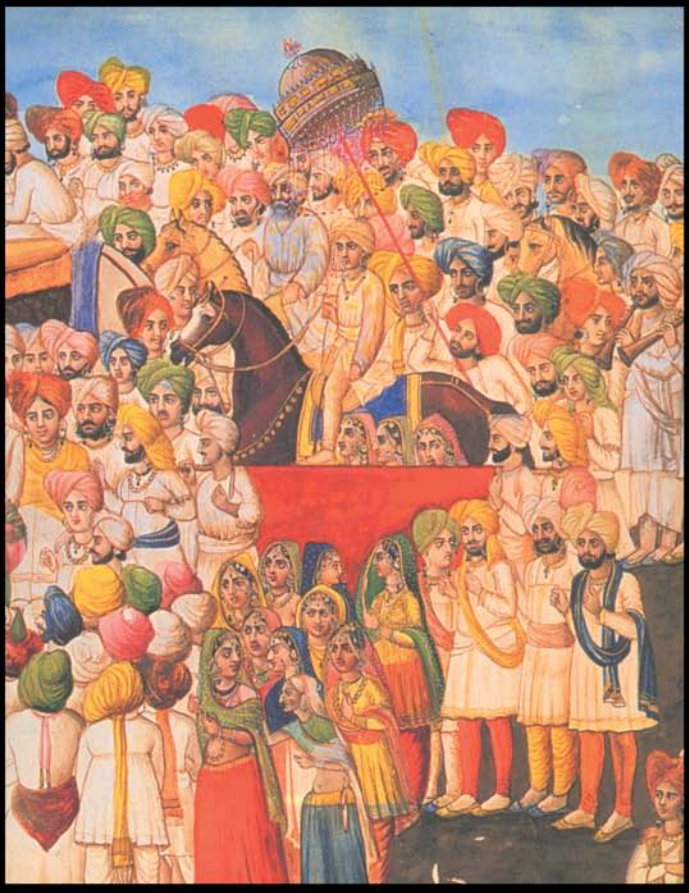
Sikh Art & Literature



Edited by Kerry Brown

Routledge

Sikh Art and Literature

Sikh Art and Literature traverses the 500-year history of a religion that dawned with the modern age in a land that was a thoroughfare of invading armies, ideas and religions and arts of East and West. The poetry of the scriptures, the illustrated life stories of Guru Nanak, the early paintings from various artistic schools and regions, the dazzling treasuries of the Sikh kingdoms, the romantic artworks of visiting European dignitaries, and the serenity of Sikh sacred architecture all provide doorways to this heroic and revolutionary faith.

Essays by art curators, historians and collectors, and scholars of literature and religion are illustrated with some of the earliest and finest Sikh paintings. Sikh modernism and mysticism are explored in essays on the holy Guru Granth Sahib, the translations and writings of the British Raj convert M.A. Macauliffe, the fathers of modern Punjabi literature, Bhai Vir Singh and Puran Singh; and the twentieth-century fiction writers Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid and Khushwant Singh. Excerpts from journals of visitors to the court of the diminutive Ranjit Singh and new translations of early twentieth-century poetry add depth and originality to this beautiful and accessible introduction to the art, literature, beliefs and history of the Sikhs.

Sikh Art and Literature is a colorful, heartfelt and informative introduction to Sikh culture. Anyone interested in gaining a full understanding of Sikh faith and culture will be drawn to and enchanted by this book.

Contributors: Narinder Singh Kapany, Kerry Brown, Gursharan Singh Sidhu, Robert J. Del Bontà, Susan Stronge, Henry J. Walker, Gobind Singh Mansukhani, Harbans Lal, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, Surjit Singh Dulai, Ardaman Singh, Nirvikar Singh and Abdul Jabbar.

Kerry Brown is the director of programs for the Sikh Foundation. She has been a writer and editor in religious publishing for fourteen years.

The Sikh Foundation was founded in 1967 to promote the heritage and future of Sikh faith and culture. Its sponsorships and collaborations include academic chairs, courses and conferences, international art exhibitions, books, films and videos.

Sikh Art and Literature

EDITED BY KERRY BROWN

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Kerry Brown is programs director of the Sikh Foundation. She was the founding director and managing editor of the International Sacred Literature Trust and has commissioned, written and edited books from, and about, the faiths of the world for fourteen years.

Robert J. Del Bontà is an art historian and Research Associate and Guest Curator at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco where he curated 'Splendors of the Punjab: Art of the Sikhs' in 1992. Currently specializing in early nineteenth-century Indian painting, his publications include works on calendar art and composite paintings and studies of Hindu and Jain art and architecture with a special emphasis on medieval Karnataka.

Surjit Singh Dulai is Professor of English at Michigan State University where he teaches English and Comparative Literature. He is co-editor of the *Journal of South Asian Literature*. Punjabi literature is one of his areas of interest. In 1990 he was Visiting Professor of Sikh Studies at the University of Michigan.

Abdul Jabbar is Professor of English and Chairman of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, City College of San Francisco, California. After coming from Pakistan to the USA on a Fulbright scholarship, Dr Jabbar earned his Master's and doctoral degrees in English from Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. He has been a lifelong devotee of the literature in Punjabi, his mother tongue, and has taught the English language works of Khushwant Singh in his English and Humanities courses.

Narinder Singh Kapany is the founding chair of the Sikh Foundation and has been a collector of Sikh art for over thirty years. He was born in Moga, raised in Dehra Dun, India and completed his postgraduate studies at the University of London. A pioneering scientist in optoelectronics, he is known as the father of fibre optics. He is based in California.

Harbans Lal was born and raised in Haripur, now in Pakistan. He is Professor and Chairman of the Department of Pharmacology at the University of North Texas Health

and Science Center. He is also a trustee of the Academy of Guru Granth Studies in Texas and of the Bhai Anand Lal Sikh Educational Foundation. As well as his extensive publications in pharmacology, he has written over fifty articles on the Sikh faith and history. In 1995, Guru Nanak Dev University in the Punjab awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Literature for his writings on Sikhism.

Gobind Singh Mansukhani (1915–1993) served as the Principal of Khalsa College in Jullundar and in Delhi, and later became a Deputy Secretary of the University Grants Commission, Government of India. His many books on Sikhism include *Indian Classical Music and Sikh Kirtan*, *Fundamental Issues in Sikh Studies*, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikh Religion and Culture* with R.C. Dogra, *Introduction to Sikhism* and his translations of hymns from the Guru Granth and the Dasam Granth. In 1991 he was awarded the Bhai Vir Singh International Award for his contribution to Sikh studies.

Gursharan Singh Sidhu was born in Lahore and brought up in New Delhi exposed to the traditions and religious beliefs of his faith. He is an engineer and computer scientist by profession. His personal interests include the study and collecting of art from India, in particular paintings.

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Susan Stronge is a curator in the Indian and South-East Asian Department of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. She has written extensively on courtly arts of India from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and is currently working on an exhibition, 'The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms', to be held at the museum in 1999.

Henry J. Walker was born in Ireland and completed his undergraduate education at Trinity College, Dublin. He received a PhD in Classics from Cornell University, and is now teaching at Bates College in Maine. He is married to Nikky Singh and has traveled with her in the Punjab.

Art Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the Sikh Foundation on the publication of this volume of essays on the art and literature of the Sikhs. This book is the culmination of the efforts of the Sikh Foundation and its chairman, Dr Narinder Singh Kapany, to recognize the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Sikh Foundation celebrated in 1992. That year, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the Sikh Foundation and the Center for South Asia Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, co-sponsored an exhibition entitled 'Splendors of the Punjab: Art of the Sikhs' which was on view at the museum from November 25 to December 27, together with a two-day conference on 'Sikh Art and Literature'.

The excellent essays on art and architecture included here were delivered at that conference, and their publication is indeed worthy of much celebration. The authors are a distinguished group of specialists, collectors, art historians, museum curators and an architectural historian. Collectively they describe the heroes, the events, the treasures and the monuments that distinguish the arts created by or associated with the Sikhs. For the uninitiated, these essays will respond to the questions, 'What is Sikh art? How is it different from the rest of Indian art?'

'Splendors of the Punjab: Art of the Sikhs' consisted primarily of paintings and objects created at the Sikh capital of Lahore in the first half of the nineteenth century and borrowed from local northern Californian collections. It should be remembered as the first exhibition of Sikh art held in North America. Since 1992, the Sikh Foundation has been instrumental in taking a number of educational initiatives, such as endowing positions in Sikh history and literature at Californian institutions, as well as initiating plans for a major international exhibition of Sikh art that will open before the beginning of the next millennium.

These efforts to preserve and to disseminate knowledge about the culture and religion of the Sikhs inspire our admiration and applause. We hope that Sikhs world-wide, as well as the general public, will come to appreciate the brilliance of the Sikh contribution, not only to the past but to the present. May the culture

described in the pages that follow promote the proud values of their traditional heritage and give rise to future leaders who can integrate the Sikh perspective into the multiculturalism of the modern world.

Emily J. Sano
Director, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

Literature Foreword

By compiling the hymns of Sikh Gurus and other saints in an anthology of sacred writings, the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjan Dev, helped save for posterity a body of work unparalleled in its scope and emotional appeal, and unique in its symbolism and expressive beauty. Its social and spiritual content would be the beacon for countless writers and poets in the years ahead.

The Sikh holy book, the Granth Sahib, originally assembled by Guru Arjan Dev, includes compositions of seven of the ten Sikh Gurus as well as those of other saint-scholars. Its ideas, form and substance have inspired many writers. The pace was set by the first Sikh Guru, Nanak, with his amazing ability to demolish, in verses of rare sensitivity, the complex arguments advanced by religious bigots. Through verse, he highlighted the mockery they were making of the ideals spelt out by their savants.

His successors also did the Sikhs proud, Guru Arjan Dev's role being especially significant. The syntax, style and rhythm of the verses he selected for the Guru Granth received his meticulous attention. The lyrical rendering of the philosophical, devotional and ethical themes are also due to his imagination and perseverance. He did not stop at setting exacting standards of literary excellence, but had the works set to music in thirty-one classical ragas.

The philosophical and creative prowess of these works had a profound impact on the literary efforts of many, which helps explain the elevated and inspired mood in the work of outstanding authors like Bhai Vir Singh, Kahan Singh Nabha, Mohan Singh Vaid and others. Their writings reflect optimism, resolution, faith and humanity towards fellow humans as they draw telling distinctions between truth and falsehood, compassion and cruelty, the material and metaphysical, virtuous and vile, courageous and cowardly, and between deep conviction and feeble compromise. The distinguished – and frequently rebellious – poet Puran Singh's inspiration can also be traced to the sacrament of the Granth.

Bhai Vir Singh's personal contribution went beyond his own elegant and evocative writing. He not only founded the thought-provoking weekly, *Khalsa Samachar*, but also established the Khalsa Tract Society in 1894 which published

monographs on a large number of themes, aimed at creating awareness and pride in the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Sikhs. Bhai Vir Singh's inputs were prodigious. He wrote over 90 per cent of the 192 monographs published within six years of the Society's founding which were then distributed to over half a million subscribers.

Possibly because it has drifted far from its earlier moorings, contemporary Punjabi literature – which in effect means Sikh literature – has, unfortunately, neither kept pace with the purposefulness and moral certainties of the older generation of writers nor with the passionate lyricism of the younger. There are, as always, fine exceptions. But content, conviction and craftsmanship are generally lacking today. All the more reason to ensure the success of books like *Sikh Art and Literature* by infusing new enthusiasm in our endeavors to identify, encourage and publish undiscovered talent in the coming millennium.

Patwant Singh

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Introduction

NARINDER SINGH KAPANY

KERRY BROWN

The survival and prosperity of a community or nation are determined by a number of factors: the laws that it formulates and enforces, the social and economic plans that it executes, and the art and literature that it creates and disseminates. In recent years the Sikh community has frequently felt under siege and has responded by consolidating its efforts in the religious, political and economic arenas. Hence art and literature, which lie at the very core of the community's existence, have not received their rightful recognition and support. They have been allowed to languish. Despite five centuries of artistic and intellectual giants, the importance of Sikh art and literature, indeed their very existence, have been largely unrecognized, even by the community itself.

Although their roots lie in the Punjab, Sikhs are now an international community that is looking both inward to its values and achievements and outward to its place and purpose within the human family. The saga of the Sikhs in the Western world has invigorated the community and fueled the urge to know, share and expand the Sikh heritage. So before looking at what Sikh art and literature have to say about Sikhs and Sikhism, let us touch upon this unfolding saga that began over a century ago.

SIKHS IN THE WEST

The move westward of the Sikhs goes back to the victory of the British government over the Sikh Empire in 1849, but the real turning point was the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887. It was then that the pride of Sikh soldiery were brought to London in their colorful turbans and splendid uniforms to parade in the Jubilee celebrations. They were showcased as magnificent and exotic human specimens to which the Empire laid claim. From there, the British government decided it would also show them off in the other colonies. They were brought to Canada.

The terrain of Canada greatly impressed the Sikh soldiers. They could see its agricultural and other potential. Upon returning to India, some of them decided that they would hitch their fortunes to the New World. So after they retired from the army, they gathered up their kith and kin to move to North America. They began arriving in the 1890s.

The story of these Sikhs is both exciting and painful. Immigration laws were very racist; one way they could find their way into Canada was to smuggle themselves into Mexico; from there to California and then on to Canada. A number of them settled in the El Centro area in California while some moved further north to Stockton. The first gurudwara in North America was built in Stockton in 1915 and the second was in El Centro in 1929. Other Sikhs actually did reach Canada and started businesses in agriculture and the lumber industry that were highly successful.

Those who stayed in California suffered a great deal in the early days. Some still alive in the 1960s told untold stories of hardship, of sleeping in the fields because they were hiding from the authorities; not being able to purchase land to till because the laws did not permit an alien to buy land in California. Mostly they worked as casual laborers. Today, their descendants are among the world's most successful farmers, owning huge acreages of walnuts, peaches, plums, and other fruits and produce that feed the international markets.

These farmers were the same people who started the international movement for India's independence. In 1913, they founded the *Ghadar* (Mutiny) Party. More than 90 per cent of the members of the Ghadar Party were Sikhs and all congregated in or around the Berkeley area of California; a Ghadar Memorial still stands on Wood Street in San Francisco. The Party published magazines and pamphlets, and organized demonstrations and lectures to raise public awareness about British colonial rule in India.

In Washington and on the East Coast, the India League of America, led by J.J. Singh, Anoop Singh and others, persistently lobbied Roosevelt's government

to pressure Britain to accord freedom to India. All these people fought for the independence of India long before Gandhi and Nehru, long before the 'founding fathers' of the movement, appeared on the scene.

Sikhs have been a presence in North America ever since. The first Asian American to become a member of the United States Congress was a Sikh, Dalip Singh Saund, who won his seat in 1956. Today, with between 750,000 and 1 million Sikhs estimated to be living in North America, there is not a single industry without Sikhs and, in the San Francisco Bay Area alone, there are dozens who are chief executives of their own hi-tech companies. From the original two gurudwaras, there are now hundreds, and hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested in Sikh religious organizations.

On the other side of the Atlantic in Great Britain, the Sikhs started immigrating to the land of their rulers late last century and, by the turn of the century, the first gurudwara had been established, with the financial assistance of the Maharaja of Patiala, at Sinclair Road in Shepherd's Bush, London. Nevertheless, after the Second World War, Sikhs were still barely visible, largely confined to working as door-to-door salesmen, factory workers and drivers. But, after Independence, in the 1950s and 1960s, new waves of Sikh immigrants came as students, businessmen and artisans.

Today there are an estimated half million Sikhs in Britain – nearly 1 per cent of the population – and over 200 gurudwaras. Their professions have expanded to include Member of Parliament, Queen's Counsel and High Court Judge. They number among some of the richest people in the land. As in North America, they are found in every walk of life. There is not a city, university campus, industrial complex or hospital where a turban or *salwar kameez* is not seen.

The Sikhs have also spread widely in Europe establishing gurudwaras in Germany, France, Italy and Belgium. And in the Asia Pacific they are thriving in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Bangkok and Singapore, even reaching as far as Australia and New Zealand.

The second and third generations of Sikh youth in the West are extremely eager to participate in the Western scene while practising and building upon the faith, customs, traditions, history, art and literature of their cherished heritage. It lies with the older generation to pass to them, and their descendants, the essence of that heritage – its most sophisticated expression – to serve as the basis of a modern, global Sikh culture. We need to ensure that they inherit it and that they understand and embrace it. We must also ensure that people of other faiths, races and cultures, understand who and what the Sikhs are. For then, and only then, will Sikhs take their place fully in the societies in which they work and live.

With this in mind, let us look at some of the artistic and literary works on which Sikhs and Sikhism stand.

PAINTINGS OF THE GURUS

We start with the fact that there are very few – perhaps only one – surviving images of a Sikh Guru painted during his lifetime. Consequently the images that we see today, from the late eighteenth-century paintings to the poster art of the late twentieth century, vary considerably. When we look at what may be the earliest surviving image of Guru Nanak (1469–1539 CE), the founder of Sikhism, which was painted more than 200 years after he lived, we see a pious man who, judging by his headgear, might be a Muslim (Plate 1, Figure 1). The cap and the quotation in Urdu at the top of the painting contribute to the view of art historians that the artist was Muslim. But we are reminded also of the fact that, for Guru Nanak, dress did not mean anything, any more than did religious rituals and dogma. He was known for wearing a mix of Muslim and Hindu garb, and his devotional songs – the written record of which he appears to be holding, and which were to become the core of the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib – pointedly dismiss the spiritual value of such trappings in favor of an inner love and experience of God:

> Wear contentment as your yogi earrings,
> let honest actions be your pouch and begging bowl,
> make inner contemplation your penetential ashes.
> Death shall be the cloak you wear,
> pure living your yogic discipline,
> and faith the staff you lean upon.
> Accept all humans as your equals
> and let them be your only sect.
>
> (Japji 28, GGS)[1]

This secular[2] mysticism has never left the Sikh faith. In the words of Bhai Vir Singh, the great twentieth-century Sikh poet, quoted in Nikky Singh's study (see Chapter Seven, p. 148):

> In me, deep inside, deep inside somewhere
> is my Beloved hidden!
> Yes,
> You strike me with your melodious tunes,

Figure 1 'Guru Nanak', Lucknow or Faizabad, c. 1770 (detail of Plate 1), pigment on paper, 21 × 13.5 cm (with border 41.5 × 33.5 cm) (Kapany Collection)

Touching
My inner strings.
They sing songs –
Songs of separation from you, songs of anticipation
of union with you . . .

If we move to another painting of Guru Nanak (Figure 2), this time from a nineteenth-century edition of the Janam Sakhis, the stories of the Guru's life, we still do not see before us a man whom we would recognize today as a Sikh. Sikhism had yet to build its separate and visually distinct identity. This time, as it happens, Guru Nanak looks more like a Hindu. Here, he is conquering, or rather, converting, demons to the path of virtue and Divine love. In the context of the Guru's own teachings, we can read this image symbolically – as a message to conquer our own demons, those that every human carries inside themselves. To quote Guru Nanak, 'Conquering ourselves, we conquer the world' (Japji 28, GGS).

For Nanak this certainly did not mean retreating from the world, he engaged in life. As Robert Del Bontà tells us in his study of the Janam Sakhis (Chapter Two), Nanak traveled widely and would talk to anyone and everyone – saintly, demonic, Hindu, Muslim, royal or humble. He climbed mountains to talk with saints who were in retreat but he did not stay there. For Guru Nanak, engagement in the world was a spiritual responsibility.

The Janam Sakhi manuscripts include numerous tales of the Guru meeting with magical phenomena such as the demons mentioned above. They are part

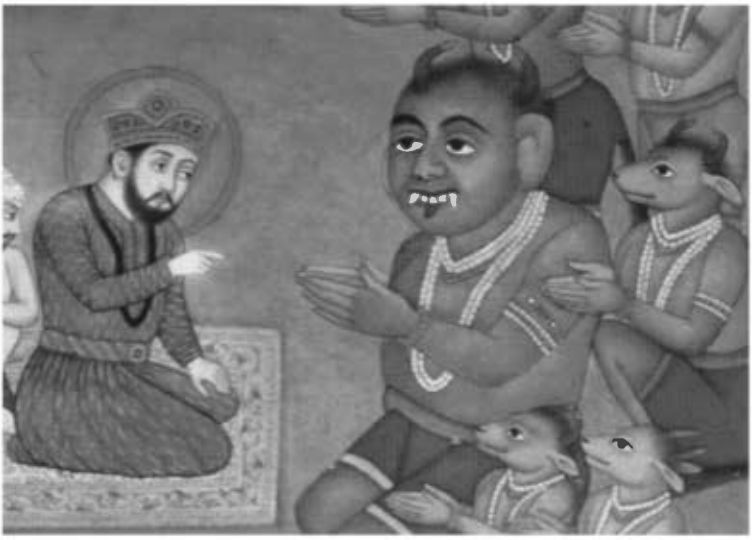

Figure 2 'Guru Nanak Meets Raj Dev Lut of the Demons', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set (detail of Plate 34), 13.3 × 17 cm (Kapany Collection)

of the folklore that gathers around all religions – and that Guru Nanak was trying to counter. There is a famous story about Guru Nanak in which, while visiting the Middle East, he goes to sleep with his feet pointing to the Ka'ba in Mecca. Muslim mullahs see this and are upset by his irreverence for the place of God. When they wake him to complain, Guru Nanak says to them, 'Turn my feet in the direction where God is not.' *That* is his message. But in Janam Sakhi versions of this story from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, embellishments are added; the mullahs are said to have turned the Guru's feet and, as they did so, the Ka'ba turned too (see Chapter Two, p. 59).

Similarly, there is an account of Guru Nanak visiting Hardwar, the Hindu holy place on the Ganges, where he sees holy men praying to the sun and throwing water towards it. Guru Nanak turns and starts splashing water in the opposite direction. The holy men ask why he is doing something so pointless. Guru Nanak replies: 'If your water can reach the sun millions of miles away, my fields are dry and they are only a few hundred miles away, I am sending them water.' This is the early story with its biting wit and religious critique but, again, by the eighteenth century, the story was embellished so that Guru Nanak's fields are miraculously watered. Sikhism is not, of course, alone in this sort of

literalism and miracle mongering that can make us blind to the miracle of our own life and of this universe. As Guru Nanak warned, all religions are vulnerable to it.

> With knowledge as the bouquet, compassion as the hostess,
> let the sacred music resonate in every heart.
> The One is supreme, the whole cosmos under Its sway,
> why revere feats and miracles which lead you astray?
> (Japji 29, GGS)

To move forward once more, now to a work by a known artist of the twentieth century, Sobha Singh, Guru Nanak is portrayed differently yet again (Plate 2). This painting has been mistaken for a recent Sikh family portrait. Except for the halo, Guru Nanak does indeed look like a fatherly Sikh of the twentieth century. Having now looked at paintings of the first Guru from three centuries, we can say that they are not of the historic Nanak but of a man of the time or, more precisely, of Sikhism of the time.

As well as the plethora of paintings of Guru Nanak, there are also a large number of depictions of the other nine Gurus, and of all ten together, highlighting the themes for which they are most known. We see one of the finest and fullest depictions in the nineteenth-century painting (Plate 3) which, along with the ten Gurus, also includes the two famous disciples of Guru Nanak – Bala, a Hindu, and Mardana, a Muslim (top centre) – and the four young sons of Guru Gobind Singh (bottom centre), two of whom were executed by a Mughal vassal and two of whom died in battle against the Mughals. By this time, the Sikh following had increased and formalized its structures and, in keeping with this development, the Gurus are portrayed with more formalized settings and iconography. They all have a halo. Guru Nanak also has his hallmark rosary, and the rebeck that Mardana is playing reminds us, as did the book of verses in Plate 1, of the centrality of music, in particular the Gurus' hymns, in the Sikh tradition. As Gobind Singh Mansukhani recalls from the Guru Granth in his discussion of the musical tradition (see Chapter Five):

> Divine music is heard in every soul;
> Resonant, continuous, self-sustained, a revelation.
> (GGS 62)

In contrast to Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru (1666–1708), appears in the same painting (bottom center), with his motifs of

sword, hawk and horse. Guru Gobind Singh embodied the teachings of the nine Gurus who preceded him. His heritage included the martyrdom of two Sikh Gurus by Mughal emperors. The first was Guru Arjan (1563–1606), the fifth Guru, who built the Harimandir at Amritsar, later to become known as the Golden Temple. He also collected his own and his predecessors' verses as well as those of great Hindu and Muslim saints into the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib. As his popularity grew, threatening Mughal supremacy, Guru Arjan was tortured to death at the orders of Emperor Jahangir. His official crime was to have given the blessing, given by any holy man when asked, to a half-brother and rival of the Emperor. The Guru refused to apologize or pay a fine and so died in agony. His son Hargobind (1595–1644), catapulted by brutal loss into the Guruship while still a boy, brought a new tone of militancy to the Sikh faith. Hargobind established his own army, the *Akalis* (Immortals) and built the *Akal Takht* opposite the Golden Temple for the governing of worldly affairs. He won four battles against the Mughal rulers yet, when expanding the town his father had established, included a large and beautiful mosque for his Muslim soldiers and workers.

In a painting from around 1750, we see Guru Hargobind as imagined by the artist in the courtly dress and setting of the Mughals (Plate 4, Figure 3). We have come a long way from the holy man's attire and setting of Guru Nanak. The Guru's move into worldly power was formally expressed as the doctrine of *miri* and *piri* (temporal and spiritual). In a land where earthly existence had come to be cast as mere illusion or trial by fire for the afterlife, this doctrine, which cast the world and the spirit as two sides of a single reality requiring wholehearted engagement, was shockingly radical. It went back to the essence of Guru Nanak's teaching but now it was gathering momentum as the Sikh faith grew. It was symbolized by the two swords of miri and piri that Guru Hargobind's Akalis wore and that hold the circle in the symbol of the Sikh *Khalsa* (the community of the pure).

Like the sixth Guru, the tenth Guru's life was profoundly affected in his childhood by deep personal loss and great public responsibility. A disciple brought the 9-year-old Gobind the head of his own father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, who had been decapitated at the Mughal court. The story begins with the Mughal emperor's death threat to the Kashmiri brahmins for following their own religion. Tradition says that Guru Tegh Bahadur was approached by the brahmins for help and decided, with the support of his young son, that it was time for a sacrifice to be made. He told the brahmins to make an agreement with the emperor that they would convert if Guru Tegh Bahadur would do so. Knowing full well the likely outcome, Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–75) and three disciples

Figure 3 'Guru Hargobind Singh on Terrace with Attendant', Punjab Plains, 1750 (detail of Plate 4), gouache on paper, 20.5 × 13.5 (26.5 × 18.5) cm (Kapany Collection)

went to Emperor Aurangzeb's court in Delhi to defend the rights of the brahmins. When they themselves refused to convert to Islam, all were publicly sawn in half, burned alive, or decapitated, the first martyrs in history to die defending the religious freedom of another tradition. The quiet heroism of this ninth Guru, who spent much of his life as a poetic recluse, is captured in a rare painting of a Guru done during his lifetime (Plate 5). Dressed in Mughal attire, in almost iridescent orange, the Guru stands like a beacon in a broad-brushed and radiantly moody background that is characteristic of the seventeenth-century Mughal school of painting.[3] He holds a hawk, associated most often with the warrior Gurus, Hargobind and Gobind Singh. But the hawk is an apposite symbol for the ninth Guru; five years after the date of this painting, by sacrificing his and his disciples' lives for the religious freedom of others, Guru Tegh Bahadur was to imprint on his son – and, through him, the Sikh people – the ideal of fearlessness in the face of injustice. In the early twentieth century, Puran Singh rallied a disheartened community with spine-tingling poetry that reawakened them to this tradition (see Chapter Eight, p. 170):

> These care-free souls of Punjab
> Jest with death,

Unafraid of dying.
They become slaves if loved,
Sacrifice and give away their lives,
But do not submit to anyone's arrogance,
Standing up with clubs raised on shoulders.
Stubborn, full of abandon, from the beginning. . . .

This second round of Sikh martyrs sealed the warrior spirit into the Sikh psyche, and reached its zenith in Guru Gobind Singh. The pride and nobility of this face of Sikhism find striking expression in a painting dated c. 1830 of the tenth Guru astride his blue stallion with his hawk and sword (Plate 6, Figure 4). The perspective of the setting, probably Western influenced, throws into relief the more traditionally rendered figures, including the Guru's blue stallion. The blue stallion was made legendary in many folk songs and artworks. We don't really know the roots of the legend – possibly the Guru owned a stallion so gleaming black that it looked blue or perhaps it is a reference to the traditional Indian association of blueness with divine beauty. Whatever the reason, here in this handsome equestrian is the inner nobility that was the imprimatur of Guru Gobind Singh and has become so integral to the Sikh character. In the words of the Puran Singh, translated by Surjit Singh Dulai (see Chapter Eight, p. 170):

Stand up like a cypress
On your own feet,

Figure 4 'Guru Gobind Singh on Horseback with his Attendants', c. 1830 (detail of Plate 6), gouache on paper, 18.5 × 15 cm (Kapany Collection)

And firm on your roots;
See, on the high top of your heart, stars hanging;
The moon, hiding, plays behind your height,
And the beauty of world, diving
In your heart, comes out washed in brightness.

THE PATRONAGE OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

The majesty stamped onto the Sikh spirit by Guru Gobind Singh became the currency of the *Khalsa Raj* (Sikh kingdoms) of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nowhere more so than in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who reigned over the Punjab and neighboring regions in north India for the first half of the century. This romantic and opulent era of Sikh history (Figure 5) – which admittedly drifted wide from many teachings of the Gurus – is brought to life in the studies of Ranjit Singh, his treasury and his contribution to sacred architecture by Gursharan Sidhu, Susan Stronge and Henry Walker, respectively (see Chapters One, Three and Four).

