culture, traditions, social ethics, psychological and political dimensions in an mosaic of multifarious perspectives. Though initially it may overtly appear to be a visual presentation of imagery employed by some promising Sikh artists to record and document the various episodes from Sikh history, mainly comprising of glorious pages from the lives of Sikh Gurus but it is a heartening revelation that the study of this most popular genre of *Sikh Calendar art* forcefully brought to the surface a plethora of vistas which go beyond the mere visual depictions and eventually relate to the very soul of the religious, philosophical, psychological and ethical essence of the Sikh religion- nurtured by unmatched divine cultivation of thought processes built on supreme sacrifices and exemplary humble, noble and pious lifestyles of Sikh Gurus. The process of propagation of the divine message of Sikhism had to encounter monstrous resistance from evil and tyrant rulers who abode the very idea of awakening of the masses as a crime fit for severe punishment. While repeeling the veneer of visual stylization of these Sikh calendars, there appears underneath a reservoir of

unfathomed dedication, artistic synergy and personal moral convictions of the stalwarts of *Sikh Calendar art* who reinforced the foundations of these wonderfully painted enchanting works of *Sikh Popular art* after deep contemplation and reinvention of their true selves. Each artist who devoted his lifetime to this genre has in fact tried to live the spiritual euphoria. The muse, inspiration and motivation behind their creations stemmed from divinity though the vehicles of imagery displays their own unmistakable personal styles and visual idioms dwelling on the moral values and spiritual ethics carefully cultivated by the Sikh Gurus. The rich and robust cultural traditions and atmosphere contributed to their enthusiasm, excitement and of course the necessity to pursue a career which catered to their mental satisfaction by bringing an aura of spiritual achievement. It is revealed that all the artists who have been featured in this study professed profound respect and dedication in Sikhism and practiced what they believed was the divine task bestowed upon them by the Sikh teachings and tenets. They treated their art as a sacred duty to be performed by them in portraying the ideals inherited from the rich religious and cultural traditions of the Sikhs. Painting these calendars was not merely an occupation to earn a livelihood but it offered them solace and peace of mind to express their ideals while recording the historical facts and perspectives in the right context and through these vibrant calendars they have tried to pay tribute to the humanistic values preached by the great Sikh Gurus.

## **CHAPTER: 8**

### **C**ONCLUDING REMARKS

**T**he journey of *Sikh Calendar art* has passed through various terrains in terms of thematic content, stylizations and adoption of new techniques and processes from Line drawing Woodcuts to Lithography, Multi-block Printing, Colour Lithography, Oleography, Half-tone blocks, Albumen prints, Bromide prints, Photo-lithography, Offset Printing and Digital Printing. It celebrates the ingenuity and incredible spirit

of enterprise of the Sikh painters who were always ready to stay ahead and strived hard to remain open-minded to learn and adopt latest techniques for improving the quality of reproductions thereby creating a large market for these *Calendar art* works. Today these calendars are available globally and command immense popularity. Due to the untiring efforts and monumental contribution of Sikh religious institutions, Gurdwaras, organizations, corporations, banks, museums and art galleries, painters, printers, promoters and scholars of Sikh thought and ideology, these *Sikh art* calendars have emerged as a single most popular mode of *Sikh art* which exudes essence of Sikh religion, history and vibrant culture. The interest in this form of art can be gauged from the fact that innumerable websites are projecting and popularizing it on the internet and dedicated efforts by foreign based *Sikh art* cultural associations and organizations that are promoting and printing the finest specimens of this genre. The themes of *Sikh Calendar art* are now being printed digitally on articles of daily use such as plates, mugs, T-shirts, keychains, wall hangings, dairies, banners, book covers, stickers, lockets, wall clocks, pen stands, mouse pads, necklaces, notebook covers, paper-weights, dials of watches, artifacts of decoration and several gift items. The future of *Sikh Calendar art* is bright as it manifests the soul of Sikh ethos and psyche, Sikh cultural traditions and heritage and the spiritual and divine messages of the great Sikh Gurus. It aptly projects the true characteristics of this proud, valiant and industrious community. It is a heartening sign that strengthens the fact that this genre of art is well founded in the fertile soil of Sikh psyche and more and more artists of various denominations, calibers and backgrounds are fully engrossed in creating innovative and imaginative works of art rooted in this genre, even the remote hamlets of towns and cities of Punjab have become hubs of artists who identify themselves with the ideology of these calendars and are creatively engaged in artistic pursuits to satisfy their aesthetic impulses and yearnings. It provides them a steady livelihood too. As a matter of fact this form of art has attained wide acceptance and is raring to spread its wings in limitless expansion. Due to its ever increasing demand even highbrow