Ranjit Singh was a patron of the arts – painting, carving, armor, brassware, jewelry, textiles and architecture. He was also a patron of Western thought, culture and military discipline, hiring European generals for his army and instituting an equivalent of the French Legion of Honor for bravery (see Chapter One). Short, one-eyed and scarred by childhood smallpox, he could command a room with his presence. He made a great impression on his Western visitors. In his illustrated journal of his time at the Court, W.G. Osborne, Military Secretary to Lord Auckland, Governor-General of India, says: 'The more I see of Runjeet Singh, the more he strikes me as an extraordinary man.'[4]

The visiting Europeans speak of the different personas that the 'Lion of the Punjab' was able to project through sheer force of personality and what can perhaps best be described as his sense of showmanship. Sitting informally, he looked unimpressive (Figure 6) but, on state occasions, the whole court would receive strict instructions to come dressed in the richest colors, cloths and jewels. Ranjit appeared in plain white or green with little or no jewelry except one huge diamond, the incomparable *Koh-i nur*, 'Mountain of Light' (see Chapter Three). Such chic simplicity amongst the ornate splendor and 'the glance of fire which every now and then shot from his single eye'[5] established him as the center of power, a man of kingship. It had tremendous impact, as did his intelligence:

Figure 5 'Dancing Girls', by W.G. Osborne from *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Sing*, Henry Colburn Publisher, London, 1840, p.96 (Kapany Collection)

> you get accustomed to his plainness and are forced to confess that there is no common degree of intellect and acuteness developed in his countenance, however odd and repulsive its first appearance may be. . . . perfectly uneducated, unable even to read or write, he has by his own natural and unassisted intellect raised himself from the situation of a private individual to a despotic monarch over a turbulent and powerful nation. By sheer force of mind, personal energy, and courage, (though at the commencement of his career he was feared and detested rather than loved) he has established his throne on a firmer foundation than that of any other eastern sovereign, and but for the watchful jealousy of the British government, would long ere this have added Scinde, if not Affghanistan, to his present kingdom.[6]

The court scene paintings (see Chapter 1) also evidence an aspect of Ranjit Singh's reign which takes us back to the images of Guru Nanak with his non-sectarian dress and his disciples of different faiths – we are looking at a mixed court; Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians all formed part of the Maharaja's circle of advisers and confidantes (Figure 7). Ranjit Singh was totally secular. In this, at least, he carried the mantle of Guru Nanak's teachings.

Another persona projected by the Maharaja and noted by his European visitors is that of the warrior. Osborne speaks of the 'great personal courage' of

Figure 6 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh', by Emily Eden, from *Portraits of the Princes & People of India*, drawn on the stone by L. Dickinson from hand painting on paper, and published by J. Dickinson & Son, 1844, print no. 13 (Kapany Collection)

Ranjit Singh who 'until the last few years, always led his troops into action himself'.[7] Even after a stroke that permanently disabled him, on his horse with his hawks and dogs he was in command. 'He is by no means firm on his legs when he attempts to walk, but all weakness disappears when he is once on horseback.' Military discipline and pride were fully integrated into the Sikh tradition by Ranjit Singh, as Gursharan Sidhu shows us in magnificent paintings from this era of men on their horses, with their hawks, hunting dogs, and weapons (see Chapter One). The age is perfectly evoked in the painting of armed Sikh generals sitting on a terrace (Plate 7, Figure 8) and in the exquisite artistry of a nineteenth-century steel helmet damascened with gold (Figure 9). Designed to accommodate a Sikh turban, it is inlaid with an intricate floral and geometric frieze. The copper and steel links are woven in the *ganga jumna* pattern forming two waves of chain mail like the mixing of water currents where these two sacred rivers meet. The helmet, like all Sikh – and indeed all Indian – arms and armory, was designed to honor and evoke Divine power.

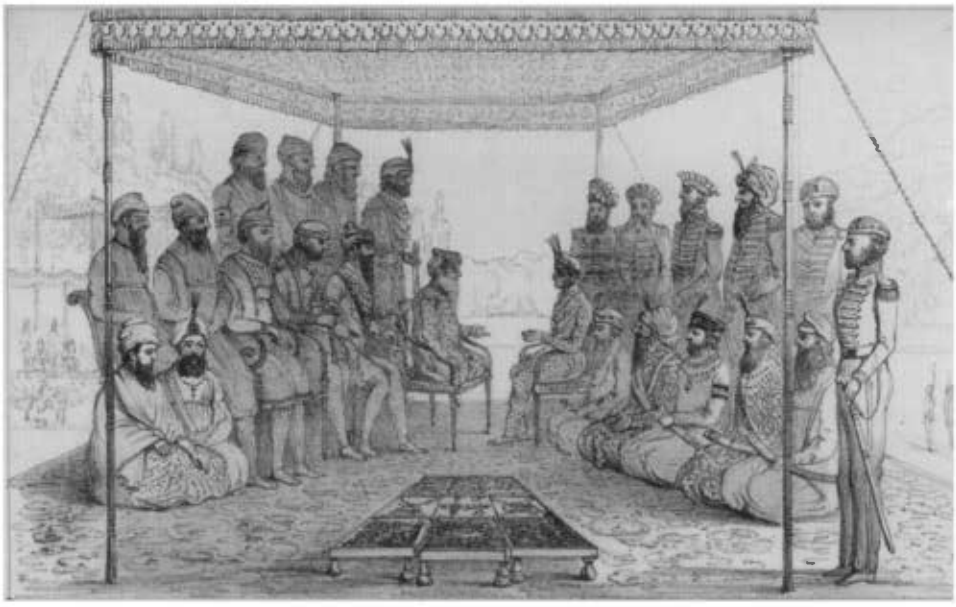

Figure 7 'Private Native Durbar', by W.G. Osborne from *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Sing*, Henry Colburn Publisher, London, 1840, p. 203 (Kapany Collection)

Figure 8 'Assembly of Sikh Generals on a Terrace', c. 1830 (detail of Plate 7); Punjab, Guler style, pigment on paper, 19 × 25.5 cm (Kapany Collection)

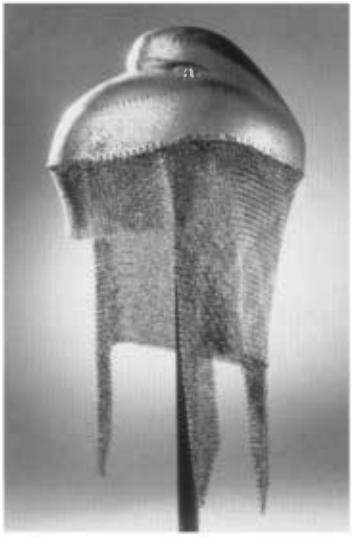

Figure 9 Sikh helmet, nineteenth century. Steel helmet damascened with gold, shaped to accommodate the Sikh turban and inlaid with a design of four-petaled flowers in a hatched grid; chain mail of steel and copper (Kapany Collection)

Figure 10 'Young Maharaja Ranjit Singh', Company style (detail of Plate 8), pigment on paper, 28 × 19.5 cm (Kapany Collection)

Our final image of Ranjit Singh is an early one of him as a young man (Plate 8, Figure 10). Its significance lies in its style. The painting was commissioned by the British-owned East India Company as part of its 'Company art' and, although probably done by an Indian artist, has taken stylistic cues from the representative art of the British Victorians who were so much a part of the age. Company art spawned a genre that stepped outside of the courts and into the daily life of India, as we see in the late nineteenth-century painting of a Sikh wedding (Plate 9, Figure 11). Whether or not commissioned by the East India Company, it has adopted its clean lines, bold colors and focus on human character.

THE PATRONAGE OF THE PHULKIAN MAHARAJAS

We must also note that although Ranjit Singh's kingdom stands as the apotheosis of Sikh courtly power and artistic endeavor, the legacy of the arts by Phulkian maharajas was as impressive as that of Ranjit Singh. The wall paintings and architecture at Qila Mubarak and the artistic contents of the Shish Mahal Museum bear a convincing testimony to this. Equally impressive is the collection of the holy relics of the Sikh Gurus at the House of Patiala. The contributions of the

Figure 11 'Sikh Marriage Ceremony', nineteenth century, Company miniature style (detail of Plate 9), 34 × 54 cm (Kapany Collection)

Maharajas of Patiala, Nabha, Kapurthala, Faridkot and Jind as collectors and patrons also deserve attention from the art world.

Unlike Ranjit Singh's kingdom, which after his death turned into a bloodbath of warring Sikh factions that made easy prey for the British, these kingdoms did not finally fall to the British but signed treaties which enabled them to keep their own courts and armies until India's independence in 1947. Business boomed for portraiture, and courtly and military scene painting. So we see Ranjit's contemporary, Maharaja Karam Singh of Patiala, and his son Narinder in full European military dress, the maharaja with a halo (Figure 12). A colorful portrait of the Maharaja of Nabha has him dressed traditionally but with the European influence apparent in the photographic style and decorative cameo frame (Figure 13).

EUROPEAN ARTISTS AND WRITERS

The presence of numerous accomplished artists from Europe has left us with a fine body of Victorian art that falls into our definition of Sikh art that is by, for and/or about Sikhs.

As Susan Stronge details in Chapter Three, writers and artists such as Emily Eden have provided us with vivid written accounts illustrated with evocative images of the Sikh court of Ranjit Singh, its treasures and its handsome Sikh warriors. Eden was one of a number of Europeans who fell in love with the exotic splendor of the Sikh court.

Whereas Eden's lithographs (see Figure 6) and those 'by a lady' are tinged with a calm and delicate appreciation of the characters, architecture and natural environs of Lahore (Figure 14), the lithographs of the Russian prince Alexis Soltykoff, who also visited the Lahore court, are wildly and wonderfully romantic (Figure 15) – it is hard to believe they were in the same place. The prince tells of his enamorment of the Sikh character after being carried, as befitted his royal station, in a palanquin by four Sikh youths. Prince Soltykoff testifies to their being execrable palanquin bearers:

> They not only shook him violently as they ran with him but repeatedly let the *palki* fall; and seemed to be more amused at the concussion than penitent for their awkwardness (or mischief).[8]

This humor is the humor of centuries. It is the humor of freedom, egalitarianism and self-worth that goes back to the witticisms of Guru Nanak through all the Gurus and the writers discussed in this book and still rings in the laughter of

Figure 12 'Raja Karam Singh of Patiala (1813–45 in the Eastern plains of the Punjab)', c. 1840, gouache on paper, 20 × 14.5 cm (23 x 44.5 cm) (Kapany Collection)

Figure 13 'Maharaja of Nabha', late nineteenth century, 19.5 × 13 cm (28 x 21 cm) (Kapany Collection)

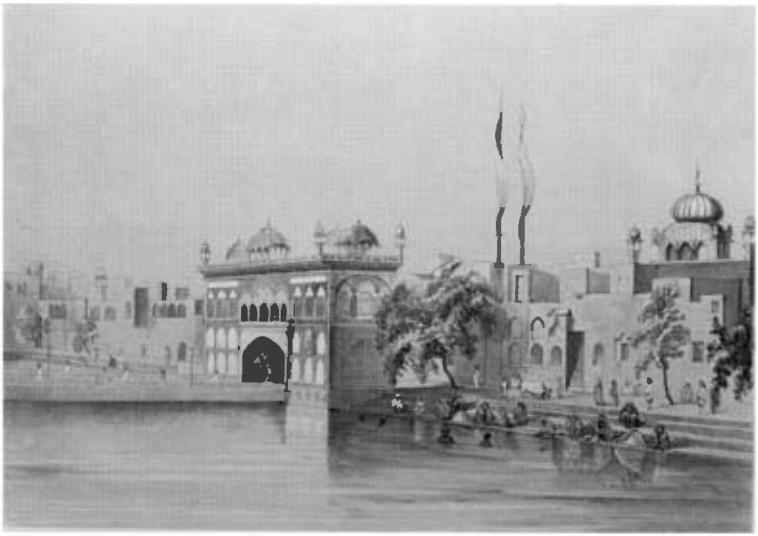

Figure 14 'Entrance to the Holy Temple at Umritsar, from the Gate of the Kutwallee', by a lady, from *Original Sketches of the Punjab,* lithographed, printed and published by Dickinson Brothers, 1854, Plate 7 (Kapany Collection)

Sikhs today. It finds delightful expression in the works of the contemporary writer, Khushwant Singh, discussed by Abdul Jabbar; stories in which dogs prove more able than human beings to compromise with each other, and holy men on their way to interfaith conferences vie with each other for the attention of a buxom blonde (see Chapter Ten).

Although there has not been the space to dwell on them in this book, it should be noted that there were other European artists who also contributed to this genre of Sikh art, such as William Carpenter, Franz Xaver Winterbalter, William Simpson, and more.

And finally, on the literary front, Harbans Lal reminds us in Chapter Six of one of the Europeans who fell so in love with the Sikhs and their faith that he became one of them. Max Arthur Macauliffe who came to India as a civil servant of the British government left his post as a district judge to devote his life to work as one of the Sikh faith's finest scholars, writers and leaders of the Sikh reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Figure 15 'Une Rue De Lahore, Mars 1842', by Alexis Soltykoff, *Voyages dans l'inde*, Paris, 1851 (Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu)

TWENTIETH-CENTURY ARTISTS AND WRITERS

The political and social reforms of the twentieth century and the internationalization of the Sikh community have all brought changes to Sikh art. Gone is the grandeur and patronage of royal courts, but Sikh art continues to flourish and, indeed, to expand in its subject matter, styles and schools of influence. Along with paintings of the Gurus such as that by Sobha Singh in Plate 3, we have Guru Gobind Singh in a 1950s' Dunlop-sponsored poster image that takes its cue from the fantasies of Hollywood (Figure 16).

But perhaps the most significant development is in the artists themselves, not only are we now seeing the distinctive work of named artists but we are seeing women artists – we are seeing *through* the eyes of women. Not surprisingly the subject matter includes women, so neglected in the past, and the dimension of life that they rule – whether in the works of Amrita Shergill in the first half

Figure 16 'Guru Gobind Singh on the Ramparts of his Fort with Cannon', example of a popular Sikh print, Shahganj Factory (Dunlop) 1936-57; I.B. Dunlop trademark (Kapany Collection)

of the century depicting scenes of Indian village life, or of Twin Studio, Amrit and Rabindra Kaur Singh, showing the cohesion of Sikh family life today in the multicultural north of England. As in the literature of writers such as Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid (see Chapter Nine), twentieth-century Sikh art has opened the windows on the Sikh home and community – on the extraordinary richness of ordinary Sikh life. And with this same gesture, we are seeing the universal themes, that gave birth to Sikhism, arise new for the age of the Global Village. 'The Last Supper' by Amrit Kaur Singh of Twin Studio depicts a family Christmas dinner, a non-Sikh festival in a room that is an intricate web of different religious and cultural strands (Plate 10, Figure 17). We see also in this painting an exquisite and highly skilled mix of Western representative and Indian miniature techniques.

Similarly Arpana Caur, in cosmopolitan New Delhi, consciously draws upon India's artistic roots – particularly of the Punjab Hills school – for color, figuration and line. The works of Arpana Caur include topics as vast as Time itself, as

Figure 17 'The Last Supper – Dedicated to Cha Cha Baldave: A Brave and Noble Soul', by Amrit K.D Kaur, 1994/5 (detail of Plate 10), mixed medium on mount card (watercolor, gouache, gold dust), 44.7 × 62.2 cm (Twin Studio Collection)

Figure 18 '1984', Arpana Caur, 1985, oil on canvas, 122 × 183 cm (Arpana Caur Collection)

political and universal in their articulation of human suffering as the American bombing of Hiroshima and the 1984 massacre at the Golden Temple by the Indian Government. In the mix of literal and symbolic imagery of Arpana Caur's 'Where Many Streams Meet' (Plate 11) we see the same interfaith values, so fundamental to the Sikh perspective, as are in the cosy gathering of 'The Last Supper'. Created for the fiftieth anniversary of India's Independence 'Where Many Streams Meet' is an image of the flow of faiths and traditions that constitute the Indian heritage. It was painted for an anniversary celebration that was also a mourning for the communal divisiveness that plagues the nation.

Her painting '1984' (Figure 18), shows this dark side of India. For Sikhs this date has one significance – the year when the community lost thousands in the Indian government massacre at the Golden Temple (Harimandir Sahib) and the rioting that ensued in the wake of Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh body-guards. The severed head in '1984' is an image scored in the heart of every Sikh. It is a reminder of Guru Tegh Bahadur's act of love for humanity when he gave his head, and of his son's call, when he established the Sikh *Khalsa*, for those

whose love was deep enough that they would give him their own head. Five heads Guru Gobind Singh called for and five heads he was offered but did not take. Heads and hearts remained united for the new Sikh community of the Pure, the Khalsa, established by the tenth Guru.

The severed head is painfully Sikh but it is also universal – the suffering and sacrifice of humanity – when we give our head for the truth that our heart feels. And what community has not suffered unbearable loss when the rational and emotional are torn asunder by social pathologies? This is the ground on which Sikhism was laid, an unwillingness to suffer the divisiveness of ignorance and hatred; a willingness to give all for the unity of existence.

Here in the works of Sikh women artists of the very late twentieth century we see images that echo the words of Guru Nanak in the very late fifteenth century, 'Accept all people as equals and let them be your only sect.'

There is a wealth of Sikh art and literature. The essays and images in this book are largely the product of a conference held in 1992 to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Sikh Foundation. We decided to focus upon the artistic and literary heritage which is ours to pass on to our young people who will carry Sikh culture when we are long gone. Under the auspices of the Sikh Foundation, 'Splendors of the Punjab: Sikh Art and Literature' was jointly sponsored by the Center for South Asia Studies at University of California Berkeley and the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. Speakers and exhibits came from the Sikh community in India, the UK and USA, and from leading American and British universities and museums.

That event has borne fruit and continues to bear fruit in ways far beyond what once seemed possible. In 1995, the Sikh Foundation sponsored a contemporary English translation of popular verses from the Guru Granth Sahib that was published by HarperCollins and the International Sacred Literature Trust. In 1999, this present book, *Sikh Art and Literature*, is published by Routledge. In the same year which marks the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh, an international exhibition, 'Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms', will open at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. Generated by the V&A with the support of the Sikh Foundation, the exhibition will tour the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada. Throughout 1999, Sikh artists will hold solo shows and an exhibition of contemporary Sikh art is planned for the new millennium.

Sikh Art and Literature and the other creative endeavors now surfacing are reminders to Sikhs and to the wider world that there is more to Sikh culture

than turbans and swords, more even than agricultural, professional and entrepreneurial success; there are the artistic and literary achievements that are the mark of a healthy, thriving, thinking and evolving community. We overlook these at our peril. They lie behind us but they are also what will take us forward. We are the custodians of the literary and spiritual masterpiece, the Guru Granth Sahib. The teachings and exemplary lives of the ten Gurus from Nanak to Gobind Singh are our beacon. We inherit the martyrdoms of Guru Arjan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and his disciples, and the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Tegh Bahadur set the ultimate secular example in human history by laying down his life and those of his disciples for the freedom of other religions. We are further inspired by our many artistic and intellectual giants – Max Arthur Macauliffe, Bhai Vir Singh, Professor Puran Singh, Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, Khushwant Singh, Professor Harbans Singh and more.

This book is intended to present the beauty and strength of the Sikh heritage without chauvinism. Sikh art and literature belong to the world. It is time now to bring them into the light.

Notes

1 GGS indicates Guru Granth Sahib. All English versions are from *The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Gurus*, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (trans.), HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1996.

2 Secular is used, as elsewhere in this book, in the Indian sense to mean non-sectarian or interfaith.

3 We are grateful to Amrit and Rabindra Kaur Singh, 'Twin Studio', for their scholarly work on the authenticity and style of this painting.

4 W.G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Sing*, Henry Colburn Publisher, London, 1840, p. 92.

5 Ibid., p. 73.

6 Ibid., pp. 81–2, pp. 93–4.

7 Ibid., p. 83.

8 Edward B. Eastwick (ed.) *Indian Scenes and Characters from Drawings Made on the Spot by Prince Soltykoff*, Smith, Elder & Co., 1858.

PART I Art

CHAPTER 1

From Gurus to Kings

Early and court painting

GURSHARAN SINGH SIDHU

The art of the Sikhs has, in its classical expression, evoked the two primary images of Sikhs – that of saints, and that of soldiers (Plate 12, Figure 19). But the splendid imagery of these works is rooted in a set of values which goes beyond mere piety or military prowess and which shines through in the artworks we shall be examining. These values are, quite simply, an all-embracing spirituality that transcends any single faith, race, class or gender, and a soldiery that is rooted in fundamental respect for the nobility of the human spirit and for the Divine Truth that resides in all.

I would like to explore these core values and their expression in Sikh art by focusing on three key personages in Sikh history. The first is Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism whom the Sikhs call Guru Nanak;[1] the second, the social leader, Gobind Singh, known to the Sikhs as Guru Gobind Singh; and finally, the famous Maharaja,[2] Ranjit Singh of the Punjab. A review of their history, their thoughts, their motivations, their achievements and the reasons for their success, provides valuable insight into the Sikh community and the underpinnings of its art.

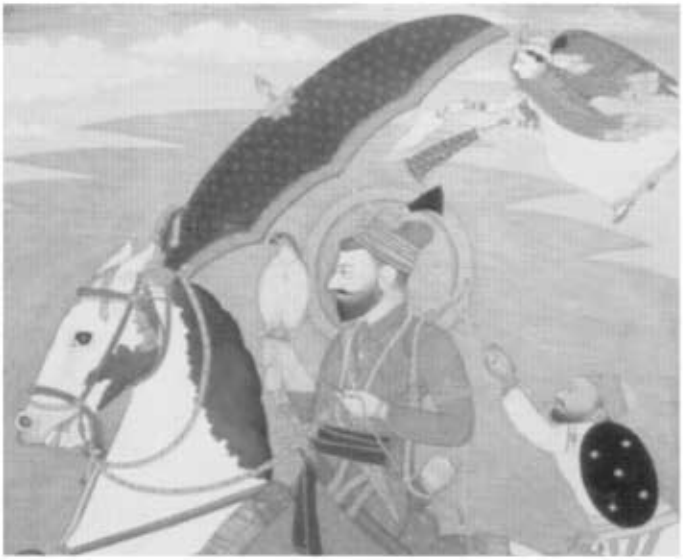

Figure 19 'Guru Gobind Singh on Horseback', artist of Guler-Kangra schools, early nineteenth century (detail of Plate 12), 23.5 × 32.6 cm (Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu)

ORIGINS: GURU NANAK

The origin of the Sikhs was in the Indian province of Punjab, the land of the *punj* (five) *ab* (rivers), located in the north-western reaches of the Indian sub-continent. In Europe, the struggle of the Christians and the Moors in Spain was then approaching its culmination. Christopher Columbus had yet to entice anyone into supporting his daring scheme of sailing across the Atlantic Ocean to Cathay.

The story starts in 1469, in the small town of Talwandi Rae Bhoe with the birth into a Hindu family of a son named Nanak. Before the century was out, Nanak had the revelation that led to the founding of the Sikh faith and his place in the heart of all Sikhs as Guru Nanak Devji, that is, 'Nanak, the Respected Teacher'.

No portraits of Nanak done in his lifetime are known, and there is no certainty about the details of his appearance. Available descriptions seem tainted by mythologizing intentions. In Plate 1 he is shown in a painting done some time in the eighteenth century, perhaps in eastern India, by an artist dispersed from the dying court of the Mughals.[3] This might even be the earliest naturalistic depiction of Nanak to which there is access today. With his long white beard and peaceful demeanor, there is no doubt that this is a revered person, one respected for his piety. His conspicuous cap, that of a Muslim *pir* (saint), and his robes of a Hindu holy man provide a notable reminder of one of his teachings – an indifference

to religious differences. Who and what was Nanak and why is his mind central to all Sikh thought and belief?

Even though visual information about Nanak is lacking, it is not difficult to explore quite effectively his subtle, witty and inspiring mind through an examination of his teachings. Nanak shines through his soaring poetry, his questioning thought and his mastery of word-images. A review of Nanak's beliefs is essential for the non-Sikh reader and can also prove revealing for the ritual-oriented minds of many Sikhs today.

From the early days of Vedic India, and certainly in the lifetime of Nanak, Indians have lived in the unrelenting grip of the caste system. Nanak was struck by the completeness with which ritual and ceremony had imprisoned human minds, and how the idolatry of Hindu practice and the iconoclasm of Islam were generating endless conflict. Nanak emerged onto this scene as a myth buster, one of the great *bhakts* (devotees).[4] In his own words:[5]

> The age is like a knife.
> Kings are butchers.
> Religion hath taken wings and flown.
> In the dark night of falsehood
> I cannot see where the moon of truth is rising.
> ('Majh ki Var', GGS)[6]

> Modesty has disappeared because falsehood reigns supreme.
> The Muslim mullah and the Hindu pandit have resigned their duties,
> the devil reads the marriage vows. . . .
> Praises of murder are sung and
> People smear themselves with blood instead of saffron.
> ('Tilang', GGS)

These words are even more striking in conjunction with the fact that they were uttered in 1499, a scant seven years after Christopher Columbus' rediscovery of the Americas. In the age of the Inquisition and its reign of terror in Europe and in the Americas, here is a man who seeks the rising moon of truth, and who condemns falsehood uttered in the name of religion. Nanak goes on to say, 'There is no Hindu, no Musulman.' Little surprise then that he chose to wear the cap of the Muslim pir and the robes of a Hindu *sant*. Indeed, this painting bears the inscription in the Islamic *nastaliq* script *tasvir-i dervish nanak shahi*, 'picture of the kingly saint Nanak' in which Muslim terms for saint and king, *dervish* and *shah*, are applied to him.

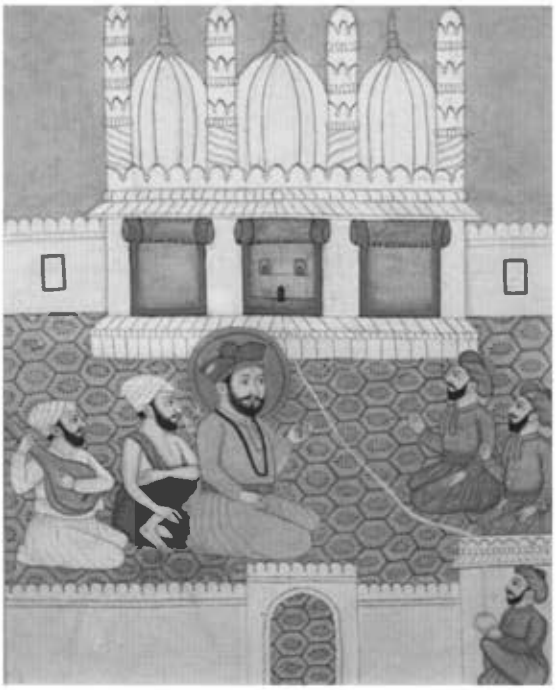

Figure 20 'Guru Nanak's Visit to Mecca', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set, nineteenth century (Kapany Collection)

In this simple garb, he criss-crossed northern India carrying his thoughts on truth and harmony to the ears of all who would listen. He is even reputed to have traveled to the holy places of Islam at Mecca (Figure 20) and Medina in Arabia, and at Baghdad in today's Iraq.

Nanak crystallized his credo of truth in the *mul mantra*, the root incantation and opening verse of the Guru Granth Sahib:

> There is one God
> He is the supreme truth. . . .
> Before time itself there was truth
> Even now, He is the truth
> And evermore shall truth prevail.
> (Japji, GGS)

One of the resonant memories of every Sikh is the daily recitation of the mul mantra and its cadence that goes *Ek Oan Kar, Sat-Naam, Karta Purukh*. . . . (There

is One Being, Truth by Name, Primal Creator. . . .). It serves as a staff of strength for Sikhs in moments of distress, tension or adversity.

Nanak's words are full of wit and humor. I quote now from the *Prabhati* where he says:

> When I am quiet, they say I have no knowledge
> When I speak, I talk too much they say
> When I sit they say an unwelcome guest has come to stay
> When I depart, I have deserted my family and run away . . .
> Nothing can I do that in peace I may spend my time.
> Preserve thy servant's honor now and hereafter, O Lord sublime.

He was not an idle philosopher-dreamer; he wrought lasting change by moving ideas into action. Among his great achievements was the breaking of the caste system. On untouchability and its foolhardy quest for purity, he reasoned impeccably, his empiricism scientific in essence:

> Once we say: This is pure, this unclean,
> See that in all things there is life unseen.
> There are worms in wood and cow dung cakes,
> there is life in the water which makes it green.
> How then be clean when impurity is over the kitchen spread?
>
> Impurity of heart is greed,
> Of tongue, untruth . . .
>
> ('Asa di vaar', GGS)

With the conviction of his words he went on to establish the community kitchen, the *guru ka langar*, in which all, whether Sikh or non-Sikh, regardless of caste, background or gender, prepare, serve and share food. This elegantly practical approach shattered the shackles of untouchability and tore down the entire structure of caste among Sikhs in the days of Nanak.[7] The Sikhs remain a casteless community, although at times we tend to forget it. I feel that it is to our shame when we do, and a signal disrespect to Nanak's genius and founding leadership.

THE FOUNDING OF THE SOCIAL ORDER: GURU GOBIND SINGH

Nanak's vision of truth was carried forward after his lifetime by a succession of nine spiritual leaders, the Sikh Gurus. Their teachings compose the core of Sikh

belief and are embodied in the Adi Granth,[8] the holy book of the Sikhs. The last, and tenth of these, was born with the name of Gobind Rae in 1666. Later renamed Gobind Singh, he brought about radical and lasting change in the community.

In Plate 12 (see also Figure 19), he is shown in one of his finest portraits, painted in the early years of the nineteenth century by an artist trained in the painting traditions of Kangra and Guler, in the lower ranges of the Himalayan mountains. Pictured astride a richly appointed steed, his hunting dogs running obediently alongside, Gobind Singh is invested with the traditional symbols of royalty – the hawk, the umbrella of state and an angel soothing him with a yak's tail whisk. The uninformed would not consider this the picture of a pious and contemplative man; they would see instead a royal personage and a man of action. This is fitting. Although an accomplished poet and scholar, Gobind Singh is best known for moving the Sikhs rapidly along the path from contemplation to community action.

His was an age of mass repression in India. Aurangzeb, the last of the great Mughal emperors, was struggling to hold together a far-flung empire, stripped of capable leaders by the Mughal wars of succession and conquest and riddled with the sycophants who inevitably thrive in such situations. Non-Muslims were being offered the distasteful alternatives of conversion to Islam or heavy taxation, if not death – India's version of the choice of the Jews in Torquemada's Spain. In this repressive climate Gobind Singh declared that it was 'permissible to draw the sword' in defence of right.[9] He called upon the Sikhs to form a brotherhood of saint-soldiers, the *Khalsa* or 'the pure'. And he gave each Khalsa the common family name of *Singh* (lion), hence his own new name, Gobind Singh. Every Khalsa woman took on the common second name, *Kaur*, meaning 'princess' or 'lionness'. Both Singh and Kaur are used by the ruling class Hindus, the Rajputs, as well.

The Khalsa became a guerrilla group wandering in the remote gullies of the northern foothills and taunting the Mughal's might through strike-and-retreat tactics interspersed with an occasional pitched battle. The scope of Gobind Singh's military activities, though a matter of Sikh pride, is in the broader scheme of things not the determining issue. What matters is that he moved the focus from the individual to the community. He took the casteless Sikh faith forged by Nanak's thoughts and gave it a firm backbone to survive harsh times. His many strictures laid the foundation of later Sikh temporal power. If the Sikhs are to be seen as a distinct body politic, it is rooted in the seminal work of Guru Gobind Singh and the stirring efforts of his staunch follower Banda Bahadur.[10]

THE KINGDOM OF THE PUNJAB: RANJIT SINGH

The man most closely associated with Sikh temporal power and whose milieu provided the patronage for most extant Sikh art was Ranjit Singh, Maharaja of the Punjab.[11]

The 1700s are characterized by a rapid decline of central authority; the court of Delhi gradually lost control over a vast empire; trading companies from Europe assumed ambitious colonial designs on the Subcontinent; the great Mughals became dissipated, effete rulers and the empire started to disintegrate. In the Punjab, the inheritor of Gobind Singh's armies, the famous Banda Bahadur, had his short-lived but meteoric day, starting with his first victory over the Mughals in 1709 and ending with his defeat and eventual execution in 1715. Mughal emperors like Mohammed Shah *Rangila,* 'the colorful or tasteful one', frittered away their legacy in the song and dance of courtesans. The definitive blow to their imperium was the great raid of Nadir Shah of Iran who invaded the capital city of Delhi in 1739 and carried away the fabled wealth of the Mughals on trains of camels and elephants stretching for miles. The jewels of the Shahs of Iran seen by us in recent times were taken from India in solid form and have little to do with today's magic liquid (petroleum).[12] Close on the heels of the sacking of Delhi by Nadir Shah came the repeated forays of the Afghan, Ahmad Shah Abdali.

Fortunately a lot is known about these troubled times, especially from travel accounts of numerous Europeans who visited as ambassadors and official emissaries, or as businessmen and traders. The title of one of these accounts, H.G. Keene's *The Great Anarchy*, is a telling reminder of the chaos that reigned in the early eighteenth century. He talks of the countryside being in the grip of bands of highwaymen who exacted protection from caravans on the trade routes of the Khyber and Bolan Passes down through the broad plains of the Indus and the Ganges.

In this period the Sikhs, a motley band of about 100,000 desperados, dispersed into several power blocs known as *misls*, Persian for 'like' or 'equal'. They collectively succeeded in becoming virtual rulers over the Punjab, a region about the size of France. The twelve misls with about 70,000 horsemen loosely divided the region among themselves and exacted protection from the people they undertook to defend. A form of turbulent barony started to hold sway.

Ranjit Singh, literally the 'Lion of Victory', was born in 1780 to the daughter of Gajpat Singh, the Raja of Jind, and the wife of Maha Singh, head of the Sukerchakia misl. Ranjit Singh had an upbringing devoid of book learning but as exciting as any

Figure 21 'Ranjit Singh Equestrienne in Saffron Robes', Punjab, c. 1830 (detail of Plate 13), opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 13 × 19.2 cm (San Diego Museum of Art, Edwin Binney 3rd Collection)

Errol Flynn movie. As a child he lost his left eye to smallpox which deeply marked his face and forever deprived him of any claim to being handsome. He developed an abiding love for horses and horsemanship,[13] won his first military campaign at the age of 10, in fact on the eve of his father's death, and in the safe shadow of a regent, spent the coming years in the pursuit of deer and other game. At the age of 17 he became the effective head of the Sukerchakias.

Ranjit Singh now started on a long but rapid trail of consolidating his power and influence, at first through marriage into two of the most powerful misls, and subsequently by exploiting every opportunity offered by the ups-and-downs of the times. On July 7, 1799 (twenty-three years and three days after America's declaration of independence), 18-year-old Ranjit Singh, became the master of Lahore, the largest city of the Punjab and former capital of the great Mughal emperors, Akbar and Jahangir. However, it was not until Baisakhi day (April 12, 1801) that he felt secure enough to assume, in word and in fact, the title of Maharaja of the Punjab. It is tempting to conjecture that the equestrian painting (Plate 13, Figure 21) represents him on this momentous day or on an anniversary celebration. These events initiated a period of Sikh hegemony over north-western India until the eventual extinction of their court at the hands of the British imperium in the mid-nineteenth century.

Ranjit Singh, was now the proud owner of the superb gardens and palaces of Lahore, built by the most aesthetically refined of the Mughals, the great Jahangir (Figure 22). In these he now engaged in the pleasures of wine, women and song, yet retained his deep devotion to the Sikh faith.

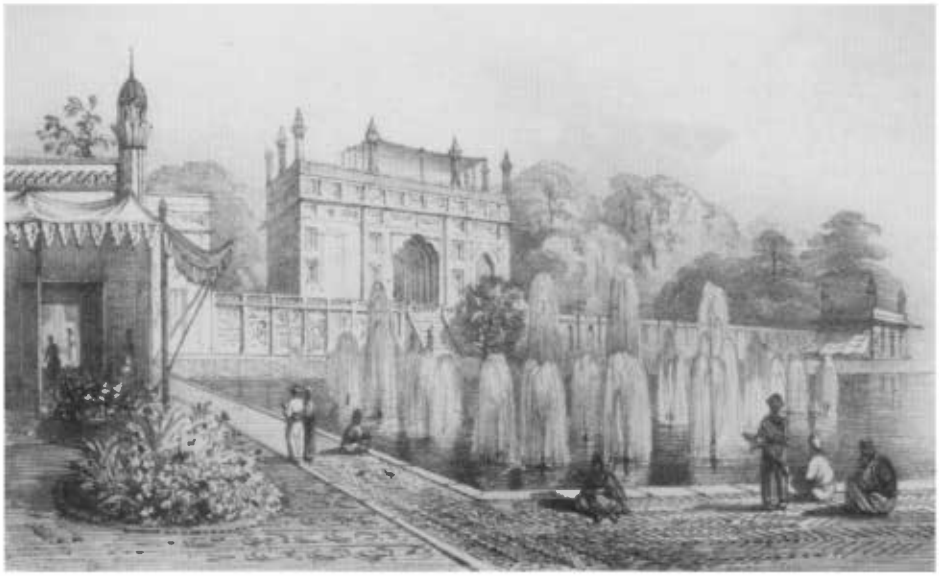

Figure 22 'The Shalimar Gardens, Lahore', by W.G. Osborne from *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Sing*, Henry Colburn Publisher, London 1840, p. 141 (Kapany Collection)

On a sober but splendid gold throne[14] he held court in the sumptuous buildings of the Lahore fort, even in Jahangir's hall of private audience, the Diwan-i Khas with its pierced screens of stone, and in the scintillating interior of the Shish Mahal, the Palace of Mirrors (Figure 23).

But would Ranjit Singh fall into the same habits of dissipation as the later Mughals, or would he manage to hold on to his precarious kingdom? In fact, he lived out his natural life[15] as undisputed ruler of the Punjab all the while maintaining a lavish court which has occasioned a major art exhibition 150 years later.

There are many reasons for Ranjit Singh's success. First was his incredible curiosity complemented by his shrewdness. He not only devoured information about the world around him, but processed it in astute assessment of situations. W.G. Osborne who visited his court in the late 1830s, notes:[16]

> our time was principally occupied in answering Runjeet's innumerable questions, but without the slightest chance of being able to satisfy his insatiable curiosity. It is hardly possible to give an idea of the ceaseless rapidity with which his questions flow, or the infinite variety of subjects they embrace. 'Do you drink wine?' 'How much?' 'Did you taste the wine which

Figure 23 'View of the Shesh Mahal or Palace of Glass', by a lady, from *Original Sketches of the Punjab*, lithographed, printed and published by Dickinson Brothers, 1854, Plate 2 (Kapany Collection)

Figure 24 'Officers of Ranjit Singh's *Ghorcharras* [Cavalry]', Lahore, mid-nineteenth century, 23.7 × 19.2 cm (Collection of Gurmukh and Harriet Sarkaria)

I sent you yesterday?' 'How much did you drink?' 'What artillery have you brought with you?' 'Have they got any shells?' 'How many?' 'Do you like riding on horseback?' 'What country horses do you prefer?' 'Are you in the army?' 'Which do you like the best cavalry or infantry?' 'Does Lord Auckland drink wine?' 'How many glasses?' 'Does he drink in the morning?' 'What is the strength of the Company's army?' 'Are they well disciplined?' & c. . . .

Ranjit Singh knew that strength of arms was essential to keeping the many adventurers of the day away from his kingdom. His army was drawn from every religion and ethnic group in his kingdom; but at its core, and engendering the most respect, were the *Ghorcharras*, the Sikh cavalry with officers dressed in richly embroidered Kashmiri shawls (Figure 24), and lesser horsemen fiercely mobile at a moment's notice (Figure 25).

Among his most loyal, though at times troublesome, troops were the fanatical[17] Sikhs known as the *Akalis* or *Nihangs* (Figure 26). Clad in characteristic blue and yellow and capable of daring deeds, these were his saint-soldiers. Among their arms were *khandas* or double-edged swords and *chakras*, remarkable quoit-shaped and sharp-edged, metal discs such as that shown in Figure 27, an especially fine

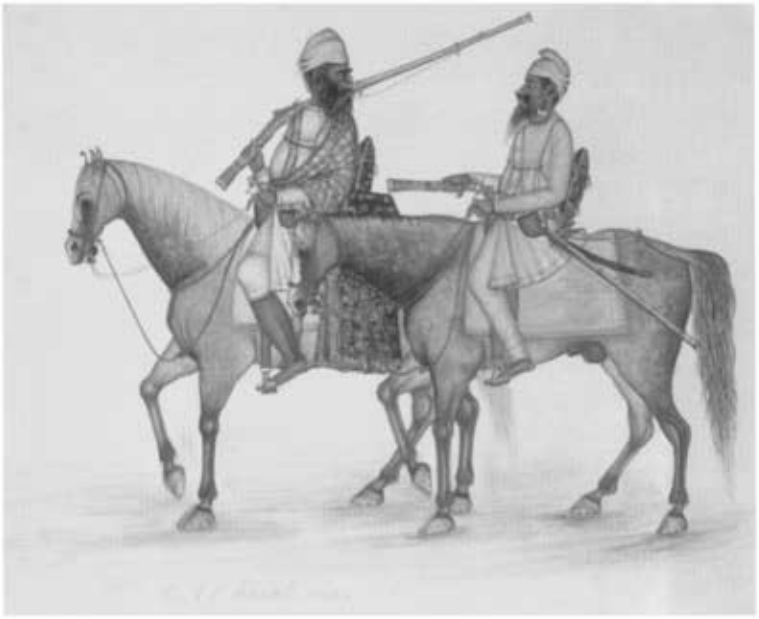

Figure 25 'Members of Ranjit Singh's Ghorcharras', Lahore, mid-nineteenth century, approx. 23.8 × 19.2 cm (Collection of Gurmukh and Harriet Sarkaria)

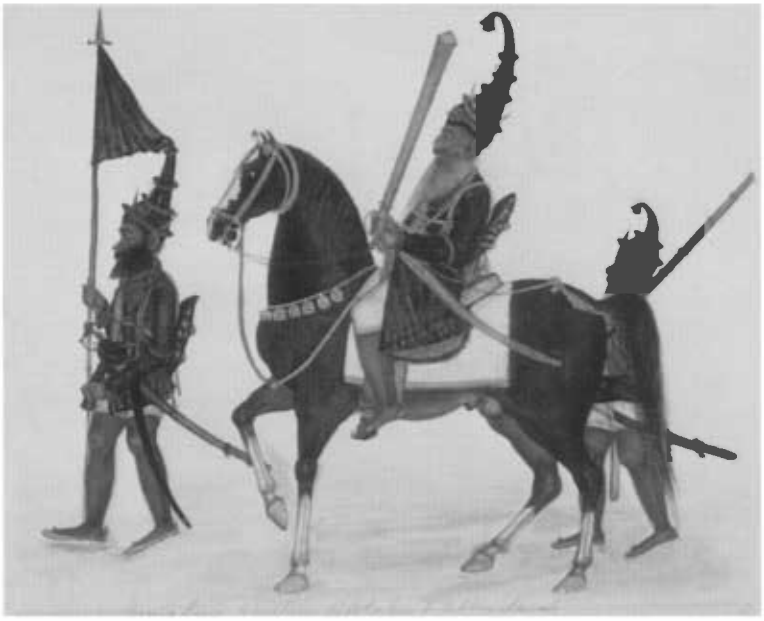

Figure 26 'Akali Leader', Lahore, mid-nineteenth century, opaque watercolors on paper, 23.9 × 19.2 cm (Collection of Gurmukh and Harriet Sarkaria)

example, most probably for ceremonial use. They wore these chakras around their characteristic high-turreted turbans. They could wield them like latter-day Vishnus, whirling their weapons with deadly and terrifying effect. Even more revealing of their *Weltanschauung* is the inscription engraved on this disc, which quite vividly reflects the simple and steadfast minds of these warriors. Written in Gurumukhi script in eight cartouches, it is an exhortation to avoid falsehood and to seize the irretrievable opportunity of staying with the truth, a teaching still very close to Guru Nanak's fifteenth-century beliefs. Rendered freely into English it reads:

> The One God is very benevolent,
> He is the one who nourishes the world.
> Remember! Uttering falsehood is evil.
> From such actions save thyself.
> If you utter a false concoction [sic].
> Then the future will be spoiled.
> These are times for good deeds.
> Once dead this time will be out of your grasp.

Figure 27 Chakra (flat steel quoit), Punjab, perhaps Lahore, nineteenth century, steel with gold or brass *koftgari* engraving, outer diameter 23.6 cm (Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu)

The Nihangs' dedication allowed them to be steadfast to their faith even in trying circumstances and in ill health; witness the emaciated nihangs in the painting of Figure 28.

A further insight into the nature of Ranjit Singh's troops is a group of large silk war banners reputedly purchased by Lord Dalhousie at the sale of the Lahore *toshkhana*, or treasury, of the Maharajas after the fall of the Sikh imperium. These were, according to Dalhousie family tradition, used at the Battle of Gujarat on February 21, 1849, when the Sikh army was finally defeated by the British. An engraving by the Russian Prince Alexis Soltykoff shows these large banners, or others similar to these, being borne into battle by Sikh riders (Figure 29). Upon close examination the banners provide evidence of the complex nature of religious belief and secularism intermingling in Ranjit Singh's army. The device on the banners is, in fact, Durga, the avenging goddess of the Hindus who symbolizes the victory of good over evil, a theme not inimical to later Sikh thought; the other side of the banner shows a solar disc. It is natural to wonder why a Sikh ruler's forces would use banners with clearly Hindu symbols. Many reasonable explanations can be advanced. The army of the Sikhs, no doubt, included soldiers who were Hindus; and Sikhism is founded on a respect for all religions. Also,

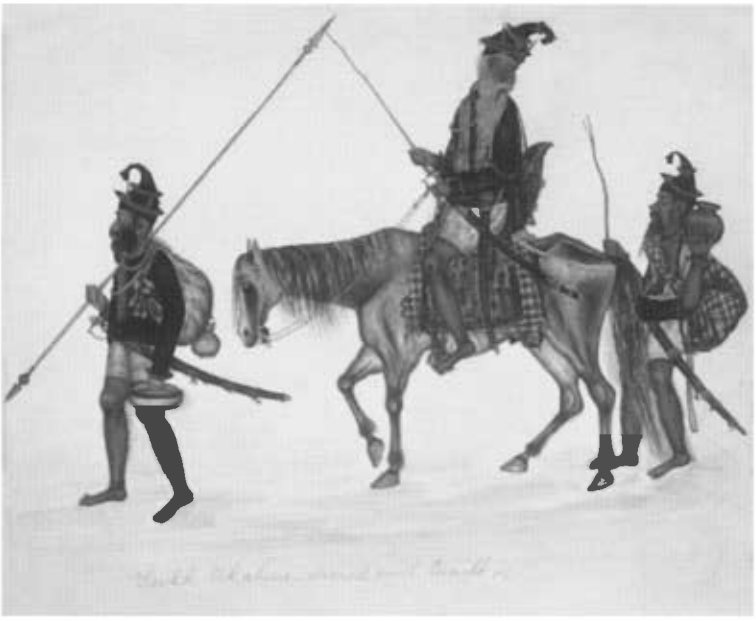

Figure 28 'An Emaciated Band of Akalis', Lahore, mid-nineteenth century, approx. 23.8 × 19.2 cm (Collection of Gurmukh and Harriet Sarkaria)

Figure 29 'Schir Singh [Sher Singh] revenant d'une revue de troupes aux environs d'Umritsar, Mars 1842', by Alexis Soltykoff, *Voyages dans l'Inde*, Paris, 1851 (Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu)

the Dasam Granth of Guru Gobind Singh reputedly includes his invocation of Durga as a symbol of righteous struggle, ergo perhaps a reason for Durga to be invoked as a symbol by the Sikhs themselves. But this complex and sensitive issue will take additional effort to understand and unravel.

A second principal reason for Ranjit Singh's enduring success was his ability to harness the best and most capable from every community and religious background. His was a court where his close confidantes included many Rajput Dogra princes, Muslims and even Europeans.

In a wonderful painting by the Delhi artist Hasan al Din (Plate 14, Figure 30), we see Ranjit Singh with his sons and other courtiers, notable among them the Muslim Fakir brothers, Fakir Azizuddin, Fakir Imamuddin and Fakir Nuruddin. Starting as physician to Ranjit Singh, Azizuddin became his interpreter and close adviser. Nuruddin also served as Ranjit Singh's physician and later as the last governor of Lahore.

A second noteworthy non-Sikh family which provided many key players at the Sikh court was the Dogras, Hindu rajas of Jammu, in particular Dhian Singh and his son Hira Singh, the latter a great favorite of Ranjit. Dhian Singh was not only one of Ranjit Singh's most able ministers but also one of the most unscrupulous. In Plate 15 (see also Figure 31) we see a splendid painting of Ranjit Singh with Hira Singh. Hira Singh was a strikingly handsome, if somewhat effeminate man, who was able to take great liberties with the Maharaja; indeed, he was permitted to sit in the Maharaja's presence while his own father was obliged to stand as we see in Figure 30. The Dogra legacy is a complex one with a number of other figures such as Ranbir Singh of Jammu shown in Plate 16 seated on a throne reminiscent of Ranjit's own.[18]

A further connection with the hill states is found in the painting shown in Plate 17 (see also Figures 32a, b, c). Artists from Mandi, perhaps Sajnu or his descendants, produced superb paintings such as this scene of Sikh princes hunting wild boar. The great strength of line and coloring of these Pahari artists brought a special luster to such Sikh art.

Ranjit Singh had a deep conviction that he must improve his military machine to keep up with the Europeans, namely the British, the French and the Russians. To this end he hired into his service a number of officers who had served in various European armies such as those of Napoleon. These included two Italians, Ventura and Avitabile, the Frenchmen, Allard and Court, and the Scottish-American, Colonel Gardner, all of whom contributed to making his army perhaps the most effective force in India, the only one to rival the British. In one of the finest Sikh paintings dated 1838,[19] General Jean François Allard is shown taking

Figure 30 'Ranjit Singh in Darbar [Durbar]', by Hasan al Din, Punjab, first half of nineteenth century (detail of Plate 14), 29.1 × 54.7 cm (San Diego Museum of Art, Edwin Binney 3rd Collection)

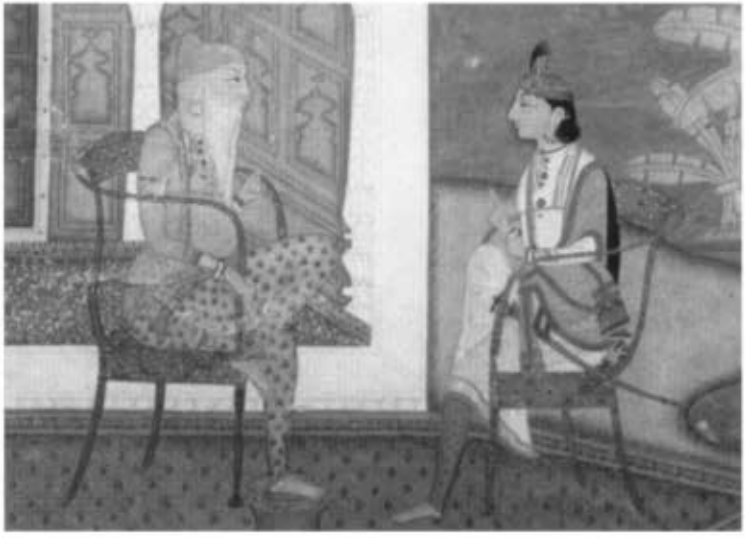

Figure 31 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh with Hira Singh', Lahore, c. 1830 (detail of Plate 15), 23 × 29.6 cm (Kapany Collection)

his leisure with his Kashmiri wife and children. He wears two orders, one of which is clearly the French Legion of Honor bestowed by Napoleon Bonaparte.

Not to be outdone by such European trappings, Ranjit Singh devised his own order, the 'Bright Star of Punjab', which he handed out to various visitors and dignitaries. These consisted of a portrait of Ranjit Singh set in a star-shaped, enameled gold setting encrusted with a variety of precious stones whose value depended on the importance of the recipient. Indeed, the painting of General Allard shows him wearing the Bright Star of the Punjab just above his Legion of Honor. Even though a number of these medals must have been given out by the Maharaja, few have survived. Until recently only four were known, all with somewhat primitive enameled portraits of Ranjit Singh and one with a portrait of his young son, the boy king Dulip Singh.[20]

An entirely new type, shown in Plate 18 with a very refined portrait of Ranjit Singh was awarded to Sir Frederick Currie, Chief Secretary to the government of British India, who showed great sympathy to the descendants of Ranjt Singh. Now where does this picture come from? Suddenly we see a naturalistic portrait, very different from any of the other versions of the Star of the Punjab. The answer is to be found in Emily Eden's celebrated portfolio mentioned earlier. This picture is taken straight from her wonderful portrait of Ranjit Singh seated at his leisure in the Lahore fort.[21] It is quite likely that when this portrait showed up in the Punjab it caused a significant change in the established local approach to portraiture of the Maharaja. This medal seems to reflect this change.

THE LEGACY: AFTER RANJIT SINGH

Ranjit Singh's death in 1839 initiated a rapid decline of the Sikh court. Lahore was racked by intrigue and murder, most notable being the murders of Ranjit Singh's two sons, Kharak Singh (Figure 33) and Sher Singh. These untimely deaths left just the boy king, Dulip Singh, shown in Plate 19 (see also Figure 34) with his mother Rani Jindan riding in a bullock cart. Of supposedly dubious legitimacy, Dulip Singh was a mere figurehead while the kingdom was mismanaged by his regents.

The meddling and intrigue of Dulip Singh's regents and the grasping interests of a British Governor-General brought about war between the Sikhs and the British. The Sikh kingdom came to an end in 1849 with the annexation of the Punjab into British India. Dulip Singh became a ward of Queen Victoria, and his personal effects and the treasury were, quite illegally and in contravention of the terms of surrender, sold off at public auction, ostensibly to pay the costs of

(a)

(b)

(c)

Figure 32 'Raja and Retinue Hunting Wild Boar', Mandi-Guler artist, c. 1830 (details of Plate 17), opaque watercolors on paper, 40.8 × 31.3 cm (Kapany Collection)

the campaign. Dulip Singh was raised in England, a curious favorite of Queen Victoria.[22]

But Sikh art continued to produce fine works, some of which now moved on to the subject of daily life in the community. One of the most striking examples of this is the wonderful painting showing the saint Bhai Vir Singh at his riverside encampment (Plate 20, Figure 35). As we examine the details of this masterpiece, we see an entire world of Sikh and Indian activity – men and women of all types, certainly of different religions, preparing food, making offerings, showing their respect to the holy man at the encampment where he is receiving the poor, the needy, the suffering and the devoted. Others prepare *bhang* and *sukha*[23] in this mêlée of devotion and action so like the *melas*, or fairs, of today's India. And the *langar* (community meal) is being served; you notice people with various physical afflictions, right there among them all, all accepted into the guru ka langar (community kitchen) which I presume this is.

By the time of this painting, the artists of the Sikhs were serving new masters, tourist-minded Britons who wished to take back with them scenes of the curious East. For them, such paintings brought to life exotic memories of days spent in the Punjab. For us, it is a reminder of the daily spirituality and humanity of the Sikh community as it was expressed in its first context, that of the Punjab.

Figure 33 'Raja Kharak Singh', c. 1850, opaque watercolors on paper, 11.4 × 9.3 cm (Gurpal S. Bhuller Collection)

Figure 34 'Dalip Singh and Rani Jindan', c. 1840 (detail of Plate 19), opaque watercolors on paper, 35.5 × 48.5 cm (Suresh S. Bhalla Collection)

Figure 35 'Bhai Vir Singh', Lahore, c. 1850 (detail of Plate 20), pigment on paper, 54.9 × 37 cm (Kapany Collection)

Ranjit Singh's legacy survives most strikingly in the wonderful Harimandir, the Golden Temple of Amritsar, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs (see Chapter 4 and Plate 38). The tranquil mood of this jewel set in the middle of a water tank can only be understood by visiting it. Ranjit Singh lavished wealth and attention on the Golden Temple, as he did on other Sikh shrines such as the gurudwara in Patna. These acts of piety and devotion underline his dedication to his Sikh roots and to its creed, and should be noted in trying to piece together the complex relationships of his thoughts and practices.

Let us close with two images of the preceptors, the Gurus Nanak Dev (Plate 21) and Gobind Singh (Plate 22), as portrayed in the popular somewhat 'calendric' art of our times. As the religion has evolved so have its images, richer in color today, more mystical, yet still harking back to the original spirit of Nanak and Gobind Singh. Although more numerous, these icons have now become less flesh-and-blood, but rather more abstract and mysterious. Yet the magnificence of the great men whose thoughts and deeds started it all comes across undimmed.

There is much more to the arts of the Sikhs than just the arts of their courts. It is hoped that a fuller treatment of Sikh art, including their vibrant and earthy

folk arts, will be forthcoming in the near future. Indeed, it is high time that a major retrospective be presented to bring together the artistic legacy of the Sikh peoples.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my deep gratitude first to my grandfather, the late Atma Singh Sarkaria who in my pre-teen years vividly related to me the ever-present history of the Sikh Gurus – it was he who took me to Anandpur and to the many other sites of Sikh pilgrimage and engendered an awe for the exploits of Guru Gobind Singh; and then to my father, the late Dr Sarwan Singh Sidhu for imvolving me from my teen years in the intensely thought and truth-centered approach of Guru Nanak Dev – for him this was an absorbing obsession in the last four decades of his long life.

Notes

1 *Guru*, literally 'teacher', is used as a title of reverence and respect.

2 *Maha* (great) *raja* (ruler): used in a sense of 'king of kings'.

3 I have proposed as a hypothesis for further study, a possible origin in Patna. The style of the painting seems related to the eastern courts of Lucknow and Bihar. This taken together with the possibility of a patron among the Sikh community in Patna, so closely associated with the ninth guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, makes this a worthwhile direction for further investigation.

4 The *bhakti* (lit. loving devotion) movement which swept India throughout the Middle Ages was one of the notable products of the fusion of Islam and Hinduism. It professed that God was directly available to all through loving devotion, thus denying the power and authority of the Hindu priestly caste, the brahmins, and by implication of the validity of the whole caste system.

5 I have freely used, and without specific attribution, translations of the Sikh scripture from the works of Khushwant Singh and others. The ideas and verses are the domain of all Sikhs; the translations are the work mostly of Khushwant Singh.

6 GGS refers to the Guru Granth Sahib.

7 The reader can find more about the life of Nanak and of paintings illustrating the Janam Sakhi, the story of the life of Nanak, in Chapter 2 by Dr Robert Del Bontà.

8 Also referred to by the reverential title of *Guru Granth Sahib*, this name reflects the Tenth Guru's instructions that after him the Sikhs should accept no other human guru, and that the teachings in the Adi Granth serve as the only *Satguru*, the True Guru. The Adi Granth consists of the thoughts and teachings of the Gurus in a verse form of abiding lyricism.

9 See Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, vol. 1, 1469–1839, p. 78, footnote 5.

10 I recall with emotion my father reciting, in its original Persian, Guru Gobind Singh's stirring verse-form *Zafar Nama* challenge, addressed to the Emperor Aurangzeb. Of particular personal thrill is the stanza where he overcomes the pain of losing his young sons, brutally killed by provincial Mughal governors who interred them alive in masonry, and declares that 'the death of the cubs matters little for the lion [Gobind Singh] still roars'. For me, as a young lad, this added special thrill to being a Sikh, a follower of a guru who challenged the overlord of the entire Indian peninsula, *in verse*!

11 Ranjit Singh's bravery engenders deep respect and admiration among the Sikhs. He is given various titles such as *Sher-e-Punjab*, the Lion of the Punjab, indicative of the high esteem in which his memory is held by Sikhs. The depth of feeling among Sikhs has had social consequences as well – for instance in my memory no one has been allowed to screen a movie on the life of Ranjit Singh.

12 The Sikhs may be the only Indians who recovered some of this treasure.

13 He is most commonly depicted on horseback.

14 A gold-covered, lotus-shaped seat now in the Victoria & Albert Museum is often referred to as being his throne; there are certainly a number of paintings, some in the collection of the San Diego Museum of Art, which show him seated in such a golden lotiform seat.

15 Much abbreviated, some have claimed, by his dissipated lifestyle, quite common among eastern potentates.

16 W.G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Sing*, London, 1840, pp. 79–80.

17 I use the term in its original and positive sense; from the Latin *fanaticus*, meaning 'of a temple', hence enthusiastic, inspired. This should not be confused with the derogatory term *bigot*, implying blind and intolerant devotion to a creed or opinion.

18 We find many insightful portraits of personages at the court of Ranjit Singh in a collection of drawings done by Emily Eden and published in 1844 in a large folio volume titled *Portraits of the Princes & People of India*. Her drawings were done from life when she accompanied her brother, the British Governor-General Lord Auckland, to the Sikh court in 1838, the year before Ranjit Singh's death.

19 See Stuart Cary Welch, *Room for Wonder – Indian Painting during the British Period 1760–1880*, New York, 1978, number 55.

20 See Man Mohan Singh, 'Medals of Maharaja Ranjit Singh,' pp. 125–30 in Mulk Raj Anand (ed.), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh as Patron of the Arts*. Bombay, 1981.

21 See Emily Eden, *op. cit.*

22 He spent much time petitioning the British government to redress the wrong done to him. So handsome in his youth, he died a sad, colorless figure.

23 Preparations involving the use of *cannabis sattiva*, today's marijuana.

CHAPTER 2

An Illustrated Life

Guru Nanak in narrative art

ROBERT J. DEL BONTÀ

In spite of the popularity it clearly enjoyed, the narrative genre in Sikh painting has been largely overlooked. Sikh painting is usually illustrated with portraits; the pioneer book on the subject by W.G. Archer[1] includes many portraits of Sikh and Sikh-related figures with only a couple of narrative works. Nevertheless, numerous battle-scene frescoes commissioned by Sikh maharajas are mentioned by early English visitors to the Punjab, and later fresco paintings of scenes from the life of Guru Nanak (1469–1539) are also known. And there is the art of the *Janam Sakhis,* the manuscripts, many with illustrations, which tell the life story of the first Sikh Guru. It is this barely considered genre of narrative art on which I shall focus my discussion.

Given the number of Janam Sakhis (lit. 'birth stories') which have surfaced without any concerted search, we can assume that scores of manuscripts have survived, handed down from generation to generation in Sikh families. However, very few individual folios and only one complete set, now in the India Office Library in London,[2] have been published. The scholarly study of the texts and their illustrations has been accordingly limited.