connoisseurs of art have started evincing a keen interest in *Sikh Calendar art* as a vivid and serious form of art. It is indeed the most visible genre of *Sikh art* which has crossed national boundaries and found a respectable place in every nook and corner of the globe.

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## ABSTRACT

The mesmerizing and vibrant calendars of the Sikh Gurus offer perennial enigmatic charm and fascination to the viewers and due to a spiritual aura around them their presence on the walls of Punjabi households radiates with devotional and ethereal reverence. As they are endowed with a visual persona which inspires and moves the sacred chords of an onlooker to the deeper and unfathomed depths of religious adoration and piety. Thus a *Sikh Calendar* is not only an ordinary painting but a prolific amalgamation of lofty ideals of Sikhism which often provides a peep into the glorious historical episodes of Sikh history seeped in valour, divinity, saga of sacrifices, true dedication to the ideals of humanism and this decorative object d'art is infact a mirror to the plethora of ideological, philosophical and ethical developments of Sikh tenets and a visual treat which portrays the artistic and aesthetical journey of the artists, writers, thinkers, preachers and philosophers. Deeply overwhelmed with their mystical charm and evocative stance the analytical study of *Sikh Calendar art* became the topic of my research work. As a store-house of historical, conceptual, philosophical, social and moral facts pertaining to this captivating genre of *Sikh Calendar art* remained to be unraveled and explored, this most popular form of *Sikh art* is deeply rooted in the very psyche of Sikhism which further prodded me on a sacred endeavour to understand its genesis and its progressive journey to the present day. The whole experience of demystifying the true soul and essence of these calendars has enriched the research work as the elements and conceptual contents of these vibrant *Sikh calendars* derived their mesmerizing power from an array of factors pertaining to Sikh history, ideology, philosophy, spiritual, divine and ethical perspectives. Simultaneously the study has provided sumptuous revelations about its artistic, aesthetical and creative manifestations and influences. This study has covered the period when after the first appearance of *Janam Sakhis* in 1658 to the present 21<sup>st</sup> century when this genre is at its zenith and enjoys the world-wide popularity as a representative object d'art of Sikh history, art and culture. It was a pilgrimage of sorts to pass through each and every magnificent element of the deep and engrossing study examining the manuscripts, specimens of original Sikh paintings, books and journals on the

subject written by scholars and preachers and engaging interactions with artists, printers, scholars and experts to dig deep into the ocean of mystical aspirations behind these mesmerizing objects of art. These sources provided valuable information and knowledge which guided my onward exploration of the subject. The visits to museums, art galleries, rural and urban *Gurdwaras*, *Havelis*, *Deras*, *Dharamshalas*, corporates, universities, academies, institutions and banks engaged in the promotion and patronage of these calendars provided me with a new insight and vision to evaluate and analyze this genre of *Popular Sikh art* in new perspectives and dimensions. A remarkable treasure of the sources have infact offered an unfathomed vision and urgency with which several generations of artists and historians have poured in their valuable mental and physical faculties for the development and popularization of this genre of art which has its admirers in all the continents of the globe. This research work is divided into eight significant chapters which deal with various aspects of *Sikh Calendar art* and these include: Introduction to Sikh Calendar art; The Emergence and Development of Sikh Calendar art; Subject matter, Processes, Techniques and Materials of Sikh Calendar art; Sources of Sikh Calendar art; Main Features of Sikh Calendar art; Descriptive and Critical Analysis of important Sikh Calendars and their Artists; Psycho-Analysis of the prominent painters of Sikh Calendar art and Concluding Remarks.

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