Dates of the existing sample of manuscripts range from 1680 CE to the late nineteenth century, although dating is by no means cut and dried.[3] The manuscripts are not all of the same text; there are a variety of versions. Many claim to be the well-known version by Paira Mokha who heard Bhai Bala, a constant

Figure 36 'Guru Nanak Visiting his Sister Bibi Nanaki', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set (Kapany Collection)

companion of Guru Nanak, tell the story to Guru Angad, the second Guru. However, most texts have yet to be identified with any certainty in terms of their authorship or the version which they follow.

For the purpose of this chapter, I shall concentrate on two sets of Janam Sakhi illustrations in the Kapany Collection: an unbound set containing forty-two paintings[4] in a somewhat surprising style (of which more later) probably from the late nineteenth century, and a manuscript from the early nineteenth century, containing twenty-seven paintings in the rather rough style identified with Kashmiri artists.[5] I will first consider the stories as they are illustrated, then the shared religious heritage of the Punjab, and end with a short discussion on the problems of dating and the importance of the various styles in these and other manuscripts.

THE STORIES

The scenes illustrated in the two Kapany manuscripts and in other manuscripts

that I have been able to study vary tremendously and can be viewed as hagiographic rather than literal history. As is true with other important historical and religious figures in India, many myths and anecdotes grew up about Guru Nanak's life. Some scenes seem strictly fanciful, while others appear to have a philosophic or religious message behind their fancifulness. It must be noted that, at this stage of research, the illustrated scenes are not always easy to identify, and sometimes it has simply not been possible to know what they are about.[6] However, with twenty-seven of the forty-two Unbound folios and fourteen of the twenty-seven Kashmiri-style folios identified, we can group the paintings into the major phases of the Guru's life and begin to make some sense of an emerging Sikh character in narrative painting.

The opening images of both Kapany manuscripts reflect a common Indian religious and intellectual principle – a lineage of teachers to establish a sense of history, continuity and authority. In what is probably the first painting of the Unbound Set, the lineage is established through the figure of Guru Angad, Guru Nanak's successor, who is listening with Paira Mokha and a woman, to the Janam Sakhi as Bhai Bala relates it (Plate 23).[7] A number of other manuscripts also include figures of Guru Angad.

In the first painting of the Kashmiri-style Manuscript we find Guru Nanak flanked by his disciple, Mardana, Bhai Bala and his two sons, Sirichand and Lakmichand (Plate 24). The second painting in this manuscript shows Bhai Bala now relating the story of Guru Nanak's life to Guru Angad. In terms of establishing lineage, it is also worth noting that, although the tenth and last Guru, Gobind Singh, lived 200 years later he appears twice in the manuscript, once with his four sons, and again in an impressive painting which was one of four paintings added later when the book was re-bound.

Moving on from the first paintings, it is my impression that there is a natural inclination to lay out the life of Guru Nanak in the four stages of life (*ashramas*) of Indian tradition. Although, Sikhs do not accept this system, especially the last stage, that of the homeless wanderer (*sannyasin*), the pattern is followed in the Janam Sakhis, at least for the first three stages. There are frequent depictions of his life as a student (*brahmacarin*), and other scenes concerning his youth. Next are the scenes of his marriage and consequently his status as a householder (*grihastha*). The bulk of the illustrations then concern his activities after he has received his revelation and begins withdrawing from life as a householder to travel and teach (*vanaprastha*), which within a Hindu context would lead to the stage as a homeless wanderer (*sannyasin*). Although Sikhism stresses the primacy of life as a householder, after Nanak begins teaching, his family is almost totally absent

Figure 37 'Guru Nanak at School with His Teacher, Jai Ram', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set (detail of Plate 25)

from the illustrations with the delightful exception in the Unbound Set of Guru Nanak visiting his beloved older sister Nanaki (Figure 36).

The education of the young Nanak is the starting point of these stories. As with most known Janam Sakhis, the first scenes illustrated in the Kapany manuscripts show him at school. The Unbound Set has him also with his teacher, Jai Ram (Plate 25, Figure 37). Ten of the folios in this set, that is nearly a quarter, concern the early phase of his life before his revelation.

A double, sometimes triple, miracle from the life of Nanak as a young man, that is clearly important given the frequency with which it is depicted, appears in both Kapany manuscripts. He is shown lying under a tree while a snake shields him by spreading its hood over his head. Cows and buffaloes are grazing nearby and there is a man on horseback (Plates 26, 27, Figures 38, 39). The rider is Rai Bulag. At first, he is annoyed because Guru Nanak's buffaloes have eaten his wheat field, but the field magically grows back. The other miracle observed by Rai Bulag is that, even though the sun moves, the shade stays over the sleeping Nanak. This double miracle is common to all of the manuscripts that I have seen, although the artists add elements from their own experience; for instance, a manuscript in New Delhi makes the field into a *charbagh*, a formal Mughal garden divided into four sections.[8] An added magical element in some of the paintings is that Guru Nanak apparently floats in the air.

Figure 38 'Guru Nanak and Rai Bulag', Janam Sakhi, Kashmiri Manuscript (detail of Plate 26)

Figure 39 'Guru Nanak and Rai Bulag', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set (detail of Plate 27)

The next scenes concern the period when Guru Nanak went to Sultanpur to work for a Muslim nobleman in his granary. Again this event is clearly important as it is found in a number of illustrated manuscripts and the Unbound Set devotes two leaves to it. In one of these (Plate 28, Figure 40) we see seated behind him Bhai Bala, who appears with him throughout the set and, like Guru Nanak, was from a Hindu family in the town of Talwandi. Later in the story Guru Nanak meets Mardana, a Muslim musician, who becomes a second companion. In both Unbound pages, and throughout this set, he has a halo, a feature that is unusual in Janam Sakhi depictions of the Guru. It is probably an offshoot of late Mughal painting which often provided emperors and religious figures with halos.[9]

Guru Nanak's wedding, which marks the beginning of the householder phase of his life, is illustrated by four paintings in the Unbound Set. Two of the paintings form a pair, one is of Guru Nanak going to the wedding on a horse (Plate 29, Figure 41) and the other is of his bride travelling in a *dholi* or palanquin (Plate 30, Figure 42). A third painting shows the wedding itself (Figure 43) and the fourth represents some of the associated festivities with charming vignettes of musicians both in the foreground and under the *shamiana* with the bridegroom (Plate 31, Figure 44). In other manuscripts the wedding scene may have different elements, usually relating to the area where it was painted. Guru Nanak's

Figure 40 'Guru Nanak and Bhai Bala at the *Modi Khana* [Granary]', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set (detail of Plate 28)

Figure 41 'Guru Nanak's Wedding Procession', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set (detail of Plate 29)

Figure 42 'Guru Nanak's Marriage – Departure of the *Dholi*', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set (detail of Plate 30)

Figure 43 'Guru Nanak's Wedding Ceremony', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set

Figure 44 'Guru Nanak's Wedding Reception', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set (detail of Plate 31)

role as husband and householder is also underscored by a wedding folio in the Kashmiri manuscript (Plate 32). The wedding is always Hindu because this was Guru Nanak's heritage. In those days, there was of course no distinct Sikh ceremony.

As mentioned above, the Guru's marriage is extremely important to show his life following the established order. It also reflects the Sikh emphasis on family and community life as integral to the spiritual path. It is curious that, with fifty-seven illustrations, the India Office Library Manuscript does not have any paintings concerning the wedding, and only four covering his life before his ministry.[10] Since there are no images of Bhai Bala, it is clear that it illustrates a different text than that which the others illustrate and the focus is obviously very different.

The next important scenes concern his revelation. This scene is hard to identify in the Unbound Set, but is found in the Kashmiri Manuscript in a representation labeled *baba nanak nirankara*, 'Father Nanak and God' (Plate 33). The image is of the first Guru with the Hindu god Vishnu. It would be easy to equate this with numerous other portrayals in these manuscripts of Guru Nanak in the company of various divine and semi-divine beings, as for example with the demon King Dev Lut (Plate 34). However, the label is very specific; it uses the Absolute-God name 'Nirankara'. When this is used in Sikhism it usually refers to the formless God from whom all forms emerge, but here He is given form by a Hindu artist who interprets God in his own way. It may be that two stories from the Janam Sakhi tradition by Sant Das Chhibbar are being combined: the story of Nanak's 'ascent to the realm of the One Formless God' and the story of 'his vision of the Hindu god Vishnu'.[11]

After Guru Nanak began his ministry he traveled about a great deal. Most of the Janam Sakhi texts tell of his trip to the Islamic pilgrimage centers Mecca and Medina. Folios from the Unbound Set (Figure 45) and from the Kashmiri Manuscript (Figure 46) depict a common scene. Nowadays, a story is told of a Muslim holy man's shock at Guru Nanak lying with his feet pointing towards Mecca. He tells the Guru that this is disrespectful as God lives there and Guru Nanak responds by asking, 'In which direction does God not live?' This scene is found in virtually all of the sets I have studied. In these early texts, the story is not told as philosophically. It concerns magic, as is depicted in these two paintings. Guru Nanak is in Mecca and has lain down with his feet pointed towards the Ka'ba. When the mullah protests, Guru Nanak tells him to position his feet away from the God-abiding place. The mullah does so and the Ka'ba moves so that Guru Nanak's feet always point towards it. The outcome is the same; Guru Nanak has taught the omnipresence of God. In the Kashmiri version the mullah

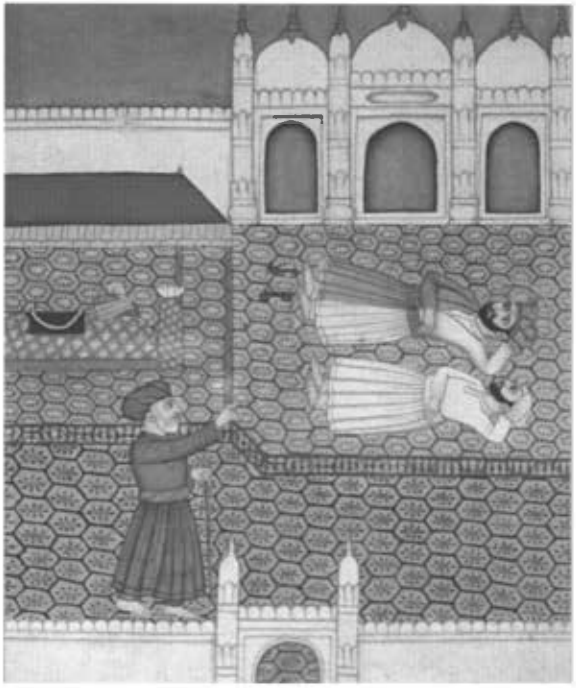

Figure 45 'Guru Nanak and Bhai Bala with their Feet towards Mecca', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set

Figure 46 'Guru Nanak with his Feet towards Mecca', Janam Sakhi, Kashmiri Manuscript f. 166r (Kapany Collection)

actually has grasped Nanak's feet. The strange glowing stone in the shrine must represent the artist's idea of the Ka'ba.[12]

Magical stories abound in these manuscripts and a charming one is found in both the Kapany Collection sets and in many other manuscripts that I have been able to study. It concerns the story of Guru Nanak's companion Mardana being turned into a ram by sorceresses (Figures 47, 48). Although continuous narration is a very common feature of Indian art, the Kashmiri painting actually represents the only case of continuous narration I have been able to identify in these manuscripts. In a single image, we are shown Mardana as ram and Mardana as himself. The popular appeal of this story is confirmed by its reappearance in the calendar art that has become the place for gods, saints and celebrities of Indian culture today.[13]

A SHARED HERITAGE

It must be recalled that the myths of the Hindus are part of the heritage of the Punjabi people be they Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. The snake-hood shown shielding Guru Nanak in both the Kapany manuscripts (see Plates 26, 27, Figures 38, 39) has been a motif for numerous religious figures throughout the history of Indian art, including Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. Many of the paintings of the Unbound Set depict Guru Nanak encountering demons and odd-colored figures. It is likely that local religious traditions are incorporated both to add lustre to the life of the Guru and to place him as either equal or above the borrowed divinity or semi-divine figure.

The way the scenes are depicted may suggest a distinct Sikh flavor to these encounters. If one thinks of Hindu mythological stories, the encounters of figures such as Krishna with demons and ogresses usually involve some sort of threat and its response: the god actively conquers the demon. In these Janam Sakhi illustrations the scenes are typically passive. Guru Nanak takes no action and is always portrayed as superior or equal to the divine or semi-divine figure. He rarely adopts the abject pose found in many paintings of Hindu kings and saints with divine figures. Even in his encounter with God as Nirankara, he seems to be in philosophical discussion with the figure of Vishnu.

Although the Kapany Collection manuscripts both draw on the Sikh and wider Indian heritage, the selections from that heritage differ considerably between the two. The Kashmiri one, presumably painted by an itinerant Hindu artist, includes purely Hindu subjects with no discernible bearing on the life of the Guru. Besides the quasi-Hindu folio which depicts Vishnu/Nirankara with Guru Nanak, there

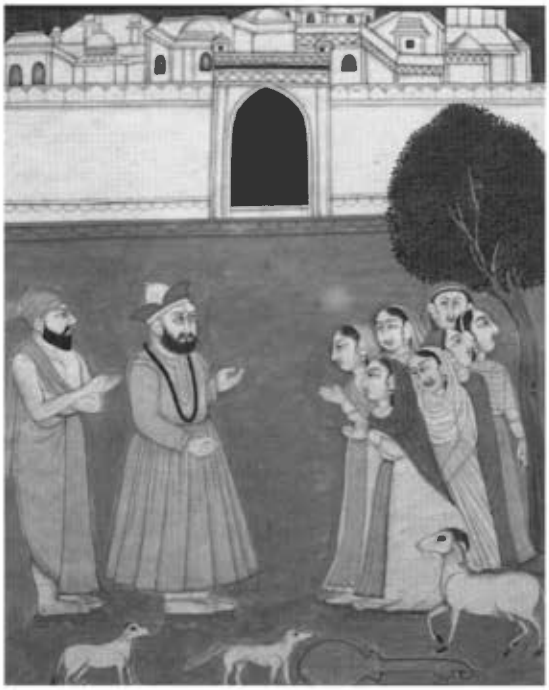

Figure 47 'Guru Nanak and the Sorceresses', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set

Figure 48 'Guru Nanak and the Sorceresses', Janam Sakhi, Kashmiri Manuscript f. 109r

are six folios of Hindu deities without Guru Nanak, and four of Hindu saints (two of these folios were added later). The deities are drawn from across the Hindu traditions – Vaishnavite, Shaivite and Shakti. Although the choice of topics does point to a Hindu artist, the Sikh patron must have had his reasons for including them or perhaps, in line with Sikhism's religious openness, no reasons for objecting to them.[14] The saints appear to be from the *Sant* tradition, which drew inspiration from Sufism and Hindu Bhakti, and is often linked with Guru Nanak in the literature. There is as well a picture of a contemporary called Gorakhnath from the ash-smeared *Naths* (a movement related to tantric Shaivism), who also appears in the Indian Library manuscript, the Kabul manuscript dated 1797,[15] and the Unbound manuscript. These paintings and some in the Unbound Set indicate a desire to link Guru Nanak with other religious reformers and mystics of the day.

Unlike the Kashmiri Set, the Unbound Set has no scenes that are not directly relevant to the life of Guru Nanak, and the mythical characters are outnumbered by meetings with historical personages such as Gorakhnath (Plate 35, Figure 49), the Mughal emperor Babur (1483–1530) (Figure 50) who imprisoned Nanak (the story associated with this is also illustrated) and a saint who might be Kabir (1440–1518) (Figure 51). The depiction of the meeting with this saint is significant because, although the young Nanak's halo is larger, it shows him deferring in namaskara to the older saint, an attitude that occurs nowhere else in the Unbound Set or in the Kashmiri manuscript. Deference to one's elders is of course the norm in Indian society, but Guru Nanak's other meetings with elders are shown as the discourse of equals or with Nanak as the greater authority. In this image of the two saints, we see over their heads two birds flying heavenwards in exactly the same trajectory – the symbolism is clear. It must be recalled that the best of various traditions – the works of Hindu and Islamic saints including Kabir – were selected for inclusion in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The Janam Sakhis are not alone in this phenomenon of shared heritage. The figure of the goddess Durga/Shakti on her lion in the Kashmiri Manuscript (Figure 52) recalls the Durga image on Sikh banners of Ranjit Singh's army mentioned in Chapter One.[16] Many paintings of scenes from the Krishna legend that are preserved in the Lahore fort are from the period when it housed the court of Ranjit Singh. There is also a 'Military Manual' thought to have been painted for the Maharaja in 1830 which includes a painting of the Sanskrit mantra *Om* containing the Hindu gods Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma and their consorts.[17] More tellingly, the Guru Granth Sahib painted in a mixed style and presented by Ranjit Singh to Baba Sahib Singh of Una also contains Hindu elements. This may be

Figure 49 'Guru Nanak's Meeting with Gorakhnath', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set (detail of Plate 35)

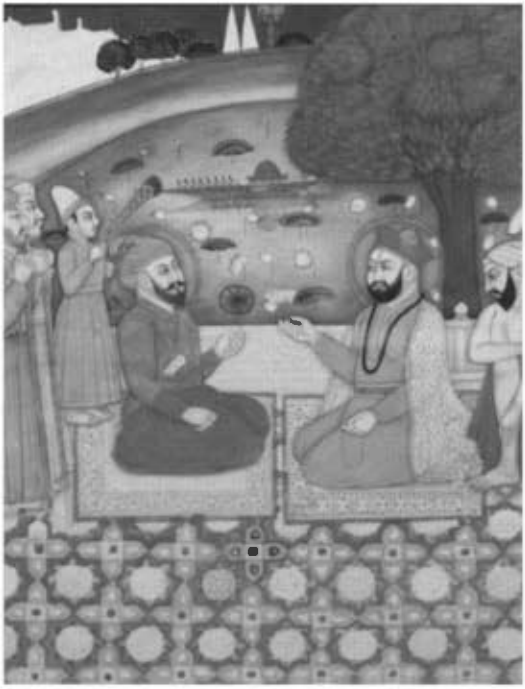

Figure 50 'Guru Nanak's Meeting with Emperor Babur', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set

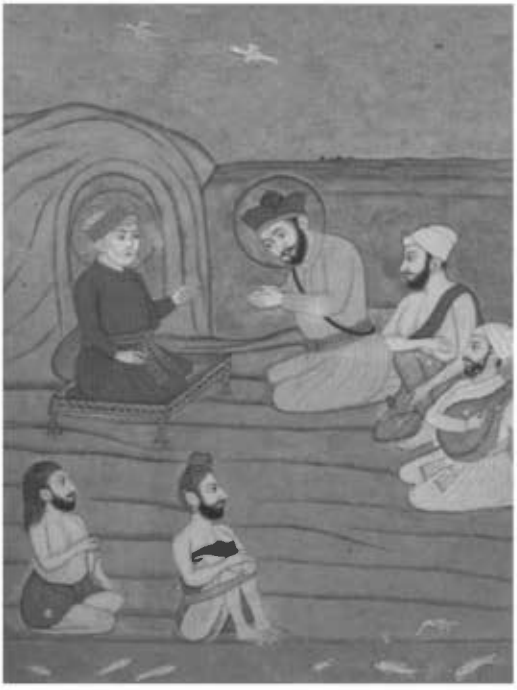

Figure 51 'Guru Nanak's Discourse with a saint on Mt Akhand (The Topless Mountain)', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set

Figure 52 'The Goddess Durga Riding a Tiger, with Worshippers and Attendants', Janam Sakhi, Kashmiri Manuscript f. 129r

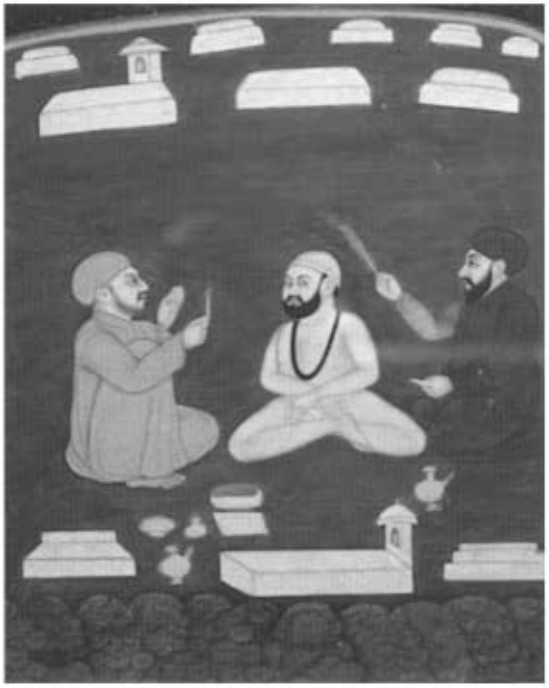

Figure 53 'Guru Nanak in the Graveyard/Ritual Treatment', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set

mirroring the use of many Hindu god names in the Guru Granth to describe the forms of the Formless One.[18]

The rich cultural mix in which Sikhism developed is also apparent in a survey of the hairstyles and headwear depicted in the Janam Sakhis. It is worth remembering that turbans were not adopted as mandatory Sikh wear for men until the time of the tenth Guru. We see the sons of Guru Nanak wearing turbans in the opening painting of the Kashmiri Manuscript (see Plate 23), but this sets them apart from their father who is depicted here wearing the conical hat typical of many religious reformers of the day. Although, the young Nanak appears in both this manuscript and the Unbound Set wearing a turban, it is more common for the Guru, certainly in his adulthood, to be portrayed wearing either the conical hat that we see in the Kashmiri Manuscript and which seems to be an early stylistic element or the tripartite hat that seems to have been distinctive to the Guru and which we see in the Unbound Set. The tripartite hat appears from the twelfth folio onwards and varies a great deal in its detail, becoming ornate on occasion, even with turban jewels, and is replaced by a skull cap in a graveyard scene (Figure 53).

Only the Muslim musician Mardana is consistently depicted in all known manuscripts in a turban. Bhai Bala, wears a turban throughout the Kashmiri Manuscript but in other manuscripts in the Kashmiri style and in woodcuts from Lahore he is shown in a conical hat. In a manuscript now in New Delhi,[19] he is shown in a conical hat, Mardana wears a turban, and Guru Nanak has the tripartite. The Hindu and Islamic saints are similarly portrayed in these manuscripts with a variety of headwear, including conical hats, skullcaps, turbans, matted locks and shaved heads.

As with the mix of deities and demons, the tops of people's heads reveal something of the great range of religious movements and disciplines that colored the age and its art. We are only at the beginning of truly understanding the content of the art of this period. As more manuscripts and paintings come to light we will be able to make a more intelligent assessment of the interchange between the various religious arts and practices up to the late nineteenth century.

STYLE

As can be seen from the paintings in this book, Sikh art varies widely in style. A consideration of the styles of the Janam Sakhi manuscripts may add a great deal to an analysis of what we label as Sikh art. Of the ten manuscripts I have been able to study in some way, four very distinct styles are represented. Four of the ten, including the Kapany Kashmiri Manuscript, have the color scheme, hard line and somewhat unrefined artistry of the Kashmiri style, which is to be expected when one remembers that it is found throughout north India because of the many itinerant Kashmiri painters. Yet Kashmiri paintings are rarely included when Sikh art is considered. Two manuscripts, one in the Prince of Wales Museum and another partially published one,[20] are in a late Punjab Hills idiom which can be loosely labeled Kangra. This is also expected, since the Punjab Hills are very close to Lahore and there are numerous examples of works in Punjab Hills styles known to have been painted for the Sikhs, particularly for the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Two manuscripts – the India Office Library one, and the set associated with Baba Sahib Singh now in New Delhi – are in a charming Rajasthani style. Again this is a style that is under-exposed in the studies of what we call Sikh art. Although these two manuscripts are very similar in artistic detail they illustrate different texts (Bhai Bala is in one and not the other) and scholars have dated them almost a hundred years apart. Similarly the two Kangra-style sets are dated to 1724 and 1793 respectively, yet in 1724 the Kangra style of painting had not developed. The paintings in the 1724 set are tipped in

so these may have been added later. Much work has to be done and many other manuscripts studied to make any sense out of these discrepancies between dates on the manuscripts and painting styles. Were paintings sometimes added later? Do the dates refer to the original compilation of the text of which the manuscript is a copy? These are questions that need to be answered.

The Unbound Set in the Kapany Collection is in a different and very surprising style altogether which, until now, has not been represented in the literature on Sikh art. Details of dress and facial types point to a style found very far east of the Punjab, associated with the Muslim centres of Oudh, such as Lucknow. For instance, Guru Nanak often has a halo, a convention of the late Mughal style. Although the stylistic similarities with nineteenth-century painting from Oudh are apparent, why and how they came about are not. Historical considerations, primarily the loss of Muslim patronage at Avadhi centers (of Oudh) after the annexation by the British in 1856 and the exodus of trained artists from that area, support the hypothesis that the paintings were done toward the end of the nineteenth century by an artist who had migrated from the Lucknow region.

But what is most curious about all these painting is the fact that many compositions and details are common to the works regardless of their divergence of style. The closest parallels and in some cases, virtually identical figures, are sometimes found in two paintings in very different styles. For instance, the figure of the mullah in the Mecca scenes appears in near replica in such diverse manuscripts as the Unbound Set, the India Office Library set, the Kangra set illustrated in *Roop Lekha* and the similar one in the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay. We must speculate that these manuscripts are far from the oldest paintings of the life of Guru Nanak; that there were some early models, perhaps even a seminal manuscript, which was seen and copied by artists of various backgrounds who transformed the style to conform with their own artistic idioms. Until more examples turn up and can be studied we can only speculate on the nature and style of this seminal source.

I hope that this short survey of paintings in these few Janam Sakhi manuscripts will encourage members of the Sikh community to open up their family books and study them. These texts represent the past, not just in the use of older artistic traditions, but also a formative period of Sikh history. They speak of an age, when the Indian identity was of a shared heritage from which the Gurus drew when compiling the Guru Granth Sahib itself.

Notes

1 W.G. Archer, *Painting of the Sikhs*, London, Victoria & Albert Museum, 1956.

2 Surgit Hans (ed.) *B-40 Janam Sakhi Guru Baba Nanak Paintings*, Amritsar, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1987. All 57 miniatures from this manuscript are published in color. Although the style is not discussed, it is clearly derived from a Rajasthani school.

W.H. McLeod, *Early Sikh tradition: A Study of the Janam-sakhis*, Oxford, 1980 provides a study of the various versions; and W.H. McLeod (trans.) *The B40 Janam-sakhi*, Amritsar, Guru Nanak Dev University, 1980, provides a translation of the B40 manuscript.

3 *Roopa Lekha*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1, includes a number of articles concerning Sikh art. Some Janam Sakhi texts are considered by various scholars in a few articles:

- M.S. Randhawa, 'Sikh Painting', pp. 21–32, Figs 7–10 for the New Delhi manuscript which relates stylistically to the India Office Library book. He associates it with Baba Sahib Singh, a spiritual preceptor of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- M.S. Randhawa, 'Paintings of the Sikh Gurus', pp. 13–20 includes a few folios, Figs 2 and 3, from an early Janam Sakhi which he dates to c. 1680 CE done in a combined Kashmiri and Punjabi Hills idiom.
- S.S. Dosanj and Rao Uttam Singh, 'A Dated Janam Sakhi of Guru Nanak', pp. 7–12, Figs. 1–10 (one figure is missing) concerns a manuscript of 1793 CE. It is painted in a Kangra style, but, aside from style, there is much in common between this manuscript and the Unbound Set.
- Other Janam Sakhi folios are illustrated in R.P. Srivastava, Punjab Painting: Study in Art and Culture, New Delhi, 1983, Figs 6, 13 and 17 and Figs 73–5 and Color Plate XI. He places the first group to 1777 CE and the second group to 1869 CE.

I have also been able to study two other manuscripts, one which was a Janam Sakhi in the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay, Acquisition No. 73.7, which is in a similar Kangra style as that considered by Dosanj and Uttam Singh. The text bears a collophon corresponding to 1724 CE. The second manuscript was with the dealer Sam Fogg in London in March 1998. It was written in Kabul and illustrated with 106 illustrations by a Kashmiri artist. It is dated to 1797 CE.

4 The recent history of the Unbound manuscript is that the paintings are now framed but were previously inserted loose-leaf into the text. It seems certain that the paintings were made specifically for the text because they are of the same squat dimensions. Strips of paper glued along the margins of those that were taken out of their frames for the 1992 exhibition indicate they were once bound. The Kabul ms. and the Prince of Wales Museum ms. have similar squat proportions.

5 All illustrations in this chapter are from the two Janam Sakhi manuscripts in the Kapany Collection given the working titles of 'Unbound Set' and 'Kashmiri Manuscript'. They were photographed by Robert J. Del Bontà.

6 Work on the accompanying texts has yet to be done and, in the case of the Unbound Set, they are currently framed so the text on the backs of only a few have been examined. In spite of this, twenty-seven of the Unbound folios can be identified with some certainty from a comparison with the India Office Library example, the Prince of Wales Museum ms., the Kabul ms., a number of other stray folios and other paintings which have been published. Eleven of the India Office Library folios, and as many as twenty-four of the Prince of Wales Museum, and nine of the ten planned illustrations of a Kangra manuscript mentioned in note 3 match with the Kapany Unbound Set. I was unable to take photos of the Kabul ms. and don't fully realize how many of the illustrations match, but the cremation of Mardana was quickly correlated and others probably also match.

7 The composition is almost identical in the Kangra Set Plate 1 that is discussed in S.S. Dosanj and Rao Uttam Singh, *op. cit.* Due to other similarities of both style and composition one would expect this theme and composition to also be the first in the Prince of Wales Museum manuscript, but the first folio there is actually a Hindola Raga depicting Krishna and *gopis* with attendants. This highlights the importance of classical Indian music in the Sikh tradition, see Chapter 5 and Appendix III of this book.

8 Fig. 10, M.S. Randhawa, 'Sikh Painting', *op. cit.* (see note 3).

9 In the Kabul ms. Guru Nanak has a halo in three of the folios relating to his enlightenment.

10 The Kabul ms. has 106 folios and folios 6–25 are of events before his ministry. The wedding has three folios devoted to it, plus there is one of the birth of Sirichand.

11 These two stories are found in the Sant Das Chhibbar Janam Sakhi tradition. In the Kabul ms. Nanak is in *namaskara* with Vishnu and I have found a similar scene with a *devi* published from Patiala.

12 A curious thing in the Prince of Wales Museum manuscript is the fact that the inscription clearly places this event in Medina, not Mecca.

13 W.H. McLeod, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, 1991, Fig. 18, pp. 128–9.

14 The Kabul ms. is also by a Kashmiri artist, but is quite different. There is only one Hindu page, the first one, and lots of details from the stories. Babur appears in two different sections. It combines various beginnings by having the Hindu salutary page, then the ten Gurus, then a series of three folios of Guru Angad having the story told to him.

15 See notes 3, 4, 6, 9, 10 and 14.

16 For an illustrated example see: Khushwant Singh, Nina Poovaya-Smith and Kaveri Ponnapa, *Warm and Rich and Fearless: A Brief Survey of Sikh Culture*, catalogue for an exhibition of Sikh art, Bradford Art Galleries and Museum (UK), 1991, No. 95.

17 R.P. Srivastava, *op. cit.*, Fig. 82.

18 Fig. 14, M.S. Randhawa, 'Sikh Painting', *op. cit.* (see note 3). An example of the use of Hindu gods in the Guru Granth is Guru Nanak's 'Japji', verse 5 where in

describing the manifestation of the Divine, he says, 'The Guru is Shiva, the Guru is Vishnu, the Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Parvati, Laxmi and Sarasvati.'

19 Fig. 7, M.S. Randhawa, 'Sikh Painting,' *op. cit.* (see note 3).

20 S.S. Dosanj and Rao Uttam Singh, *op. cit.* (see note 3).

CHAPTER 3

The Sikh Treasury

The Sikh kingdom and the British Raj

SUSAN STRONGE

Arguably the most famous diamond in the world is the Koh-i nur, known today in the form in which it adorns a crown made in 1937 for Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, and displayed as part of the British Crown Jewels. The stone came to Britain after the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, and was singled out in the terms of the Treaty of Lahore: 'The gem which was taken from Shah Shuja' al Mulk by Maharaja Ranjit Singh shall be surrendered by the Maharaja of Lahore to the Queen of England.'[1]

Probably the second most famous object connected with Maharaja Ranjit Singh is the Golden Throne (Figure 54), now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was taken from Lahore in 1850, and by 1853 had been given pride of place in the museum of the East India Company in London.

These two spectacular items came from the treasury of a court which had ruled the Punjab for only half a century. Ranjit Singh took Lahore in 1799 and was proclaimed Maharaja of the Punjab in 1801. By 1849 when his British conquerors took over the kingdom, the amassed riches included one of the largest diamonds then known to the world, and the throne covered in shimmering gold. The Sikh treasury contained other remarkable jewels and jewelry, richly adorned weapons and superb textiles, and objects of great religious significance to the Sikhs themselves, as well as others of special importance to Muslims.

Figure 54 The Throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, wood and resin core covered with sheets of gold, height 94 cm (Victoria & Albert Museum: 2518 (IS))

Figure 55 'Sikh Chieftains', by Prince Alexis Soltykoff, *Indian Scenes and Characters*, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1858 (Kapany Collection)

The sheer splendor surrounding the Maharaja of the Punjab can be appreciated from the accounts of travelers and British officials to whom all this was a sight of the utmost exoticism. Through their accounts, a whole scene suddenly comes to life, sparkling before the eyes, full of tall, impressive Sikh warriors dressed in yellow silk and glittering with jewels, riding horses decorated with enormous rubies, emeralds and pearls (Figure 55).

These contemporary European records and accounts reveal the contents of the treasury, sometimes in considerable detail, making it possible to discover the current whereabouts of particularly striking items. Other information concerning the general nature of the Maharaja's possessions may be gleaned from the account of daily public life at the court, written in Persian by the court newswriter and partly translated into English.[2]

DAZZLING THE BRITISH

Like any ruler, Ranjit Singh would frequently present a *khil'at*, a set of garments which sometimes included jewelry, as a mark of honor to individuals being given promotions or new appointments, or to visitors to the court. The value of the khil'at was carefully considered so that it would exactly correspond to the importance of the recipient. He may have been given seven, nine, eleven or more garments, gold bangles, occasionally a jeweled turban aigrette, and so on, according to rank. Unfortunately, the court news report gives few descriptive details to indicate what these items actually looked like, but shows the care with which the Maharaja examined any particular selection and the instructions he gave for improvement.

Thus, when the 'glorious sahibs' (as the translated report describes the English) came, Ranjit Singh had pieces taken out from the depths of the storerooms for his scrutiny and gave orders for additional items to be made if these did not match up to his expectations. The treasury, therefore, had both a ready supply of gifts of the necessary magnificence as well as craftsmen attached to it who could be called upon to make new items. This would not be surprising, but throughout the pages of this account there is a sense of the Maharaja reflecting on the effect that the jewelry and weapons of his warriors would have on his important visitors. Ranjit Singh was acutely aware that the British were the major threat to the long-term security of the Punjab and seems to have been particularly keen for his men to make the finest impression possible.

In August 1838, before the arrival of the Governor-General, Lord Auckland,

Figure 56 'Purtab (Pratap) Singh', by Emily Eden, from *Portraits of the Princes & People of India*, drawn on the stone by L. Dickinson from painting on paper, and published by J. Dickinson & Son, London, 1844, print no. 19 (Kapany Collection)

in November, the Maharaja announced that:

> a huge sum of money would be spent at the time of the visit in getting ready the necessary things for the *topkhana* [arsenal] and the platoons, in getting ready the clothes and uniforms for the regular troops, in getting ready valuable robes of honor and articles of jewelry for the glorious chieftains. Orders were given that the clothes of the *sardars* should be of *kinkhob* [gold brocaded silk] and that anyone wearing plain white would not be allowed to be present, and that they should wear jewels and have their horses with special harnesses and saddles.[3]

Before the review of the durbar's troops held in Auckland's presence, Ranjit Singh called the *sardars* (leaders) to him to inspect their jewels and dress. As a result, individuals such as Suchet Singh appeared to the British officer William Osborne and his companions as 'the very *beau idéal* of a Sikh chief' in his helmet with 'three plumes of black heron's feathers waving on his crest, and three shawls of lilac, white and scarlet, twisted very round and tight, interlaced with one another

Figure 57 'Runjeet Singh, the founder of the Punjaub Empire', from a drawing by an Indian artist, engraved by Stodart, c. 1840s, colored aquatint or mezzotint, Virtue & Co. Ltd, London, 16.3 × 25.3 cm [E73] (Robert J. Del Bontà Collection)

and gathered around the edge of the helmet, a chelenk of rubies and diamonds on his forehead'; his armor 'richly embossed with gold and precious stones, worn over a rich, thick-quilted jacket of bright yellow silk, with magnificent armlets of rubies and diamonds on each arm'.[4]

Emily Eden accompanied her brother Lord Auckland on this official visit to the Lahore durbar in 1838–39 and left an equally vivid description of the dazzling scenes she witnessed. Her admiration for one of the most flamboyant figures, Sher Singh, led her to ask to draw him (Plate 36) – the sketch was included in the printed volume of her work, *Portraits of the Princes of India* – and she had further opportunities to study him on his visits to their tents as a guest for dinner. On one occasion he had a companion: 'He brought his little boy, Pertab Singh, seven years old, with eyes as big as saucers and emeralds bigger than his eyes'[5] (Figure 56).

On December 31, 1838, Ranjit Singh sent his treasures for Emily Eden to see, all of which she measured exactly and sketched. These included the enormous emeralds she had seen the previous week when the Maharaja's private horses were paraded before the English visitors:

> The first had on its emerald trappings, necklaces arranged on its neck and between its ears, and in front of the saddle two enormous emeralds, nearly 2 inches square, carved all over, and set in gold frames, like little looking-glasses. The crupper was all emeralds, and there were stud-ropes of gold put on something like a martingale. Heera Singh said the whole was valued at 37 lakhs [3,700,000 rupees], but all these valuations are fanciful as nobody knows the worth of these enormous stones; they are never bought or sold. . . . It reduces European magnificence to a very low pitch.[6]

At the center of all this magnificence was the small, unadorned and plainly dressed, extremely ugly but totally compelling figure of Ranjit Singh (Figure 57). Disfigured by the smallpox which left him blind in one eye and, by 1838, disabled by a stroke which had impaired his speech, he was physically unprepossessing. Yet, almost without exception, his European visitors were greatly drawn to him as an individual and strongly impressed by his character. Henry Fane, visiting the Lahore durbar with his uncle Sir Henry Fane, in 1837, gave a typical description: 'His dress was almost always the same (green cashmere) and, with the exception of the rows of great pearls I before mentioned, and on state occasions the Koh-e-Noor, his great diamond, he very seldom wore jewels.'[7]

To Ranjit Singh's own commissions and purchases were added the presentations of foreign deputations. Emily Eden described how she persuaded her brother to buy an ornament from a Lucknow merchant: an arrangement of twenty-seven large emeralds and pearls mounted on to a green-enameled gold stalk to imitate a bunch of grapes, which she likened to the fruit in Aladdin's garden.[8] It was to be given to the Maharaja, presumably as a turban ornament or to adorn the harness of one of his prized horses. She also painted a miniature portrait of the newly crowned Queen Victoria which was set in a frame of European design made by Indian jewelers in Calcutta: 'It is solid gold, very well worked, with a sort of shell at each corner, encrusted with precious stones, and one very fine diamond in each shell.'[9] The materials had cost £500, and the portrait was to be one of the most splendid of the presents. Henry Fane, who made his second visit to Lahore with the Auckland entourage, commented that Ranjit Singh received this politely, though with a slightly puzzled air, and 'seemed to think her Majesty made a very decent Nautch [dancing] girl'.[10]

FALLING TO THE BRITISH

In 1839 Ranjit Singh died and the Punjab tumbled into chaos. Ten years later, it was annexed by the British, and Sikh possessions were taken over wholesale. The Maharaja, the 10-year-old Dulip Singh was deposed and put into the benevolent care of a Scottish doctor, John Login (Figure 58).

Login's other duty was to take charge of the treasury. Years later, after the doctor's ennoblement and subsequent death, his wife, Lady Lena Login, published some of her husband's letters. In one of these, dated April 10, 1849, he described his Lahore duties: 'I have to make out a list in English for the Governor-General of all the jewels and valuables belonging to the Sikh Government, and now transferred to ours; among them is the Koh-i-noor. . . .'[11]

While the young Dulip Singh (Plate 37) was busy preparing a book in Persian on his passion, hawking, with drawings and paintings of different species of hawks by his own artists, Login was going through the storerooms of the Sikh kingdom. Sergeants of Artillery listed the arms while other officers took account of items belonging to the camp establishment. Login took charge of the 'jewel department' and with the help of Misr Makraj, the treasurer to the Maharaja, he painstakingly listed each item. The government intended to sell some of the collection but had allowed Login to make a selection for the young Maharaja. On May 22, Login wrote to his wife:

> I have taken care to select some of the best tents for his use, before any are made over for sale . . . now when you are told that the tents for the little man himself are all lined, some with rich Cashmere shawls, and some with satin and velvet embroidered with gold, *semianas,* carpets, *purdahs* and floor cloths to match, and that the tent-poles are encased with gold and silver . . . you may fancy that we shall look rather smart! I should say, that for camp-equipage, old Runjeet's camp was the very finest and most sumptuous among all the Princes of India.[12]

On the Maharaja's tenth birthday Login gave him 'a lakh (100,000) of rupees' worth of his own jewels from the Toshkhana [treasury] which I had been empowered by the Government to select and present to him'.[13]

By July 1849, Login had sent in the inventory of jewels whose value he estimated at about 16.5 lakhs (1.65 million) of rupees, adding that he expected jewels to the value of 50,000 rupees were yet to be found in the depths of the storerooms. He noted that 'extra establishments of the palace' had already been discharged, as well as surplus animals to the value of 40,000 rupees.[14] His

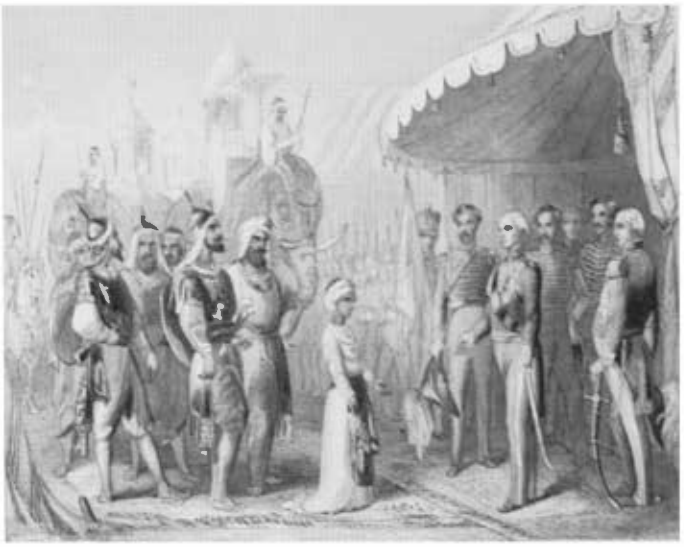

Figure 58 'Submission of the Maharajah Dhuleep Singh, to Sir Henry Hardinge, at Kanha Cushwa, Feby 19, 1846', drawn by Hablot K. Browne, line engraved by H.K. Browne and R. Young, late 1840s, J. and F. Tallis, London, 28 × 18.9 cm [E121] (Robert J. Del Bontà Collection)

instructions from the Governor-General Lord Dalhousie were that nothing on this July list should be disposed of until Dalhousie had inspected it all.[15]

Although the jewelry inventory was almost complete, other items that Login still had to list consisted of 'gold and silver-cased chairs, howdahs, beds, tent poles, cashmere shawls, carpets', elephant and horse trappings, arms and various miscellaneous articles. He recommended that these last items, valued at an estimated 7 lakhs (700,000) rupees, should be released for public sale 'to commence as early in September as possible'.

In November, Login was still trying to complete his work and wrote to his wife of the immensity of the task:

> I wish you could walk through that same Toshkhana and *see its wonders*! The vast quantities of gold and silver, the jewels not to be valued, so many and so rich! The Koh-i-Noor, far beyond what I had imagined and perhaps above all, the immense collection of magnificent Cashmere shawls, rooms full of them, laid out on shelves, and heaped up in bales – it is not to be described![16]

Figure 59 'HRH the Maharajah Dhuleep Singh', artist unknown, c. 1860, colored engraving, 18.5 × 27.3 cm [E72] (Robert J. Del Bontà Collection)

By December, on the basis of Login's lists, Dalhousie had identified the items to be given to Queen Victoria, and the remainder was sold in a series of public auctions in Lahore. Two of the auction catalogs were discovered much later by Dulip Singh (Figure 59) who had them privately reprinted in 1885 when he was living in England and campaigning for compensation for the loss of his family possessions.[17] In his introduction, the Maharaja notes the difficulty he experienced discovering anything at all about these sales. He also observes that the earlier of the two sales catalogs, dated December 1850, is headed 'Catalogue of the Seventh Public Sale', indicating that there must already have been six sales. No catalog for these has come to light and the eighth sale, which ran for nine days in February 1851, seems to have been the last. Dulip Singh presumed that all the sales must have been of equal size and with items of similar value. However, judging from the copies of Login's accounts in the India Office Library in London, it seems that all the important sections of the treasury were in these last two auctions.

THE ARMS OF GURU GOBIND SINGH

The India Office Library papers also include Dalhousie's deliberations on the care of sacred relics in the Sikh treasury. Muslim relics seem to have been given to local Islamic foundations, but Dalhousie kept items associated with Guru Gobind Singh. In the December 1849 outline of items selected for Queen Victoria, he had noted:

> a set of arms, including spears, swords, etc., which Sikh tradition asserts to have belonged to the Guru Gobind. It would not be politic to permit any Sikh institution to obtain possession, either by way of gift (for the intrinsic value of them is insignificant) or by measure of sale, of those sacred and warlike symbols of a warlike faith. If the Court should desire to have these arms for the collection they shall be transmitted, but if the Court are not solicitous regarding them I should feel gratified by receiving permission to purchase them from the Toshakhana for myself. They have naturally much interest in my eyes; and would form a memorial which would hereafter be highly prized as well by myself as by those who follow me.[18]

This collection remained with Dalhousie's heirs at Colstoun in Scotland until 1965 when Lady Edith Broun Lindsay gave it back to the Indian government.[19]

HISTORY OF THE KOH-I NUR

The most financially valuable treasure was, of course, the Koh-i nur which, when it left Lahore, weighed 186 carats. The diamond is traditionally thought to have been part of the Delhi treasury when Babur seized it in 1526 and founded the Mughal Empire. It was said to have then been passed on to his son, Humayun, and to have left India when Humayun lost the throne and was forced to flee to Iran. He is thought to have given the stone to Shah Tahmasp in return for help to regain his empire, and then, somehow, the diamond returned to India, to the Deccan. There is no evidence to support this early history, however. Whatever its early movements, it is very likely that the diamond came into the possession of Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58), eventually leaving Mughal hands forever in 1739 when the Iranian ruler, Nadir Shah, looted the imperial treasury in Delhi. On Nadir Shah's death, the diamond and many other Mughal treasures were inherited by his general, Ahmad Shah Abdali, who ended his career as ruler of Afghanistan. Ahmad Shah's successor, Shah Shuja', was forced to relinquish the Koh-i nur to Ranjit Singh on June 1, 1813.[20] Various other imperial Mughal possessions also came to the Lahore treasury from Shah Shuja'.

According to Dulip Singh's treasurer, the Koh-i nur and two other large diamonds were set into an enameled gold armlet in about 1818.[21] Ranjit Singh wore it on state occasions and liked to show this and other prize possessions to his foreign visitors. For example, when Baron Hugel visited Ranjit Singh in 1836, four shields were brought out, laden with jewels. He said that his attention was drawn 'above all' by the Koh-i nur:

> It is of the shape and size of a hen's egg, exquisitely white, and brilliant beyond description. It is set in an armlet, having a diamond on either side, for which the Maharaja told me he gave 130,000 and 100,000 rupees in Amritsar. Both of these had belonged to Shah Shuja.[22]

The Koh-i nur was shipped to England in 1850 and was displayed the following year in the Indian Court of the Great Exhibition in London. Here it made rather a sorry sight, encased in its own specially designed Chubb's Patent Diamond Case. In the gloomy setting and cold light, it failed to impress the crowds and, tragically for historians of diamond cutting in the Indian subcontinent, the Koh-i nur was recut. It was, moreover, recut badly, its size reduced by 43 per cent. It was mounted in a succession of regal tiaras and crowns until 1937 when it was set in the State Crown of the Queen Mother.[23]

THE GOLDEN THRONE

The throne (Plate 38) is of major historical significance, being one of a very few royal thrones from the Indian subcontinent to have survived intact. Although the exact date it was made for Ranjit Singh is not known, this must have been before 1827 when the English Political Agent to the Punjab saw it during his visit to the Lahore court.[24] The name of the goldsmith who made the throne, Hafez Muhammed Multani, is recorded in the Login inventory[25] and his work is very similar in style to that of the various goldsmiths commissioned by Ranjit Singh to decorate the Golden Temple.[26]

In keeping with his renowned simplicity of style, Ranjit Singh is rarely shown on the throne in paintings and seemed to prefer a European-style chair (see Figure 6). The best representation of the throne dates from after his reign; the 1850 portrait of Sher Singh by the Hungarian artist August Schoefft depicts the Maharaja adorned with the finest jewels of the treasury, sitting on the Golden Throne.[27]

In the 1850s, Dalhousie had the throne copied in mahogany by a Calcutta firm for 678 rupees and 5 annas (then equivalent to £67.16.6) and this was sold at Sotheby's, London, in 1990 along with other items from the Dalhousie Collection.[28]

THE DISPERSAL: WHERE DID IT ALL GO?

Although Login's lists of State Jewels are gemologically precise, without drawings it is almost impossible to trace the jewelry, much of which must have been broken up. One necklace exhibited at the Vienna Universal Exhibition had 156 diamonds, 53 rubies and 916 pearls and, according to the catalog, was:

> presented by Shuja ul Mulk to Ranjit Singh, sold by public auction and bought by Shekh Imam ud din, Viceroy of Kashmire. At his death, it was sold to a merchant who broke it up and sold it piecemeal. The present owner [Ghulam Ahmad of Jammu] collected all the pieces, and restored it to its original form.[29]

Today the whereabouts of the necklace are unknown.

A piece which can be easily identified is an emerald cup with 'one emerald, 88 garnets, value 1,200 rupees' (Plate 39). This was owned by Dalhousie who recorded in the inventory of his own possessions that he bought it from the treasury.[30] In 1898, the cup and an important emerald ring were loaned briefly to the South Kensington Museum (later renamed the Victoria & Albert Museum). In 1907 both ring and cup were again loaned to the museum and published in an article in the *Journal of Indian Art*. The author translated the Persian inscription on the ring:

> For a bow for the King of Kings, Nadir,
> Lord of the conjunction, at the subjugation of India,
> from the jewel-house, it was selected 1152 AH / 1739 AD.[31]

The cup was said to have the same provenance but is not inscribed. In 1921 both the emerald cup and ring were sold at auction to the Government of India, and are said to be in the Indian Museum in Calcutta, in a cigar box in a safe.[32]

A diamond inscribed with the name of the early seventeenth-century Mughal emperor Jahangir and dated 1021 AH (1612–13 CE), which was sold, set into an armlet, in the February 1851 auction,[33] may have been the 'Jahangir Diamond' later owned by the Maharaja of Burdwan. He sold it in London in 1954, but was then fined for contravening the (Indian) Antiquities Export Control Act. An appeal was upheld and the diamond was sold to Mr Stavros Niarchos. In 1957 Sotheby's auctioned the armlet, and it was bought by an Indian businessman, Mr C. Patel.[34] Its present whereabouts are also unknown.

As mentioned earlier, some of Ranjit Singh's finest jewels were drawn by Emily Eden, leaving the possibility that they may eventually be rediscovered. The topaz

on the upper left of her drawing of 'Horses and Jewels of Runjeet Singh' (Figure 60) seems to have been in the February 1851 sale[35] and, as far as is known, has not surfaced since. The present location of the 'ruby' in the drawing is known. Login's list includes a necklace of four large 'rubies' which was later exhibited with the throne and Koh-i nur at the Great Exhibition, and then presented by the East India Company Directors to Queen Victoria. The rose-pink gemstones are similar in appearance to rubies but are in fact stones called spinels. They were made into a necklace which was inherited by Queen Mary on Queen Victoria's death. By then, the history of the stones had been lost but at Queen Mary's request an investigation was made by James Dunlop Smith, former Private

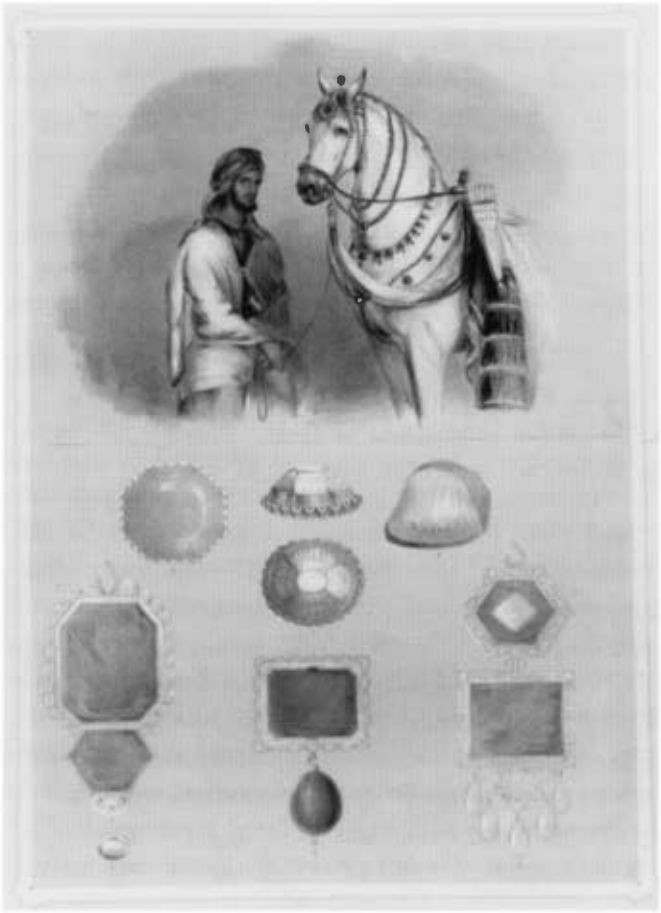

Figure 60 'Horses and Jewels of Runjeet Singh', by Emily Eden, from *Portraits of the Princes & People of India*, London, 1844, print no. 14 (Kapany Collection)

Secretary to the Viceroy of India. He traced them back to the Sikh treasury, but erroneously identified the largest one with a legendary spinel of Timur, the great Central Asian ruler from whom the Mughal emperors were descended. It was then universally known as the 'Timur Ruby' until 1996 when the spinel was shown to have no connection with Timur.[36]

The 352.5 carat stone nevertheless has a very distinguished history, as shown by the seven inscriptions minutely engraved on its surface. The earliest recorded owner was the Mughal emperor Jahangir, and it was inherited by his successors Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb and Muhammad Farrukhsiyar. It left India when Nadir Shah took it from the Delhi treasury in 1739 and, like the Koh-i nur, came into Ranjit Singh's treasury from the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah. It too remains in British royal possession.

Also in the Royal Collection is a girdle set with emeralds which had belonged to Sher Singh. It was sent to England with his robe, though the robe was later returned for sale. The emeralds were said to have once adorned one of Ranjit Singh's horses, which he took great pleasure in decorating sumptuously, as may be seen from the sale catalogs which record many jeweled harnesses, headstalls and one or two magnificent pommels. Lot 139 of the second day's sale in February 1851, for example, is 'a most valuable emerald pommel, set in rich gold, it consists of 5 immensely large emeralds of a very beautiful colour, surrounded by 24 smaller ditto'. This was said to have been owned by Nadir Shah. Another pommel is similar but set with diamonds; another set, consisting of bridle, crupper and headstall had 'beautifully clear diamonds (16), fine coloured emeralds (1049) and 14 very fine large pendant pearls and 1 ruby'. There are jeweled saddles, including one set with 500 emeralds; others are relatively plain, being of gold or silver with crimson velvet. None of these have so far been traced.

Also in the catalogs are jade and crystal bowls and boxes, jeweled jade pendants and sword hilts. One of the buyers at the sale was a Colonel Guthrie who later sold his large collection of crystal and jade to the Indian Museum and this was transferred, with the rest of the Indian Museum collection, to the V&A in 1879. Records in the V&A give virtually no information on how Guthrie acquired his collection except for a tantalizing reference to the fact that he bought them from the dispersed treasuries of Delhi and Lahore.[37] It is now impossible to identify which pieces may have come from Lahore.

Of the other items in the sale catalogs and Login lists, it seems probable that many will never be found. Pieces set with large gemstones, or made of precious metals, would probably have been broken up. The gold which covered one of the chairs was definitely sold off, in sections, to raise funds for the purchase

of Dulip Singh's new residence at Fatehgarh where he had been moved at the Governor-General's insistence.[38] Other items of gold and silver plate which were sold at the same time were probably melted down.

However, certain objects may have survived because of their intrinsic value or historic connections, though have not so far been identified. Among these are the topaz in Emily Eden's illustration; the items Dulip Singh was allowed to keep, such as an emerald saddle ornament and an emerald with Ahmad Shah's name engraved on it, both formerly in the possession of Shah Shuja'; a sword presented to Ranjit Singh by Lord Auckland; eleven jeweled and enameled belt ornaments; a tassel of 114 large pearls and twenty-four carved emeralds; Ranjit Singh's state sword which had a richly jeweled hilt and jeweled and enameled belt buckle; and various turban jewels. There are also items of smaller value which were closely connected with Ranjit Singh, not least the various orders instituted by the Maharaja in imitation of the Légion d'Honneur, some of which have been rediscovered in recent years (see Chapter One, p. 45).

It is very likely that more documentary material survives in the Government Archives of both India and Pakistan which would expand the information gleaned from the papers in the British Library in London, and which may determine whether the other sales contained important objects. There is also a great deal more work to be done associating the descriptions in the London lists with objects in public and private collections all over the world, which will increase our knowledge of one of the most significant royal treasuries in the Indian subcontinent.

Acknowledgments

I should like to record my immense gratitude to Dr Narinder Singh Kapany and the Sikh Foundation for their generous invitation to present this paper at the twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Foundation. I should also like to thank Dr Richard Bingle of the India Office Library and Records (now the British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections) for his guidance in negotiating the labyrinths of the record system, enabling me to find Dr Login's accounts; Robert Skelton, who gave me the reference which allowed me to find the Lahore sale catalogs reprinted by Dulip Singh; and Brendan Lynch, formerly of Sotheby's, London, for very kindly sending me, at extremely short notice, a slide of the painting of Dulip Singh by Beechey seen in Plate 38.

Notes

1 Stephen Haworth, *The Koh-i-noor Diamond*, Quartet Books, London, 1980. The State Crown of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother is illustrated in plate 12, between pp. 80 and 81.

2 V.S. Suri (ed. and trans.), *Umdat-ut-tawarikh, Daftar III, parts I–V. Chronicle of the Reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh 1831–39 AD*, by Lala Sohan Lal Suri, S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1961.

3 Ibid., p. 510

4 W.G. Osborne, *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Sing*, Henry Colburn, London, 1840, pp. 63–4.

5 Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, reprint edition, Curzon Press, London, 1978, p. 210.

6 Ibid., p. 227; inspection of the gems, p. 235.

7 Henry Fane, *Five Years in India*, 2 vols, London, 1842, vol. I, pp. 141–2.

8 Emily Eden, pp. 177–8.

9 Ibid., p. 193.

10 Fane, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

11 Lady Login, *Sir John Login and Duleep Singh*, London, W.H. Allen & Co., 1890, p. 155.

12 Ibid., p. 163.

13 Ibid., p. 175.

14 British Library (OIOC): LP&S/5/202, No. 186, 6 July 1849. Memo from Major H.P. Burns, Deputy Secretary to the Board of Administration to Sir Henry Eliot.

15 L/P&S/5/202, No. 1468. Letter of 20 August 1849.

16 Lady Login, p. 181.

17 *A Reprint of Two Sale Catalogues of Jewels and other Confiscated Property belonging to His Highness the Maharaja Duleep Singh, which were put up to auction and sold at Lahore, in the Years 1850 and 1851, by the Government of India. With Introductory Remarks*, 1885.

18 Minute by Dalhousie, British Library (OIOC): P/199/22 India Political Consultations 20–27 December 1850, No. 109, paragraphs 7 and 8.

19 See British Library (OIOC), Archer Collection Papers, Mss. Eur D677.

20 Ian Balfour, *Famous Diamonds*, Collins, London, 1987, p. 23.

21 Lady Login, pp. 195–8: 'Statement of Misr Makraj, Treasurer to H.M. the Maharaja Duleep Singh (for upwards of 32 years employed in the Toshkhana at Lahore), with regard to the Koh-i-Noor, from the time that it came into Runjeet's possession'.

22 Baron Charles Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab, Containing a Particular Account of the Government and Character of the Sikhs*, from the German of Baron Charles Hugel. Notes by Major T.B. Jervis, FRS, John Petheram, London, 1845, p. 303.

23 Ian Balfour, pp. 26–28.

24 C. Wade, quoted in R. Sethi, *The Lahore Durbar*, Punjab Government Record Office Publications, Monograph no. 1, 1950, p. 330.

25 British Library (OIOC); P/199/22. Memo 2903 of 1850 {No. 110} of R.N. Timson who was 'In charge of the late Lahore Durbar Toshkhana 11 December 1850', Login having left earlier with his young charge.

26 See for example, Patwant Singh, *The Golden Temple*, Hong Kong, Time Books International, 1988, plate on p. 120 with similar palmettes and floral decoration. See also P.S. Arshi, *The Golden Temple: History, Art and Architecture*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989, who dates the golden embellishments of Ranjit Singh between 1803 and 1819 (pp. 70–1). Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus all seem to have been involved in the work.

27 F.S. Aijazuddin, *Sikh Portraits by European Artists*, Sotheby Parke Bernet, London, 1979, col. pl. II.

28 Sotheby's *Colstoun. Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland*, Monday 21 and Tuesday 22 May 1990, lot 95, pp. 42–3.

29 Vienna Universal Exhibition, 1873: *A Classified and Descriptive Catalogue of the Indian Department*, by J. Forbes Watson, London, 1873, p. 168.

30 Dalhousie inventory: copy in the papers of W.G. Archer, now in the British Library (OIOC). The cup was number 22 on one of the lists: 'a cup formed of a single emerald, bought from Toshakhana at Lahore'. See also inventory (BL (OIOC), L/P&S/5/202, No. 186).

31 T.H. Hendley 'Indian Jewellery', *Journal of Indian Art and Industry*, vol. XII, no. 106, London 1896; see also *Country Life*, March 12, London 1921, p. 325. The two dates given are according to the Islamic calendar and Christian calendars (AD).

32 Reported by Robert Skelton, former Keeper of Indian Art at the Victoria & Albert Museum.

33 Lot 368 of the fifth day of sale.

34 Ian Balfour, p. 40. The diamond described here has a second dated inscription to Shah Jahan of 1042 AH (1632 CE).

35 Lot 447.

36 See Susan Stronge, 'The Myth of the Timur Ruby', *Jewellery Studies*, Number 7, London, 1996, pp. 5–12.

37 Guthrie Collection papers, British Library (OIOC): L/F/2/333, Letter No. 691. See also Susan Stronge, 'Colonel Guthrie's Jades', *Oriental Art*, Winter 1993/4, vd. xxxix, No. 4. A minute by N.S. Maskelyne, a gemologist who had been asked to assess the collection for the Indian Museum, makes it clear that Maskelyne had interviewed Guthrie and confirmed that the collection had, indeed, been bought from the Delhi treasury and from the Lahore auctions, though he omitted to inquire which pieces came from where.

38 British Library (OIOC); L/P&S/204, No. 164 of 1850: List of Property sold from His Highness the Maharajah Dhuleep Singh's Toshakhanah, since arrival at Futtegarh.

CHAPTER 4

Golden Temple, Marble Forum

Form and meaning in sacred architecture

HENRY J. WALKER

I am going to compare Sikh and ancient Roman architecture, specifically the Golden Temple of Ranjit Singh in Amritsar with the Marble Forum of Augustus in Rome. This might sound a little strange at first; these two buildings are separated by almost 2,000 years and 4,000 miles. But I am not trying to claim that there is any connection or influence between the two. On the contrary, I have deliberately chosen two unrelated traditions. I feel that the only way we can realize how distinctive Sikh architecture is, is by comparing it with the architecture from another tradition. One is the experiment; the other is the control, and if the results are to have any value, the experiment and the control must be independent.

What I want to show is how two great leaders with similar aims come up with quite different architectural results; and I want to show that this difference is not merely one of fashion or style, but one that is deeply rooted in the fundamental beliefs of their people.

Among Roman historians, the first century BCE is often called the Fall of the Roman Republic, but it would probably be more accurate to call it the Rise of the Generals. These generals acted like dictators, and some of them were officially made dictators by the Roman Senate; but as we shall see shortly, these unruly men actually built some remarkable temples throughout Italy. This exciting and dangerous period of Roman history came to an end when Augustus became

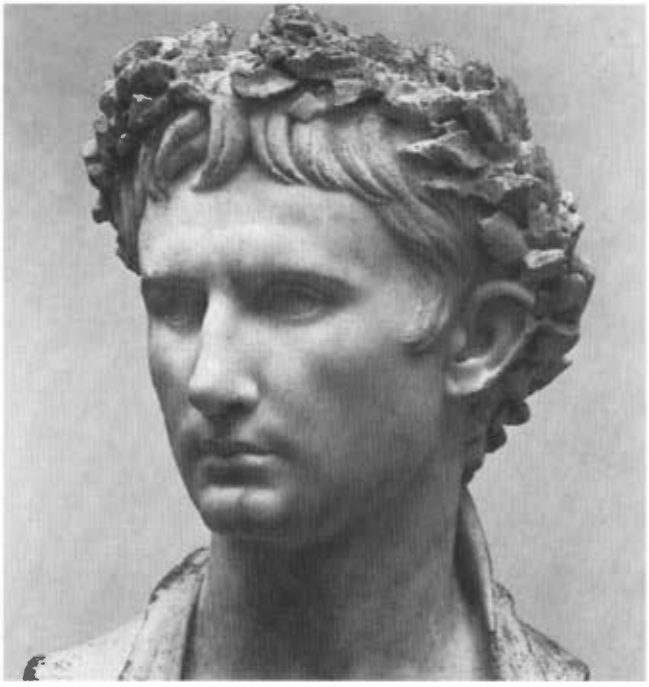

Figure 61 Augustus (Emperor from 27 BC to AD 14). From Paul Zanker, *Forum Augustum. Das Bildprogramm*, Tübingen: Wasmuch, 1968, plate 53

the first Roman Emperor (Figure 61). He reunited the entire empire under his personal control and won the approval of the Roman gods by renovating their temples and building new ones. His masterpiece was the Temple of Mars in the Forum of Augustus (Figure 62).

When we turn to the Punjab of the eighteenth century, we find ourselves in much the same atmosphere; the age of the *misls*, the Sikh military power blocs, is very similar to that of the generals of Rome. It was only by breaking their power that Ranjit Singh could unite the entire Punjab and make himself the first Maharaja of the Sikh empire (Figure 63). Like the Emperor Augustus he was a pious man and built and renovated many temples throughout his land. His masterpiece was the Golden Temple, because it was he who changed it from an attractive temple to a golden one (Figure 64).

If we pause to look at the masterpieces of these two emperors, we shall see some interesting similarities in their general design. In each case we have a large sanctuary built in the middle of a busy city. The sacred space is walled off from

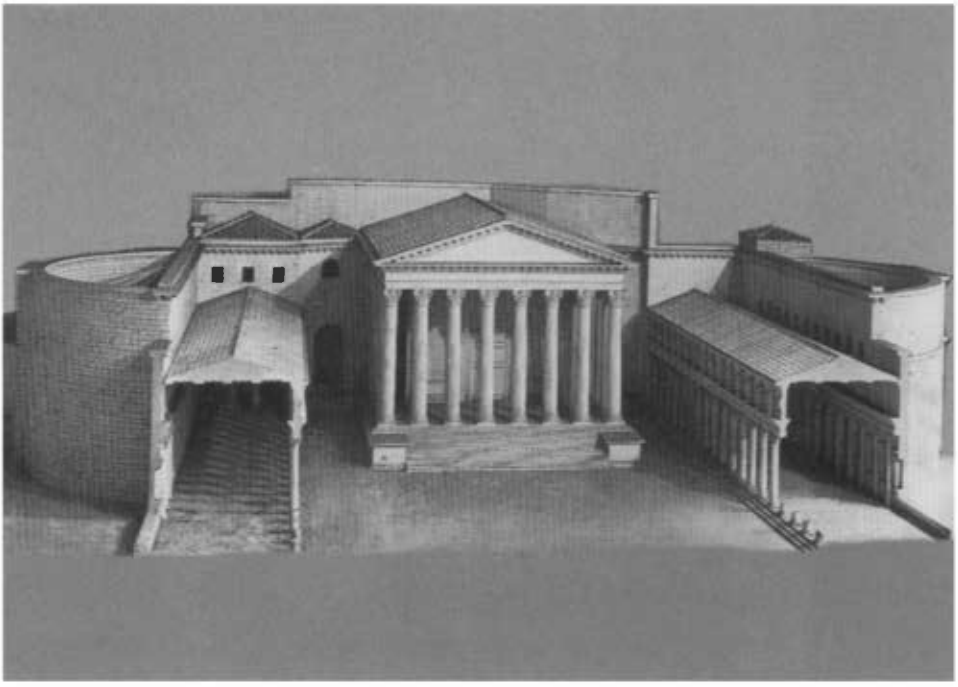

Figure 62 Model of the Forum of Augustus. From Zanker, plate 4

the city, and this creates an area of unusual calm in the midst of all the hustle and bustle of city life. In each case the sanctuary consists of a large square, surrounded by a portico, with the temple in the middle. Once we start to look more closely, however, we see that the two sanctuaries are completely different.

This difference in their architecture is a direct reflection of the difference between the religious beliefs of the two cultures. The ancient Roman religion was a very earthy and practical one. It had almost no mystical element whatsoever. The Romans were impressed, not by the goodness or truth of the gods, but by their might. The main aim of their religion was, therefore, not to become one with these gods, but rather to keep their distance from the gods and make sure that they did not annoy them. Their religion was a set of rules for bargaining with very dangerous and powerful partners. So, the temples they built were magnificent; they emanated power, but they were no more mysterious than the palace of a great king or emperor. There was nothing that would launch the soul towards the gods.

Figure 63 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Maharaja Sher Singh', by John Jones from Moghul Drawings (Picture Album), no. 1 (Kapany Collection)

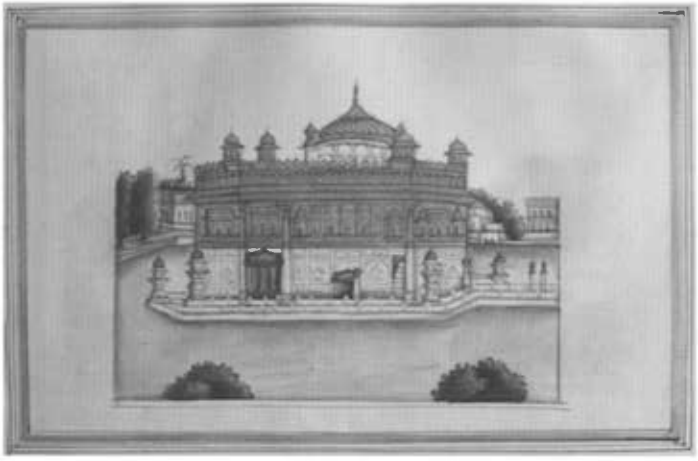

Figure 64 'Hariminder Sahib', by John Jones from Moghul Drawings (Picture Album), no. 18 (Kapany Collection)

The Sikh faith, on the other hand, worships a Creator God who is infinite and mysterious, yet as close as our own heart. Where the power of the Roman gods is separate, authoritarian and devoid of love, the power of the Sikh God is gentle and ubiquitous. Its very essence is love, it is within all and it radiates from all. The aim of Sikhism is the return of the soul to that Beloved Divinity who is everywhere and yet infinitely and mysteriously beyond us. The temples of the Sikhs express this sense of the divine presence. They are designed to sweep us up in a sensory whirl and carry us toward the Giver and Lover of all.

STARTING SIMPLE

We can see how these religious differences show themselves even if we go right back to the very beginnings of the temple architecture of the Sikhs and the ancient Romans. They both start off at the same point with very simple adobe huts, which have no particular architectural merit, though they do indicate that we are dealing with the center of a sacred area. But once we leave this primitive starting point, we find that their religious architecture develops along paths that are as divergent as their beliefs.

Going back to the first real temples of the Romans, our earliest example is a model of a temple from the sixth century BCE (Figure 65), before Rome had gained its independence and become a Republic. Already we can see the hallmarks of the Roman temple. It is raised up on a pedestal, it has a deep porch and there are steps leading up to the temple. Later the Romans started to copy the Greeks, and they produced more sophisticated temples. The two examples illustrated here date from about 100 BCE. The first is a plan of temple from the south of Italy (Figure 66); the second is a photograph of a temple from the city of Rome (Figure 67). They are somewhat better-looking than the first one we saw, but the basic design is the same. These temples tell you what to do. You do not walk round them; you stand right in front, because otherwise you will be faced with a blank wall. The temple directs your attention up the stairs, through the front door, all the way to the statue which stands at the end of the temple. This is just what we would expect from the Roman elite. They were excellent engineers and lawyers, who made straight roads and clear laws. They always had a fair idea of where they stood and where they should be going. Their temples tell you where to focus your attention just like a sign-post or law might do.

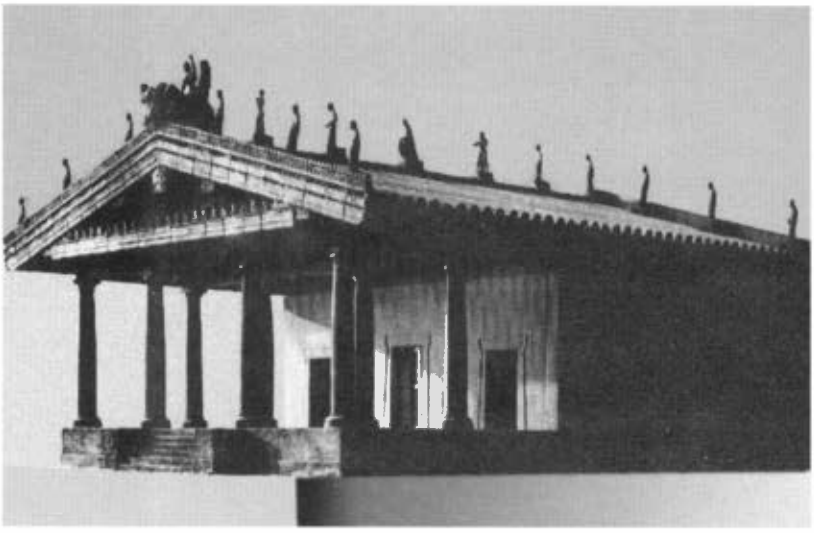

Figure 65 Model of a temple (sixth century BC). From John B. Ward-Perkins, *Roman Architecture*, New York: Electra/Rizzoli, 1988, p. 9, illus. 2

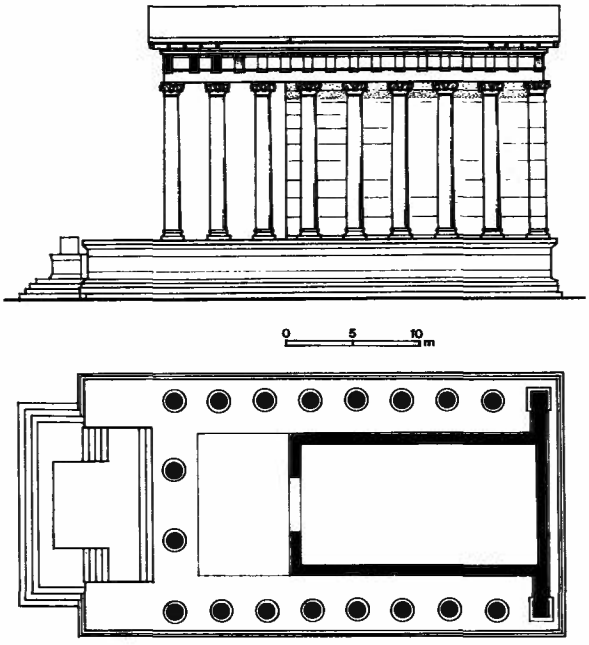

Figure 66 Plan of temple at Paestum. From Ward-Perkins, p. 11, illus. 6

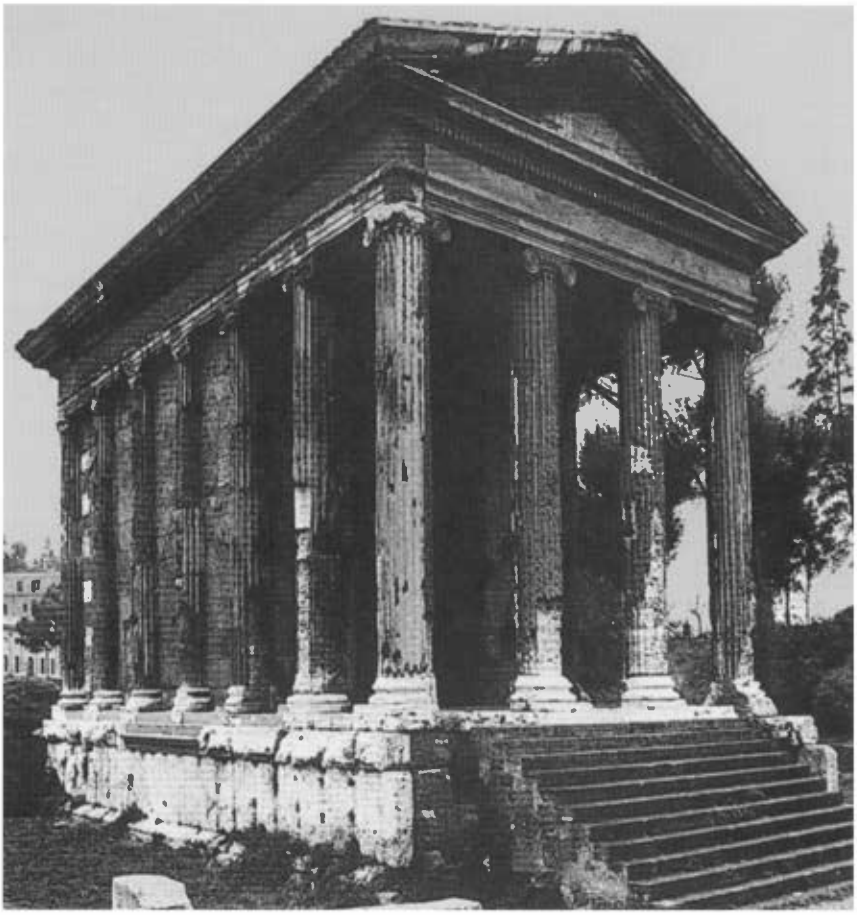

Figure 67 Temple in the Forum Boarium, Rome. From Ward-Perkins, p. 18, illus. 19

When we compare these Roman temples with the earliest Sikh temples, the contrast is striking. Even the shape is different. Whereas the Roman temple is rectangular with the entrance at one of the shorter ends, and thus draws you on to the focal point at the other short end, Sikh temples are nearly always square, though some are octagonal. They are invariably at ground level and easily approachable. And they frequently have four doors so that they can be entered from any side. The focus is, therefore, on the center. Here the Sacred Book lies. True worship consists in acknowledging it as the center of your life, and in the Sikh temple there is always a path which you can walk round as you contemplate the Supreme Being represented by the Book in the center.

The temples illustrated here are very early ones, and they date from the time of the misls. They are Guru ka Lahore (Figure 68) and Hol Garh Sahib (Figure 69), both of which are in Anandpur Sahib. Each one consists of a simple square room, and nothing more. To walk round in comfort, you must actually step outside and perform your circumambulation on the path that surrounds the building. In Hol Garh Sahib the path is raised for this purpose. A third example of such early temples is the Hari Mandir Sahib in Karatpur (Figure 70); it has the same design except for the addition of a little kiosk on the roof. We can also notice something important about the decoration of Sikh temples which is already apparent in these examples. The Roman temple emphasized the massive nature of its walls through elaborate sculptural decoration of its pediment, and gave import to the transition from the outside world to the sacred space by placing a large stairway and a deep porch with several rows of columns before the doorway. The Sikh temple, on the other hand, usually has a very simple entrance; you walk right in without any fuss. And, the mass of the walls is always played down. The stone or brick is concealed behind a layer of smooth plaster which gives it an air of lightness. This effect is increased by the delicate pilasters and blind archways that decorate its surface. The

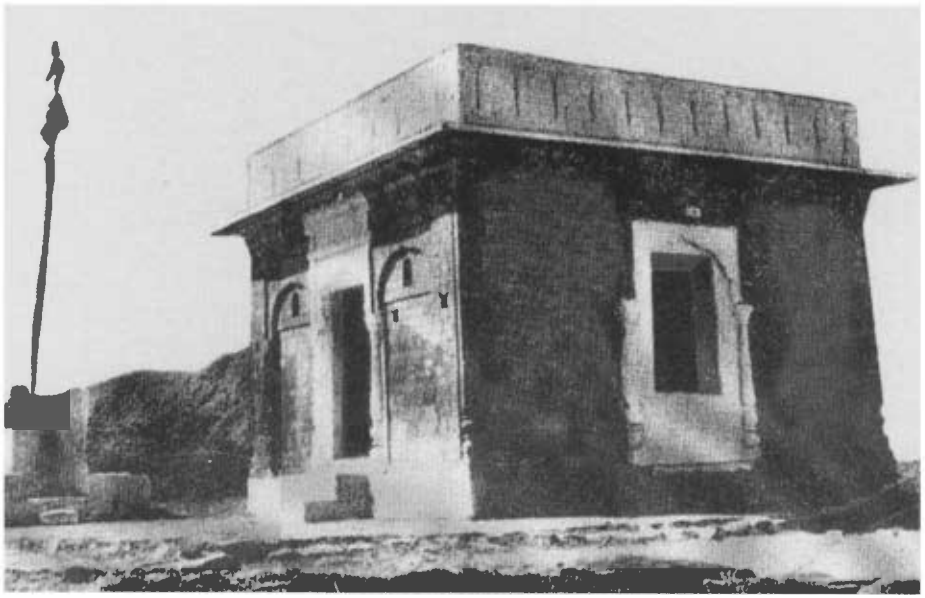

Figure 68 Guru ka Lahore at Anandpur Sahib. From Pardeep Singh Arshi, *Sikh Architecture in Punjab*, New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1986, pic. 1
Publisher Note: Photographic documentation of Sikh architecture is currently limited and we have not been able to access original copies of these pictures, which is reflected in their lower reproduction quality.

Figure 69 Hol Garh Sahib at Anandpur Sahib. From Arshi, pic. 2

general impression is of icing on a cake rather than of a mighty structural element bearing up the awful weight of the roof.

But in a Sikh temple we don't feel the need for a heavy wall, because the roof itself seems to be very light. Even in these simple early temples, we can see how this is achieved, especially in the gurudwara at Kiratpur. The roof is separated from the rest of the building by large but almost razor-thin eaves, so that you get the impression that the walls do not have to hold the roof up, since they are cut off from it, and also that the roof itself must be very light, if it can lie on such a delicate and flimsy element. This effect is further enhanced when the temple is topped by a dome. Logically, such a dome adds to the weight of the roof; but its psychological effect is quite different. The dome seems to be expanding outwards and floating upwards like a balloon, but we shall see this effect more clearly when we return to some other Sikh temples later on; because now I want to turn, once again, to the Roman side of things

GETTING FANCY

We have seen what a normal Roman and Sikh temple looks like; but as time went on, people wanted to place their temples in an elaborate setting, to make their

Figure 70 Hari Mandir Sahib at Kiratpur. From Arshi, pic. 4

temple part of a large impressive sanctuary. This is of course a later development, and in Rome it starts in the era of the Generals. My first Roman example dates from around 100 BCE. It is an enormous complex (Figure 71) consisting of layers upon layers which finally lead up to a tiny circular temple of Fortune. There is something almost cute about the way in which all these elaborate stairways and plazas and porticos end with this petite little gem. My second example (Figure 72) was built around 50 BCE and is clearly a direct ancestor of the Forum of Augustus. The portico on all three sides may distract us a little, but our attention is still being focused on the temple located at the back. Both sanctuaries, like others of the time, were built on mountains in the countryside, and were designed accordingly. They both used the steep approach up the mountain as a way of drawing attention to the temple placed at the highest point, but when Augustus builds his sanctuary in the center of Rome, he will have to focus attention on the temple in a different way. The viewers will have to be drawn in rather than up towards the temple.

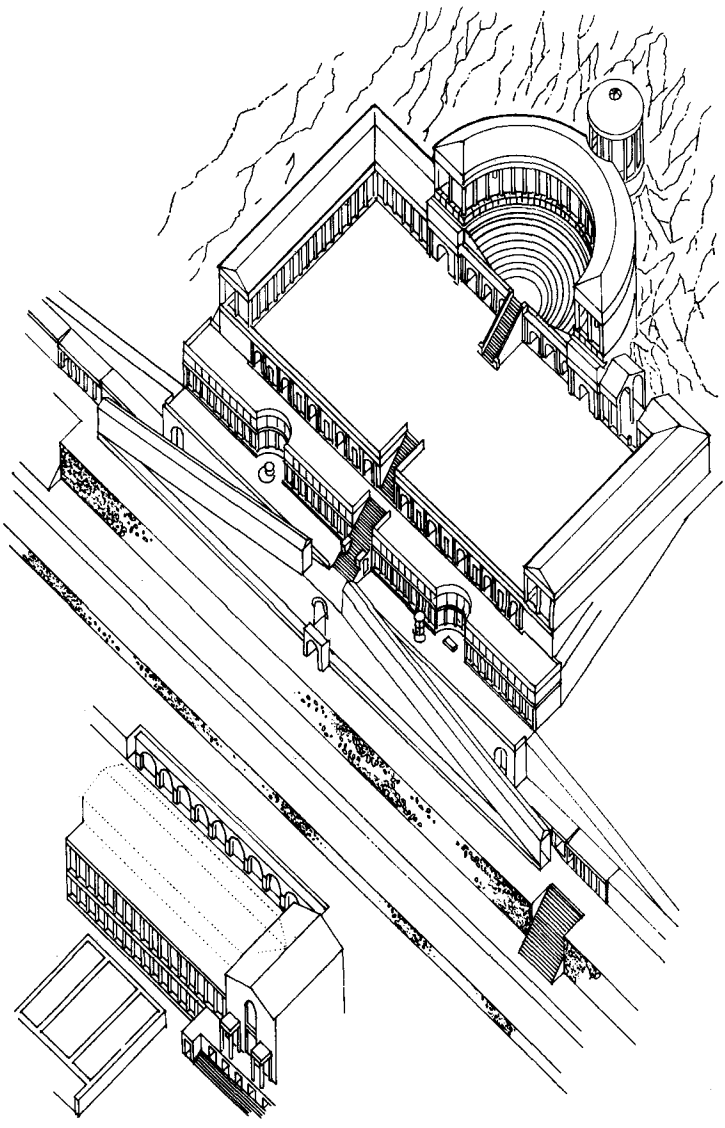

Figure 71 Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia at Praeneste. From Ward-Perkins, p. 28, illus. 39

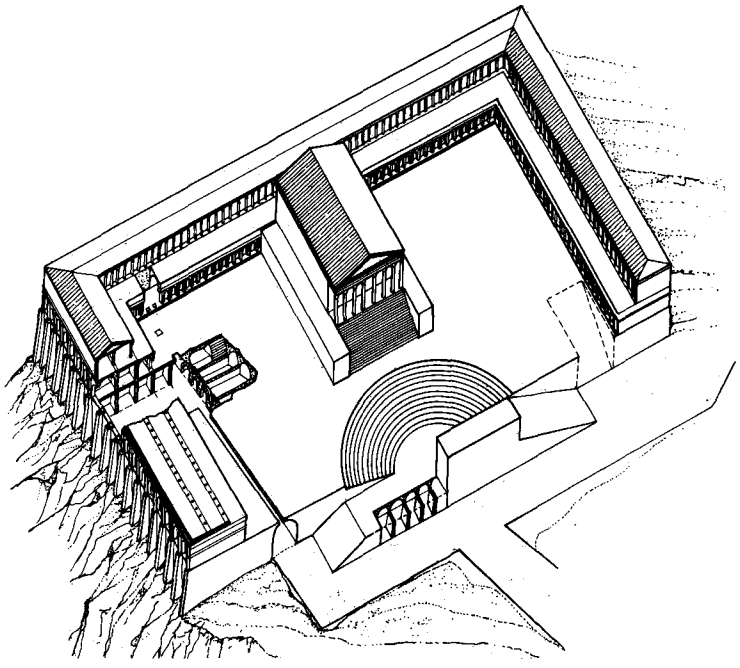

Figure 72 Sanctuary of Hercules Victor at Tibur. From Ward-Perkins, p. 24, illus. 30

When we look at more elaborate Sikh sanctuaries, we find that the architects had to integrate four elements which had become the fundaments of Sikh sacred architecture: the enclosure, its gateway, the temple itself and the pool. An early and attractive example, which probably dates from the time of the misls, is the Ram Sar Gurudwara at Amritsar (Figure 73). The temple itself is two stories high; and although it is a relatively simple building, it anticipates some of the features of the great temples built or renovated by Ranjit Singh. The bottom part of the lower floor is covered with marble slabs; and these are decorated very delicately in low relief designs, in a way that makes the walls seem light and almost paper-like. The dome crowning the temple is a simple version of the magnificent lotus-domes that seem to have been a favorite design of Ranjit Singh. The enclosure around the temple consists of a wall facing the outside world with rooms on three of its inner sides facing the courtyard. On the fourth, eastern side of the enclosure is a great gateway. Outside the enclosure to the south is the pool which is linked by a doorway through the rooms on that side. The pool is surrounded by a brightly decorated pathway (Figure 74). The end result is quite pleasing, but it seems a little odd that the gateway lies in one direction

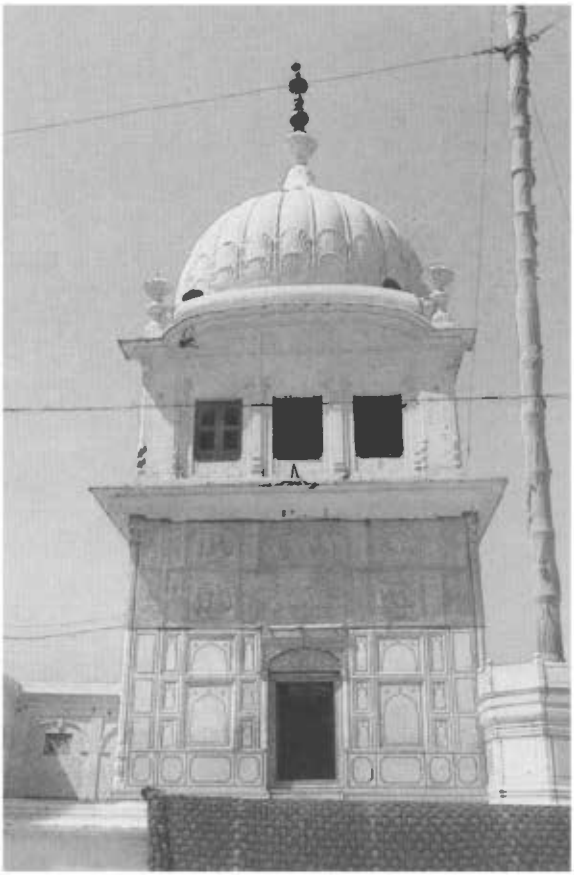

Figure 73 Ram Sar temple at Amritsar. From Arshi, pic. 39

(east) and the pool in another (south), and that the enclosure surrounds the temple alone, cutting the pool off from the rest of the sanctuary. Later, gurudwara complexes will find more satisfactory answers to the architectural problem of integrating these different elements.

The first temple we shall look at which attracted the attention of Ranjit Singh is the Darbar Sahib at Dehra Baba Nanak (Figure 75). The general layout is more or less the same as at the Ram Sar Temple, but the roof and dome of this gurudwara are quite extraordinary. They are actually taller than the building itself, and Ranjit Singh expressed his admiration for it by gilding the enormous dome. The elaborateness of this golden superstructure forms a striking contrast with the

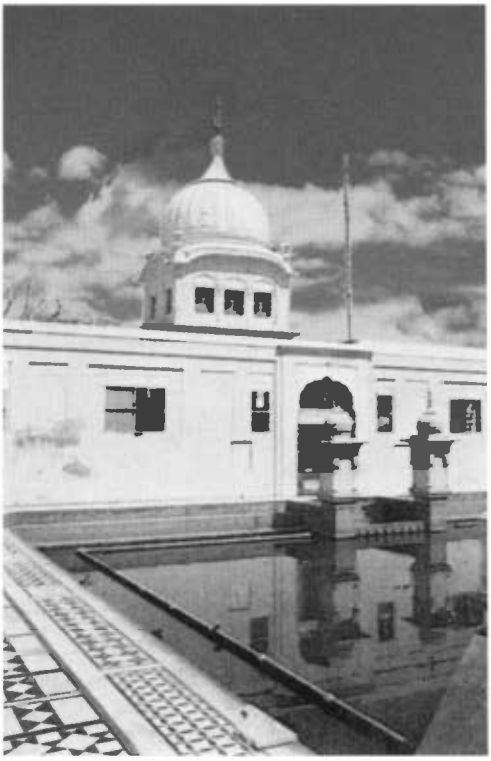

Figure 74 Ram Sar temple and pool at Amritsar. From Arshi, pic. 40

Spartan simplicity of the plain white building. The peaceful dome with its enormous lotus leaves is separated from the roof by three rows of smaller decoration whose unending repetition creates a very rapid rhythm. The row of the onion-shaped domes between the rows of miniature lotus leaves is dizzying as it races round the bottom of the dome.

Imitation is said to be the highest form of flattery; and if Ranjit Singh showed his respect for this temple by gilding it, he honored it even more by copying its design exactly when he came to building his own gurudwara of Angitha Sahib at the village of Khadoor Sahib (Figure 76). The splendid archway, added later, unfortunately detracts from the impact of the temple which originally was identical to the one at Dehra Baba Nanak. The temple is surrounded by an enclosure with rooms on all sides, but the most striking feature of the entire complex is the great gateway that leads into it (Figure 77). This handsome structure with its

Figure 75 Darbar Sahib at Dehra Baba Nanak. From Arshi, pic. 13

cusped archway and balcony windows looks forward to the gateways and temples of Tarn Taran and the Golden Temple itself.

The culmination of these experiments towards a more perfect union of the major elements in a Sikh sanctuary is the great Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran (Figure 78). It is hard to imagine that this was once no more than a hut beside a pool, until the present temple was built in 1775 and later renovated by Ranjit Singh. Here the temple and pool form an integrated unit, and the entire complex (rather than just the temple itself) is enclosed by the sanctuary wall. In its design the temple is remarkably similar to the Golden Temple. The walls are cased in marble slabs with the light designs in panels that are typical of Sikh architecture. The upper floor is gilded and is adorned with windows framed by cusped arches in the center of each side, with a balcony-window to the left and right of this central feature. Finally, in the center of the flat roof, we have a small square

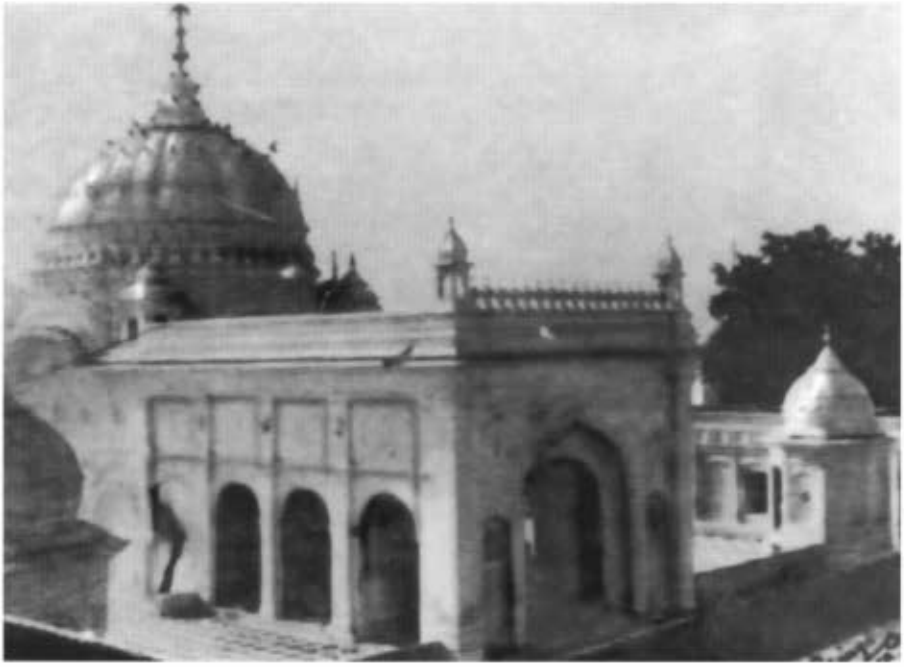

Figure 76 Angitha Sahib at Khadoor Sahib. From Arshi, pic. 17

Figure 77 Gateway of Angitha Sahib at Khadoor Sahib. From Arshi, pic. 18

Figure 78 Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran. From Arshi, pic. 60

chamber topped by a flat gilded dome, which is practically identical to the dome of the Golden Temple. Even the interior design is similar with a central hall surrounded by rooms that form galleries, which on the upper floor look down over the great hall below. The great archway is impressive (Figure 79), though it does not quite match the gateways of Gurudwara Angitha Sahib or the Golden Temple, either in its original form (which we see here) or in its renovated form. The Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran is, however, a great work; and the Golden Temple will simply bring its features to perfection.

We have followed the development of the temple and the complex sanctuary in the Roman and Punjabi traditions, but now we shall turn to the masterpieces themselves. Augustus boasted that he had received a city of brick and given back

Figure 79 Archway of Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran. From Arshi, pic. 64

a city of marble. Ranjit Singh could likewise have claimed that he found a temple of stone and turned it into a Golden Temple.

THE AUGUSTAN MASTERPIECE

The Forum of Augustus was a remarkable achievement of Roman architecture in that the entire complex was a single architectural unit, not a temple standing in a square (Figures 80, 81). It was small in comparison with the huge Golden Temple complex; the entire Forum was only 118 × 215 meters, which is about the size of the sacred pool at Amritsar, while the open square in front of the temple was only 50 × 70 meters.

The complex was bounded by massive walls that ranged from 22 to 30 meters in height. This is extremely high in relation to the space they enclosed. From the outside it would have been quite hideous – all that you would have seen was

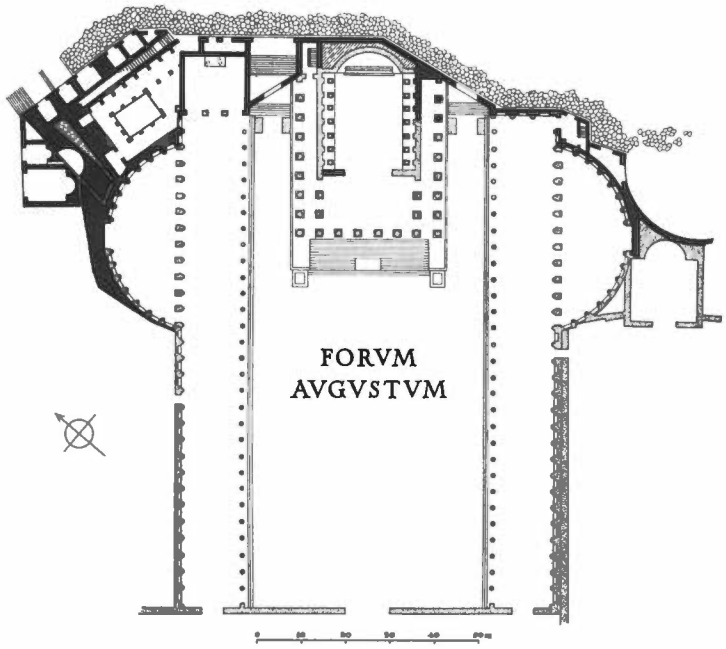

Figure 80 Plan of the Forum of Augustus. From Zanker, p. 8

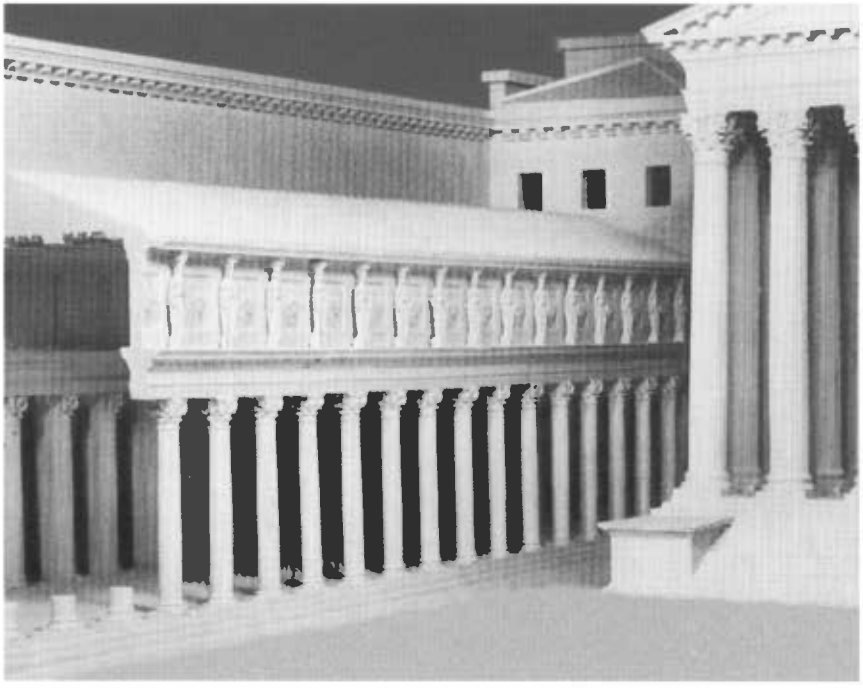

Figure 81 Model of the colonnade. From Zanker, plate 5

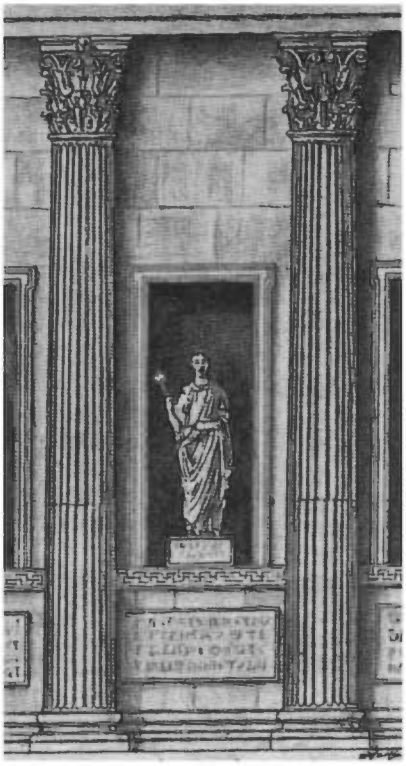

Figure 82 Statue in portico. From Zanker, plate 33

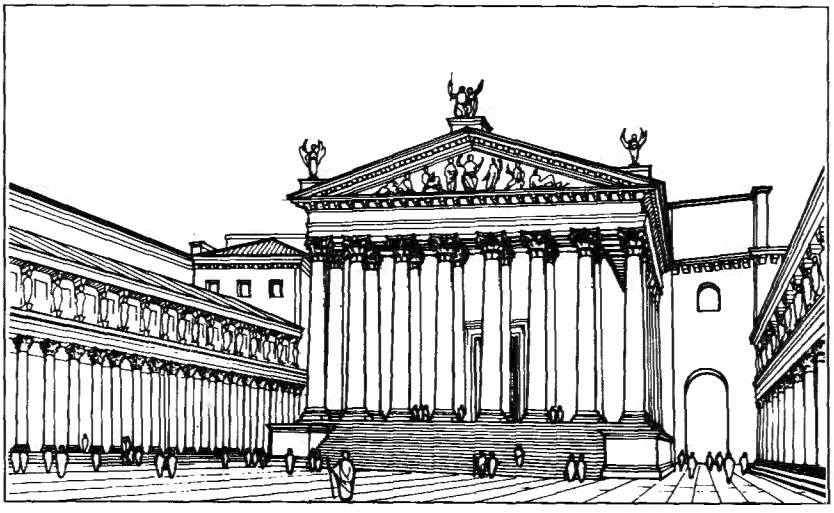

Figure 83 Temple of Mars the Avenger. From Ward-Perkins, p. 48, illus. 71

a huge stone wall! Inside, as we can see even in the model, this dominance of the vertical plane created the effect of a huge room with an open space in the middle, rather than an open square with buildings around it. We are beginning to see here the emphasis on interior space, rather than outer shape, which became all-important in Roman architecture of the first century CE. What mattered was the feeling of space that you would get once you walked into it. You instantly felt that you were in a special place, that you had left the busy city behind. The space created was rather like that of a huge exhibition room in a modern museum. And to a large extent, that is what the Forum of Augustus was, a national museum or hall of fame. The colonnades invited you to walk along inside them and to peer into the two great semi-circular rooms that stood to the right and left of the temple entrance. These rooms and the walls of the colonnade were lined with the statues of great Roman generals and politicians, and a plaque under each statue listed his achievements (Figure 82). In short, this Roman Forum was not just a setting for the temple; it was a national monument of which the temple was just one part though it was, of course, the most important part of the entire complex.

The two colonnades directed your attention towards the temple (Figure 83). The sun rose up behind it in the morning, and its facade received the rays of the setting sun. The temple was dedicated to the war-god Mars; it was the Temple of Mars Ultor, Mars the Avenger. Augustus was thanking this god for helping him to punish his enemies – both national, during the civil wars, and international, in his wars to expand the Roman Empire. Inside the temple were souvenirs from various Roman battles; and at the very end of the temple, the focal point of the entire Forum was the great superhuman statue of Mars himself (Figure 84).

We might expect that a temple should be a purely religious building, but there is something very political and almost secular about the Temple of Mars the Avenger. We could, perhaps, best sum up the effect of the entire complex by saying that it is a monument to power, but the division between imperial power and divine power is deliberately left quite vague. As you looked along the rows of columns that led to the temple, and as you looked up the steps that raised it high above you, you were dwarfed by the effect. You were being put in your place, and that place was a rather low one. The religious feeling inspired was one of power and majesty. It may have impressed you, but it would not uplift you.

Nothing could be farther from the 'fearful mystery' of the Holy that we find in most modern religions. This element of the Sublime, which is missing in the

Figure 84 Statue of Mars the Avenger in the temple. From Zanker, plate 49

religion of the ancient Romans, is precisely the message of the Golden Temple. The message is revealed in the layout of the entire complex, in the temple itself and in the detail of its decoration.

THE SIKH MASTERPIECE

The center of the sanctuary is clearly the Golden Temple, and everything else radiates from it. The temple, the pool and the path for circumambulation are perfectly integrated here through the ingenious device of placing the temple in the middle of the pool. In the nineteenth century, the complex was still open to the outside world, so it must have appeared to blend into it and spread all the way to the horizon. Nowadays, of course, a colonnade has been added on all sides, but this does not distract from the impression of a vast open space. In contrast to the high enclosing stone walls of the Roman Forum with their

evocation of authoritarian power, we have a vast light-reflecting pool (147 × 153 meters) with its evocation of openness and infinity. The effect is enhanced by the path around the pool which is so wide that it makes the worshippers seem tiny (Plates 40 and 41). They are little humans in the face of the Infinite. The geometric designs on the marble pavement create a quick rhythm which invites the visitor to walk around. The colonnade, the pool and the path all revolve around the temple, as if they themselves were performing a great circumambulation in its honor. The centrality of the temple is emphasized by the four doors which open out in all directions. The focal point is, of course, the great Book, the Guru Granth Sahib, in the central hall with its gallery of rooms looking down on the Book. The whole arrangement looks like a model of the planets going around the sun. Each part of the sanctuary follows its orbit at a fixed point from the Holy Book which lies at the center of this solar system (Plate 42, Figure 85).

Everything about the Golden Temple reveals the presence of a Reality that lies beyond mere appearances. It does not seek to impress the senses like the

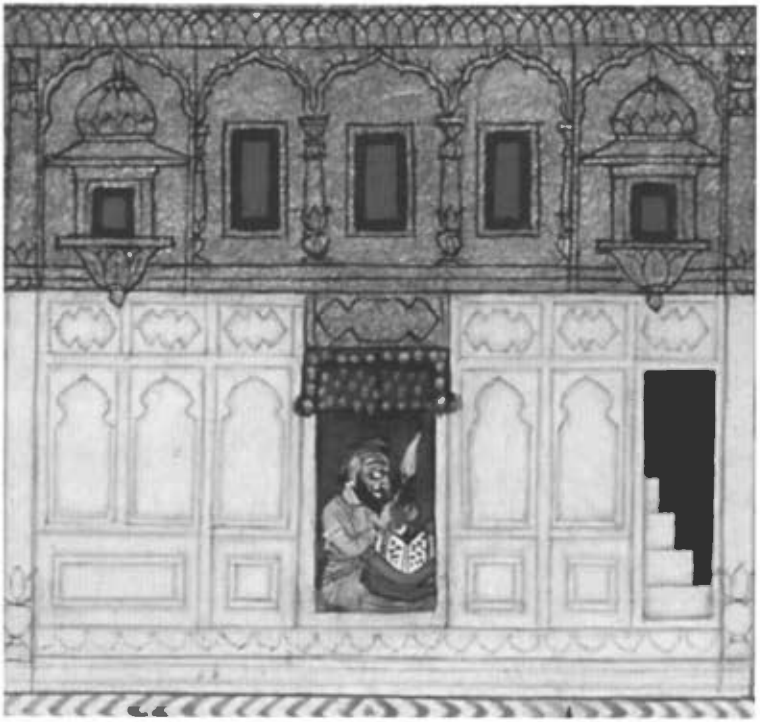

Figure 85 'The Golden Temple, Amritsar', by Amritsar artist, nineteenth century (detail of Plate 42), opaque watercolors on paper, 24.8 × 27.6 cm (Kapany Collection)

temples of the ancient Romans; instead, it overwhelms them. It exhorts the mind to go beyond the world of the senses. We are struck not by its masses and its surfaces, but rather by its quiet open spaces. The shining and intricate surface of gold on the temple's upper storey creates the impression of an elegant jewelry box floating on the water and rising into the air (Figure 86). It is hard to realize that we are actually looking at a mass-bearing structure, that the white marble walls are working hard to bear the weight of the roof above. They seem weightless; it is their delicately carved, abstract decoration that attracts our attention.

The edge of the roof is decorated with no less than fifty-eight little golden onion-shaped domes, which bewilder the senses as they run around the roof. The four domed kiosks at the corners of the roof are matched by the great flat dome that crowns the entire building. This dome is adorned with a gigantic lotus-leaf motif, and the little spheres that run around it are actually lotuses as well. The room just below the dome lies right above the central hall and the Book, so the dome makes the presence of the Book visible even from the outside.

Figure 86 'The Holy Temple', by a lady, from *Original Sketches of the Punjab,* lithographed, printed and published by Dickinson Brothers, 1854, Plate 8 (Kapany Collection)

Figure 87 Upper storey of the Golden Temple. Photo by Dilip Mehta, Contact

When we go inside the temple, we find the same transcendence of concrete realities. The different surfaces of the gold, the mosaics that cover the white marble, make us realize that we are in a world of reflected light and abstract patterns, where nothing has any solidity. The dazzling designs on the walls make us unsure what is near and what is distant, what is real and what is a mirrored illusion. The attention cannot be focused on such surfaces. The senses are overwhelmed by the barrage of impressions. The mind turns towards the calm center of the whole, towards the vast space of the central hall which represents the Infinite, the Being that somehow brings together and explains all these conflicting impressions that bombard our senses.

For me, one of the most beautiful photographs of the temple is of a child in one of the galleries on the upper floor (Figure 87). What is he looking at? He is not really looking at the pattern on the floor, because it offers nothing to focus on, but rather on the Infinity that its confusing repetition suggests. But, would it not be better to say that he is not really looking at all? He is contemplating. His experience is precisely that which the Golden Temple was designed to

produce. The surfaces of the temple deliberately distract the senses so as to direct the mind. The delicate work of the goldsmith, the mirrors on the walls, arches behind arches behind arches, the bewildering pattern on the floor . . . we do not know where we are. We are in a strange world of deceptive receding surfaces where we cannot trust our eyes, where everything we can see is vague and unclear, where the one thing that we cannot see is the one thing that is real. But when we find ourselves recording such impressions, are we talking now about the architectural ornament of a building, or are we talking about life itself?

I thought if I could show you two very different types of architecture, I might be able to establish that they were somehow related to the lives that their builders lived. But now that I have come to the end of my chapter, I am beginning to suspect that this most ancient and useful of all the arts is indeed the very image of our inner lives.

Plate 1 'Guru Nanak', Lucknow or Faizabad, c. 1770, pigment on paper, 21 × 13.5 cm (with border 41.5 × 33.5 cm) (Kapany Collection)

Plate 2 'Guru Nanak', by Sobha Singh, 1969, oil on canvas, 71 × 56 cm (courtesy of R.K. Janmeja Singh)

Plate 3 'The Ten Gurus', early nineteenth century, gouache on paper, 52 × 41 cm (Kapany Collection)

Plate 4 'Guru Hargobind Singh on Terrace with Attendant', Punjab Plains, 1750, gouache on paper, 20.5 × 13.5 (26.5 × 18.5) cm (Kapany Collection)

Plate 5 'Guru Tegh Bahadur', 1670, Mughal school, gouache on paper, 22 × 16.5 cm (Kapany Collection)

Plate 6 'Guru Gobind Singh on Horseback with his Attendants', c. 1830, gouache on paper, 18.5 × 15 cm (Kapany Collection)

Plate 7 'Assembly of Sikh Generals on a Terrace', Punjab, c. 1830; Guler style, pigment on paper, 19 × 25.5 cm (Kapany Collection)

Plate 8 'Young Maharaja Ranjit Singh', Company style, nineteenth century, pigment on paper, 28 × 19.5 cm (Kapany Collection)

Plate 9 'Sikh Marriage Ceremony', Company miniature style, nineteenth century, 34 × 54 cm (Kapany Collection)

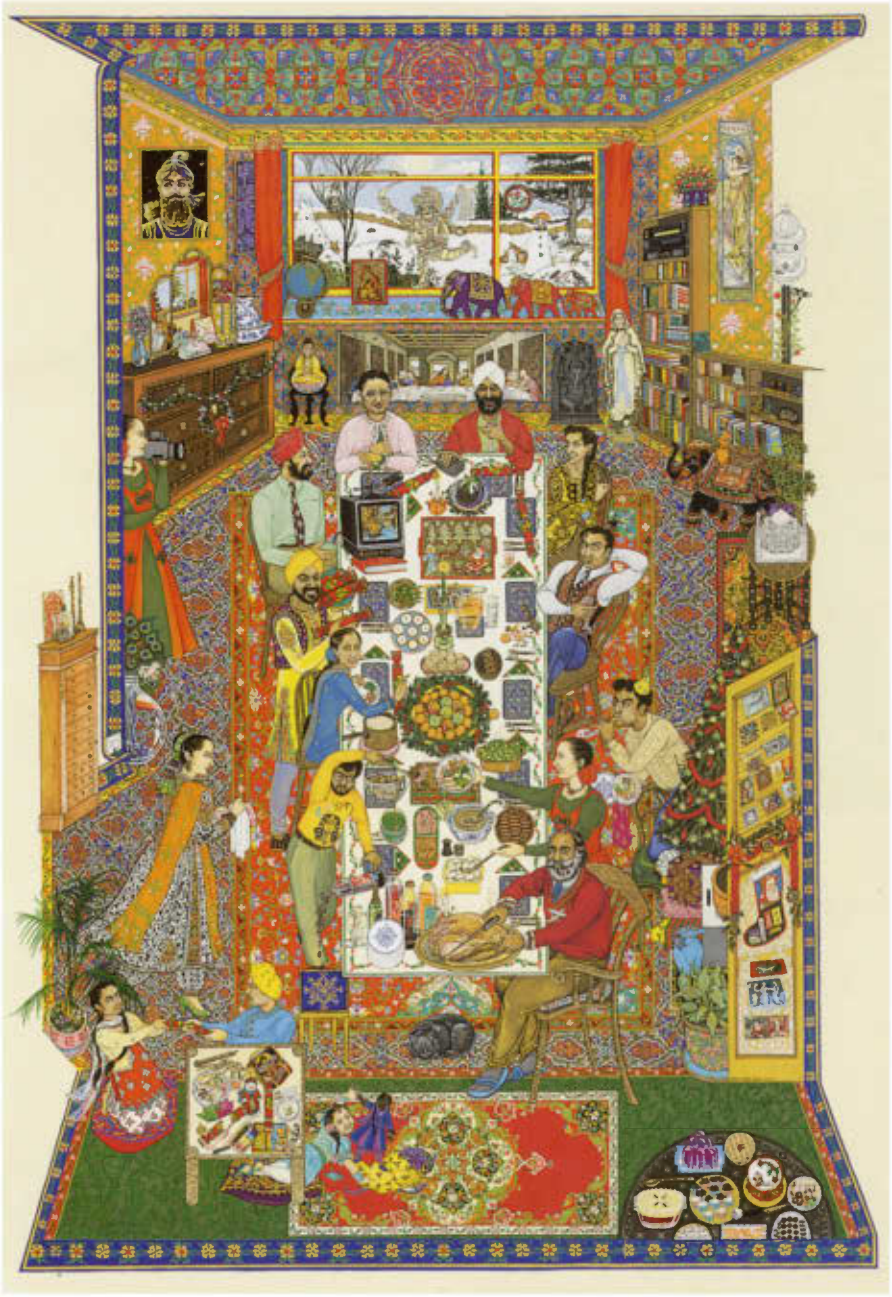

Plate 10 'The Last Supper – Dedicated to Cha Cha Baldave: A Brave and Noble Soul', by Amrit K.D. Kaur, 1994/5, mixed medium on mount card (watercolor, gouache, gold dust), 44.7 x 62.2 cm (Twin Studio Collection)

Plate 11 'Where Many Streams Meet', Arpana Caur, 1997, oil on canvas, 152 × 183 cm (Arpana Caur Collection)

Plate 12 'Guru Gobind Singh on Horseback', artist of Guler-Kangra schools, early nineteenth century, 23.5 × 32.6 cm (Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu)

Plate 13 'Ranjit Singh Equestrienne in Saffron Robes', Punjab, c. 1830, opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 13 × 19.2 cm (San Diego Musuem of Art, Edwin Binney 3rd Collection)

Plate 14 'Ranjit Singh in Darbar [Durbar]', by Hasan al Din, Punjab, first half of nineteenth century, 29.1 × 54.7 cm (San Diego Musuem of Art, Edwin Binney 3rd Collection)

Plate 15 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh with Hira Singh', Lahore, c. 1830, 23 × 29.6 cm (Kapany Collection)

Plate 16 'Raja Ranbir Singh of Jammu', c. 1840, opaque watercolors on paper, 37 × 22.5 cm (Suresh S. Bhalla Collection)

Plate 17 'Raja and Retinue Hunting Wild Boar', Mandi-Guler artist, c. 1830, opaque watercolors on paper, 40.8 × 31.3 cm (Kapany Collection)

Plate 18 Medal of Ranjit Singh's court, back and front, mid-nineteenth century (Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu)

Plate 19 'Dalip Singh and Rani Jindan', mid-nineteenth century, opaque watercolors on paper, 35.5 x 48.5 cm (Suresh S. Bhalla Collection)

Plate 20 'Bhai Vir Singh', Lahore, c. 1850, pigment on paper, 65.5 × 47.5 cm or 54.9 × 37 cm?? (Kapany Collection)

Plate 21 'Guru Nanak Dev', by N.[athdwara] artist Pannalal Gopilal, c. 1930s, chromolithograph, 50.7 x 35.8 cm (Collection of Robert J. Del Bontà, no. CP-9)

Plate 22 'Guru Gobind Singh', by N.[athdwara] artist Pannalal Gopilal, c. 1930s, chromolithograph, 50.7 x 35.5 cm (Collection of Robert J. Del Bontà, no. CP-139)

Plate 23 'Bhai Bala recites Janam Sakhi to Guru Angad and Paira Mokha', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set, late nineteenth century (Kapany Collection)

Plate 24 'Bhai Mardan, Guru Nanak, Sirichand, Bhai Bala and Lakmichand', Janam Sakhi, Kashmiri Manuscript f.1r, early nineteenth century (Kapany Collection)

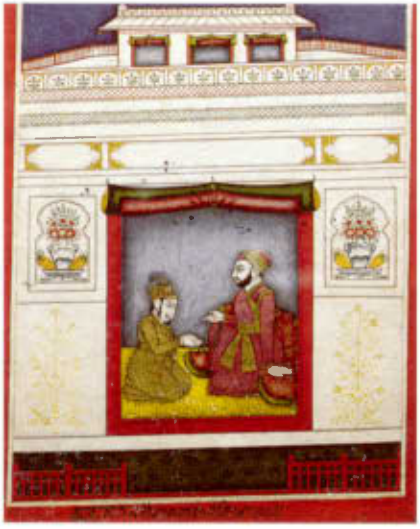

Plate 25 'Guru Nanak at School with His Teacher, Jai Ram', Unbound Set (Kapany Collection)

Plate 26 'Guru Nanak and Rai Bulag', Kashmiri Manuscript f. 12v (Kapany Collection)

Plate 27 'Guru Nanak and Rai Bulag', Unbound Set (Kapany Collection)

Plate 28 'Guru Nanak and Bhai Bala at the Modi Khana [Granary]', Unbound Set (Kapany Collection)

Plate 29 'Guru Nanak's Wedding Procession', Unbound Set (Kapany Collection)

Plate 30 'Guru Nanak's Marriage – Departure of the *Dholi*', Unbound Set (Kapany Collection)

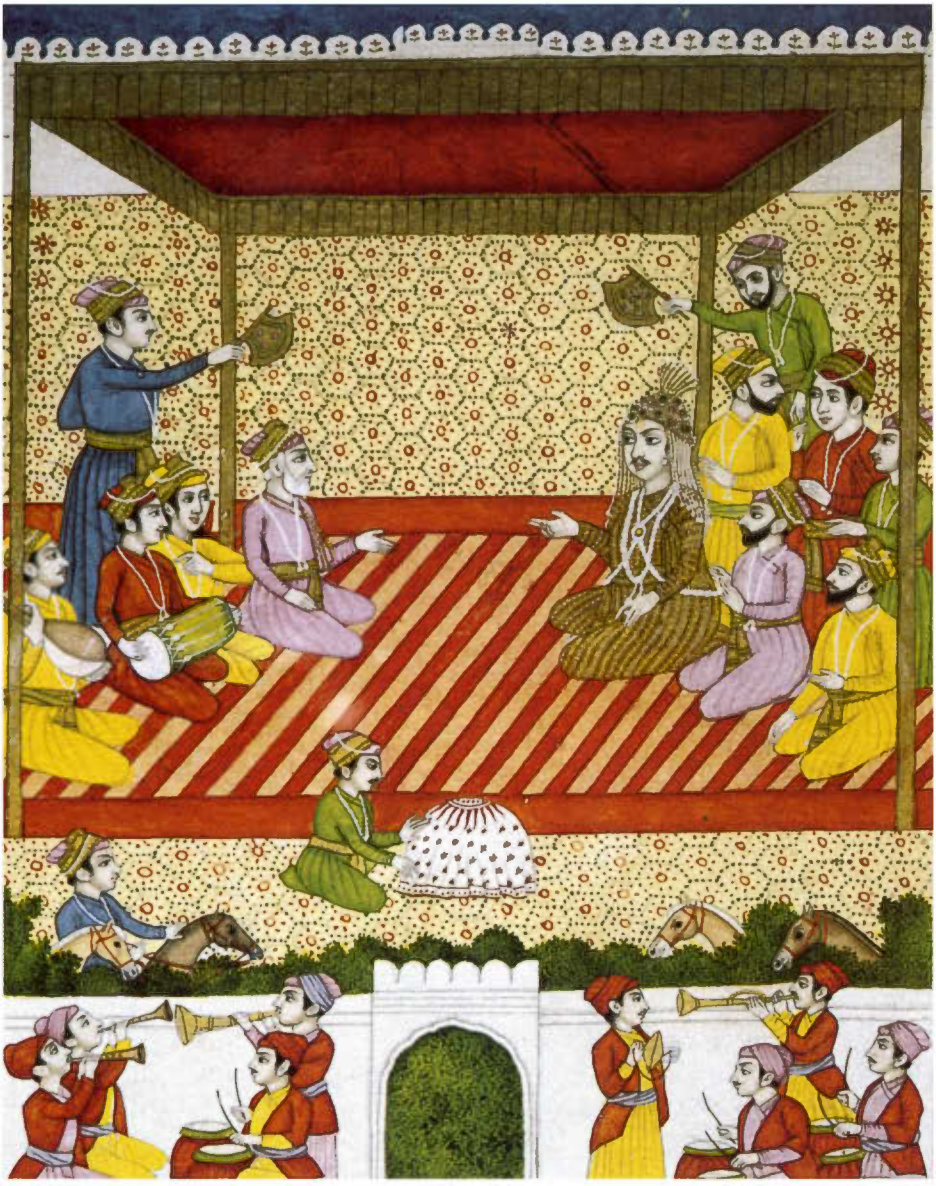

Plate 31 'Guru Nanak's Wedding Reception', Unbound Set (Kapany Collection)

Plate 32 *'The Wedding of Guru Nanak'*, Kashmiri Manuscript f. 32r (Kapany Collection)

Plate 33 'Baba Nanak and Nirankara', Kashmiri Manuscript f. 211r (Kapany Collection)

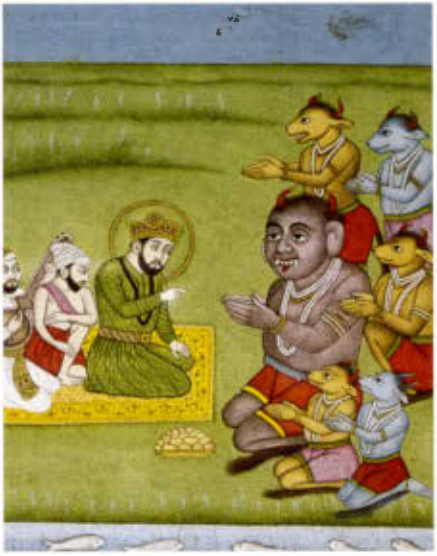

Plate 34 'Guru Nanak Meets Raj Dev Lut of the Demons', Unbound Set (Kapany Collection)

Plate 35 'Guru Nanak's Meeting with Gorakhnath', Unbound Set (Kapany Collection)

Plate 36 'Maharaja Shere Singh (Present Sovereign of the Sikhs)', by Emily Eden, from *Portraits of the Princes & People of India*, print no. 2, drawn on the stone by L. Dickinson from hand painting on paper, and published by J. Dickinson & Son, London, 1844, print no. 14 (Kapany Collection)

Plate 37 'Portrait of Maharaja Duleep Singh', by William Beechey, mid-nineteenth century, oil on canvas (Sotheby's, London)

Plate 38 The Throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, early nineteenth century, wood and resin core covered with sheets of gold, height 94 cm (Victoria & Albert Museum: 2518 (IS))

Plate 39 Emerald cup set with rubies in gold, eighteenth century. The cup carved from a single emerald; the stem enameled gold, height approximately 5.8 cm, after T.H. Hendley, 'Indian Jewellery', *Journal of Indian Art*, vol. XII, no. 106, London, 1896

Plate 40 The Golden Temple. Photo by Jaswant Singh

Plate 41 Circumambulating the Golden Temple. Photo by Jaswant Singh

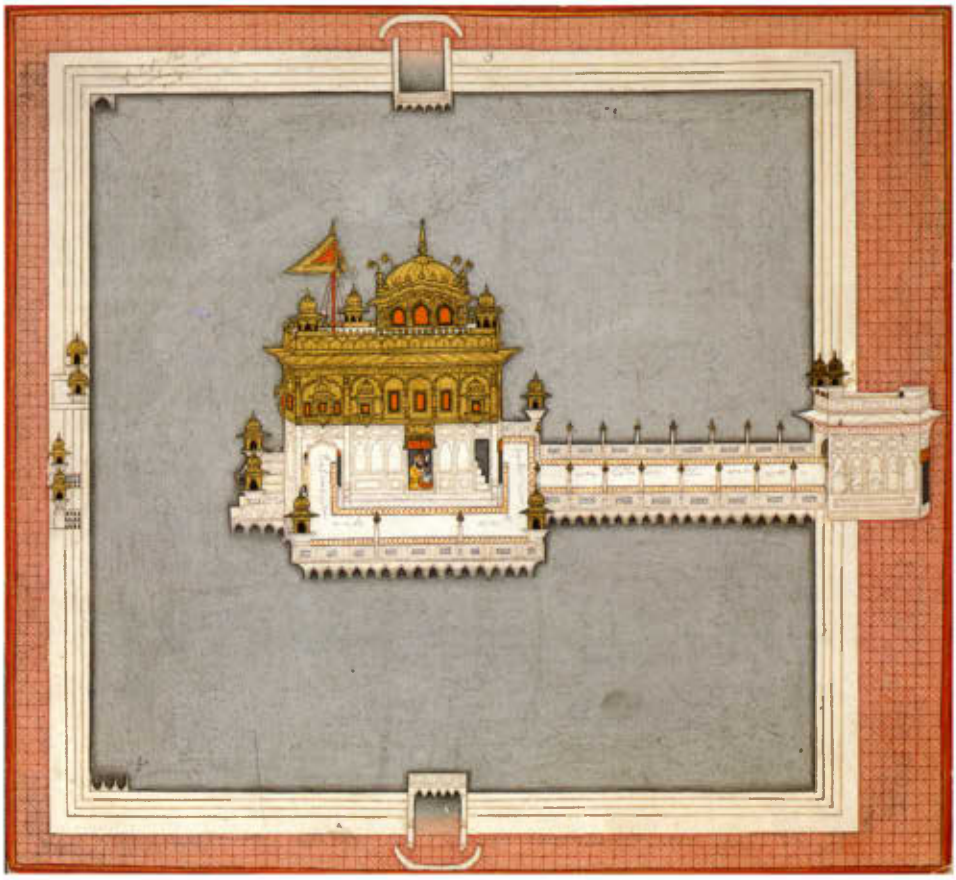

Plate 42 'The Golden Temple, Amritsar', by Amritsar artist, nineteenth century, opaque watercolours on paper, 24.8 × 27.6cm (Kapany Collection)

PART II Literature

CHAPTER 5

The Unstruck Melody

Musical mysticism in the Scripture

GOBIND SINGH MANSUKHANI

God is formless, infinite, indefinable, ineffable; beyond time, space and circumstance. How then can humanity apprehend Him? Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism (Figure 88), provides the answer in the opening hymn of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book.

> The truthful Lord, His Name is eternal;
> The way to communicate with Him is intense love . . .
> Sing, listen to his praises with inner love.
>
> (Japji, GGS 1)[1]

In Sikhism, music is the chief mode of worship. Music is prayer, is high mass, is meditation and offering. It is praise of God and His attributes and is called *kirtan* from the word *kirat* meaning 'praise'. Kirtan is our thanksgiving for the bountiful gifts of the Infinite. It is also known as *sabad-kirtan*, literally 'word-praise'. *Sabad* is the primal sound, the holy Name, the 'unstruck melody', pervading the universe and resonating within each of us. It is the Divine Revelation which can free us from vice and sorrow and unite us with God.

Figure 88 'Guru Nanak, Mardana and Bhai Bala on Balcony', nineteenth century, 21.5 × 18 cm (Kapany Collection)

Divine music is heard in every soul,
Resonant, continuous, self-sustained, a revelation;
Few are the saints who are granted this understanding;
Nanak says, release from bondage comes through
contemplating the Word;
Forget not the Holy Name.

(GGS 62)

The Sikh Gurus and the Hindu and Muslim saints whose verses comprise the Guru Granth Sahib heard the divine music within themselves and were overwhelmed by love and longing for union with the Supreme Reality. To express this intense yearning, they composed songs full of emotive imagery that evoked their sad plight of separation from God and invoked his Grace for a sweet vision of Him. A stanza from one of their songs is also referred to as *sabad*.

O God, my breath, flesh and soul belong to You,
I am deeply attached to You,
Nanak, the poet, says this:
You are the sustainer of all life.

(GGS 660)

This was the great contribution of the Gurus and other saints whose works were included in the Guru Granth Sahib: their divinely inspired songs and their declaration of the supremacy of kirtan for direct access to God.

In this dark age, kirtan is supreme
but it must be done with concentration.

(GGS 1075)

The poet–saint, Kabir, whose poetry is included in the Guru Granth Sahib declared kirtan as prayer and devotion:

People consider my poems as songs,
Know that they are meditations on the Divine.

(GGS 335)

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru, emphasized it as *the* spiritual practice that would take us from fear of death into the light of God:

Know that he who sings the praise of God
Thereby practises all religious duties.
He who within a day or night
contemplates God even for a moment,
loses, O Nanak, all fear of death
and illumines his life and self.

(GGS 902)

THE KIRTAN OF GURU NANAK

Even before he began his preaching tours, while he was working in Sultanpur as storekeeper for a Muslim nobleman, Guru Nanak would go each morning with his Muslim companion Mardana to sit in the woods and perform kirtan for two or three hours. Such was the importance that he gave to kirtan; it was the first thing to do each day, the most important duty (Figure 89).

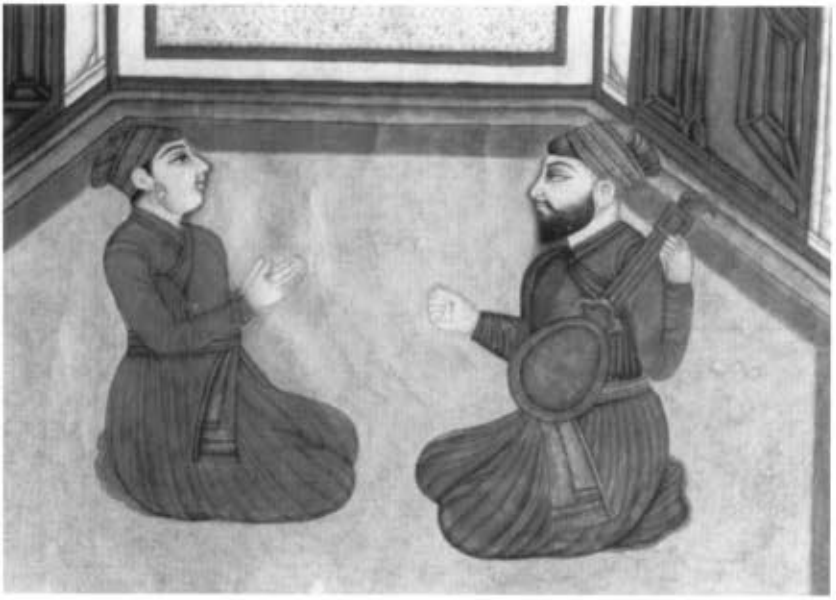

Figure 89 Detail of Mardana and Bhai Bala from 'Guru Nanak's meeting with Salas Rai, the Jeweller', Janam Sakhi, Unbound Set (Kapany Collection)

Kirtan was also a powerful means by which Guru Nanak conveyed God's message to the masses.

> The minstrel [Nanak] disseminates the Divine Revelation
> through ambrosial song,
> Nanak says, through imbibing the praise of Truth
> the Truth has been attained.
>
> (GGS 150)

The sincerity and sweetness of Guru Nanak's music appealed to the minds of his listeners and transcended religious barriers. In the Janam Sakhis, the stories of Guru Nanak's life (see Chapter 2), there is an account of the Guru and Mardana visiting Baghdad where they performed their usual early morning kirtan. This affronted a group of orthodox Muslims who descended upon them, led by their *pir* (spiritual master) and armed with stones. But as the Muslims approached, the gentle strains of sacred music soothed their hearts and they said to themselves, 'This is something sweet, how have we come to attack this man?' The pir took up the matter with the Guru, saying that the Qur'an banned music and this was

a land of the Qur'an. Guru Nanak argued that the art of music is itself neutral and can provide both good and bad music; the Qur'anic ban is intended for coarse and obscene songs that can turn us to immorality, whereas sacred music can soften our hearts and minds and turn them to God. Kirtan is a spiritual dish, spiritual nourishment. In this account, the Muslims are convinced by Guru Nanak that sacred music can transform humans into holy people.[2]

There are a number of other stories from the Janam Sakhis in which we also hear of the power of his music. It opened the eyes of Sajjan Thug to the enormity of his crimes in enticing travelers to his inn to rob and murder them, it won the heart of Koda the Cannibal and it made virtuous maidens of the dancing damsels of Sri Lanka, deliberately sent to tempt the Guru. In all these stories, the emphasis is on how the gentle vibrations of holy music can overcome anger and ego and wash away the inner pollution of dark souls. As Guru Nanak and his successors declared, everyone has the divine spark within them:

> Your light is in all creation, you are that light;
> Your radiance shines in all creation.
>
> (GGS 13)

> O self, you are an image of the Divine Light,
> Realize your own exalted origin.
> O self, the Lord is ever beside you,
> Listen to the Holy Master's teaching and you may live in bliss.
>
> (GGS 441)

THE DIVINE BRIDEGROOM

Sikhism teaches that the divine spark within each of us needs to be kindled and strengthened through *sadhana* (spiritual effort) and kirtan. It is this that transforms the personality, arousing feelings of peace, hope and joy, while intensifying the longing for God. Such longing is echoed in the most intimate love we know, the love and communion between husband and wife, the closest experience on earth to the state of union ultimately possible with the Divine. So it is that the Guru says, 'I am the wife of the Lord. The Lord is my spouse and master' (GGS 1164).

The blending of the mystical with the experiences of human love and of the natural world are seen at their finest in Guru Nanak's musical and poetic

masterpiece, *Barah-mah*, the song of the twelve months. In this hymn, the seasonal cycle of nature follows the moods of the pilgrim-soul in her journey to union with God. 'Here the devotee-bride goes through periods of calm and storm, hope of union and a state of separation in the different months and seasons of the year. Ultimately after great suffering and delay which test her endurance, she is able to unite with the Lord.'[3]

The year begins with Chet (March/April), the spring season, but for the devoted spouse, it is a period of separation from the Lord.

> The koel calls in the mango groves
> Her note is full of joy
> But there is sorrow in my soul.
>
> (GGS 1107)

Baisakh (April/May) is deeply disappointing for the waiting beloved who remains alone. The spring season is followed by the summer, Jeth and Asadh (June and July), with its scorching heat which increases her thirst for divine union. Then comes the rainy season – Sawan and Bhadon (August and September) – when everything becomes lush and green, but the lovelorn young woman is now weak and fearful.

> The lightning strikes terror in my heart,
> I stand alone in my courtyard in solitude and sorrow.
>
> (GGS 1108)

Then comes Assu (October/November), the season of autumn, but still the beloved must wait for her fortune:

> It is trysting time, O Lord
> And I have waited long.

After Katak comes Poh (December/January) with its cold, mist and snow:

> Winter frost does freeze the sap in tree and bush,
> So does the absence of the Lord.
>
> (GGS 1108)

Then the wheel of seasons turns full circle and it is Phalgun (February/March). 'The bride has forgotten herself in the contemplation of the beloved Spouse. Her suffering is now to end for the Lord is pleased with her patience.'[4]

When he wanted me I went
With garlands and jewels and finery,
O Nanak, a bride welcomed in the Master's mansion
Found her true Lord and Home.

(GGS 1109)

THE STAGES OF KIRTAN: CLEANSING, RESONANCE, UNION

The longing for God expressed in sacred songs such as *Barah-mah* leads to the longing to hear the songs because it is through them that union with God is experienced. Guru Ram Das insisted on continuous kirtan in his court, one group of singers following another. Once, when the next group had been delayed in reaching the court, the Guru composed a song on the spot to express his intense hunger for kirtan:

How long will they take to find the bells and cymbals?
How long to tune the rebec?
Of course some time will be lost.
Meantime, I must sing the Holy Name;
Without the Lord, I cannot live even a moment,
Like the fish that gasps dying for lack of water . . .
Meantime, my mind shall hum praise of the Lord.

(GGS 368)

But how does kirtan work and bear fruit? It is possible to understand the process in three stages: (1) initial impact and cleansing, (2) resonance and illumination, (3) ecstasy, union, God-realization.

Initial impact and cleansing

The initial impact of kirtan may begin as *kan-rasa*, literally 'pleasure of the ears'. We are charmed by the sweet notes and the rhythms of the tabla. In addition we begin to feel, *man-rasa*, that is, 'pleasure of the mind'. At this level of initial impact, kirtan cleanses the mind of its darkness and lower passions.

Whoever chants or listens to kirtan, their dark thoughts vanish
All wishes are fulfilled and hope is strengthened.

(GGS 683)

Singing, listening to Kirtan with a devoted mind
Removes sorrow and brings great joy to humanity.
(GGS 2)

However, it is not enough to come to the gurudwara and see who else has come and who has not while we float on the surface of the music. We need to dive deep into the ocean of the *Gurbani* (Guru's hymns) to pick out the pearls that lie in the depths. We must be receptive, 'Close down all the doors, so that the celestial music starts', that is, close all our senses and concentrate on the *sabad*, so we can hear it resonating within ourselves.

Resonance and illumination

After cleansing comes *dhuni*, a word frequently used in the Scripture to refer to the echo or resonance of the sacred music within oneself. It is the recall of the music by the mind. We pick up the tunes and the words of the hymn which have appealed to us and begin to sing them to ourselves. Like musicians tuning their instruments, we tune the vibrations of our minds to the kirtan. The resonance of melody and rhythm becomes so strong that it holds the mind steadfast. In this way, the mind is being trained and channeled toward calm and repose. The more the mind is in tune, the greater the effect of the music, reinforced by the sabad (stanza). Such experience when frequently repeated brings one to the state of *sahaj* or divine bliss. Through the veil of melody and devotion comes a glimpse of joy and inner satisfaction. The Guru says:

When the consciousness awakens to the melody of the
sabad within,
The mind in the body is detached from worldly pleasures,
The mind is attuned to the True Name.
Devotion to God brings bliss through the Guru's shabad;
the Name tastes sweet and one is absorbed in it.
(GGS 907)

We seek to hear more and more of the kirtan because it is satisfying an inner need, not only creating a sense of peace but giving a purpose and direction to life. As the Gurus tell us, it imprints 'God on the tablet of our mind' so that we can 'rise to a new life'.

Ecstasy, union, God-realization

The final stage in kirtan is when our consciousness merges with the Supreme Reality. The Guru calls it *surat-sabad-da-mel* (union of consciousness with God). We lose our sense of separation and isolation and unite with the Infinite:

> From the melody of the holy music comes meditation,
> From meditation comes realization,
> Such is the inexpressible secret of the divinely enlightened.
> (GGS 879)

The cosmic 'unstruck melody' (sabad) is heard through the kirtan:

> Then the blissful strain creates unstruck music,
> And through the spiritual experience of shabad, one realizes the Pure Lord.
> (GGS 1042)

MYSTICISM AND MUSICAL TECHNIQUE

The Gurus were expert in blending their poetic compositions with the *ragas* (musical scales) that would best match and amplify their thoughts and words. The Gurus whose works are collected in the Guru Granth Sahib (the first five and ninth Gurus), had the same message and the same philosophy; like the rainbow, their ragas and rhythms are of different colors, but they rise as a single arch of divine praise.

Every raga has its appropriate *rasa*, ethos and mood, as well as the time of day and/or year to which it is connected. Singing a Guru's hymn in the raga prescribed for it is essential; otherwise the song will not create the feeling that the Guru intended to produce in the mind of the singer and listeners. For example, in raga Basant which is specially suited for the spring season, Guru Nanak uses the image of the blossoming tree to evoke the eternal spring of a life of holiness and meditation.

> The virtuous deeds are the tree, God's Name its branches,
> Faith its flowers and divine knowledge its fruit,
> Attainment of God is its foliage and effacing the ego its shade. . . .
> Nanak says, they who by the Guru's grace merge into God, wither not and remain ever green.
> (GGS 1168)

Guru Arjan also liked the Basant raga as an appropriate expression of joy and fulfilment:

> For him [the devotee], there is ever the spring season
> within whose heart the Name abides;
> In his home is the eternal spring.
>
> (GGS 1180)

Guru Amar Das regarded Sri raga as appropriate for ridding the mind of *maya* (worldly attachment) and leading to the path of Truth. He said:

> Sri raga is supreme if hearing it produces love of the Lord,
> The truth resides in the heart and makes it steady.
>
> (GGS 83)

Guru Ram Das considered the extremely devotional mood of Sorath raga compatible with the mood of the spouse (soul) in her search for God, He wrote:

> Sorath is pleasing should she [the devotee] seek the Holy Name;
> She should adore the exalted Master and utter the Guru's word.
>
> (GGS 642)

For Guru Arjan, the Maru raga, associated with the late afternoon, death and war, was an aid in subduing the major vices of lust, anger, greed, worldly attachment and pride, and in promoting holiness:

> Through the Guru's Word, one contemplates the Holy Name with
> love and becomes detached.
> When one overwhelms the five enemies [vices], O Nanak, then Maru
> raga becomes fruitful.
>
> (GGS 1425)

Guru Tegh Bahadur contributed a new raga called Jaijawanti to the Sikh scripture. This melodic pattern is associated with the winter season and hence the evening of life. The Guru mentions the need to remember God's Name because human life is fleeting and uncertain:

> The body is like a hail shower, it melts quickly.
> Shed all your doubts and sing God's Name.
>
> (GGS 1352)

The Tukhari raga, with its *komal* (low) N, and *teevan* (high) G and M notes and its association with the optimism of the early morning, was prescribed by Guru

Nanak to echo the faithful mood of the devoted bride of the Lord in Barahmah (quoted earlier).

Nothwithstanding the Gurus' reverence for, and contribution to, Indian classical music, they also regarded folk music as important, for it was loved by the masses, particularly the rural people. There are hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib which do not require a knowledge of Indian classical music; they are to be sung according to the *taraz* (tunes) of popular *vars* (ballads). There are twenty-two vars in the Scripture, of which nine have prescribed tunes and the rest can be sung in any popular tune. The most important of these is *Asa-di-var*, the Ballad of Hope which is based on the story of King Asraj and illustrates the victory of good over evil. At times, the Gurus mixed styles of the *bhajan* and *kafi*, Hindu and Muslim devotional music respectively, thereby achieving a catholicity of style in which music is a shared and vital source of spiritual development.

It is said that on one occasion Guru Arjan's musicians refused to perform kirtan for personal reasons. So, the Guru told the *sangat* (congregation) to sing *Gurbani* in folk tunes or in *Jotian-de-sabad* where one leads and everyone else repeats the refrain. Thereafter chorus singing became popular with congregations. We have on record the report of an English traveller, Charles Wilkins, who in 1781 attended the gurudwara in Patna:

> An old man began to chant to the tune with the drum and the cymbals, and at the conclusion of every verse, most of the congregation joined chorus in a response, with countenances exhibiting great marks of joy.[5]

To achieve a fusion of the mystical and the musical requires more than just the appropriate melodic and rhythmic elements. The qualities necessary in the *kirtaniya*, the singer-musician, were enumerated by Guru Arjan:

> The Lord's singer should convey his love of God and sing only praise of the Supreme Reality;
> He shows the way to God that pervades all His creation.
> Such a musician deserves recognition for
> His praise of God without attachment to worldly goods.
> His musical instruments should remind one of the five virtues;[6]
> His seven notes should be steps on the path to God's Love;
> His drone note should be the renunciation of pride, and a guard against the crooked path [discordant note];
> Decorating his waist-cloth with the Holy Name, he should beware of the circle of transmigration;

He should feel the presence of God within himself, and
Forget sorrows like the echo of his musical instruments. . . .
Only one who is pleasing to the Lord will sing the Lord's praise as a devoted servant of the congregation.

(GGS 885)

The mystique of the music of the Guru Granth Sahib is irresistible and full of surprises, for, in their search for new ways to communicate spiritual uplift to the people, the Gurus constantly stretched the possibilities of the raga. Though we have collected and notated many of the *rag-ritees* (traditional styles of singing), we have not been able to identify the basis or the system of classification of thirty-one ragas used in the Scripture. Moreover, the ragas are different from *rag-mala*, the index of ragas, given at the end of the Guru Granth Sahib. We have very few works on the music of Guru Granth Sahib, though we have many musicians and singers who follow their own styles of gurbani-kirtan. There has been some experimenting with gurbani-kirtan in *kheyal* (a meter of Indian classical music)[7] and with Western instruments. For example, a new type of kirtan is performed by American Sikhs, with string band music giving it a vital and resonant harmony. Electronic keyboards and synthesizers have also come into play.

This sort of internationalization of kirtan and its performance may make it more accessible to Western audiences. However, there are many questions from our own musical heritage that remain unanswered and much research that needs to be done on the styles of music prevalent in the times of the Gurus. The ocean of Granthian music still needs its explorers who may be able to dive deep into Gurbani and pick out the pearls of forgotten tunes and rhythms.

Notes

1 GGS indicates Guru Granth Sahib, followed by the page number.

2 G.S. Mansukhani, *Indian Classical Music and Sikh Kirtan*, Oxford and IBH, Delhi, 1982, p. 92.

3 Balkar Singh (ed.), *Essential Postulates of Sikhism*, Guru Nanak Commemorative Lectures Series 1982 & 1985, Publication Bureau, Punjabi Univeristy, Patiala, 1988, p. 13.

4 K.R.S. Iyengar, (ed.), *Guru Nanak: A Homage*, Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, 1973, p. 267.

5 *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 1, 1788, 'On the Sikhs and their College at Patna', Wilson Jones (ed.) Oriental Book Distributors, p. 290.

6 Righteousness, contentment, patience, compassion, humility.

7 Satbir Singh (ed.), *Aduti Gurmat Sangeet Samellan*, Sriman Sant Baba Sucha Singh Ji, Gur Gian Prakash Sahib Ji, Ludhiana, 1991, p. 50.

CHAPTER 6

The Western Gateway to Sikhism

The life and works of Max Arthur Macauliffe

HARBANS LAL

One of the first Sikhs to speak and write about his religion in English was the Irishman Max Arthur Macauliffe (1841–1913) (Figure 90). His monumental six-volume work is the most cited text on Sikhism in the English language.

While posted in the Punjab with the Indian Civil Service in the 1860s, Macauliffe often visited the Golden Temple in Amritsar. There, he heard the hymns of the Gurus that sparked his interest in the Sikh faith and ultimately led him to adopt it as his religion. In his lifetime Macauliffe wrote with great insight on Sikh theology and traditions, communicating it to the Western world while also contributing to the Sikh community's own understanding and reform of its faith. His seminal work, *The Sikh Religion, Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*, published in six volumes in 1909 by the Oxford University Press, was the catalyst of Western scholars' interest in Sikh studies. It has been in print ever since and is essential reading for all scholars of Sikhism.

The translation of the Sikh holy book included in these volumes was undertaken by Macauliffe with the participation of Sikh *gyanis* (preachers) and scholars and was the first English translation of the Guru Granth Sahib to be accepted by the community. It established the Sikh scripture as a world scripture. It remains a classic translation.

As well as this *magnum opus*, over nearly forty years, Macauliffe published widely in scholarly journals of East and West, and spoke before gatherings of scholars

Figure 90 M.A. Macauliffe. Photograph courtesy of Dr Molinder Singh, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, National Institute of Punjab Studies, New Delhi

in India, Italy, France and England. According to N.G. Barrier, Macauliffe stressed two themes throughout his writing: the heroism inherent in the Sikh tradition, and the distinct nature of Sikhism as a world religion. Macauliffe presented Guru Nanak as the founder of a new and important religious system.[1]

Fauja Singh considers Macauliffe's writings significant for two reasons. First, he demonstrated an ability to tell a good story, to describe and interpret events and complex issues in the evolution of Sikhism in a clear and highly readable fashion. Second, his interpretations generally reflected the intellectual currents around him. Macauliffe endeavored to relate Sikhism to the Western public as a religion very relevant to their own life and aspirations. Following the tradition set by Guru Nanak, who often bridged gaps in argument with an analogy, Macauliffe drew parallels between key doctrines and critical historical junctures in Sikhism, and Western history, religion and metaphysics.[2]

Macauliffe was born on September 10, 1841, at Newcastle West, Limerick Country, Ireland. He was educated at Newcastle School and then at Springfield College and Queen's College, Galway, studying the Greek and Latin classics as

well as French and Italian literature. In 1862, he was selected for the Indian Civil Service and in 1864 he was assigned to the State of Punjab. Within eight years of taking up the post, he was promoted to the rank of Deputy Commissioner of the district of Ferozpur and, two years later in 1884, became a Divisional Judge of the district. Born into Protestant Christianity in predominantly Catholic Ireland, he converted to an Indian religion which had a similar protestant history and relationship with the dominant religion and priesthood.

Macauliffe practised the Sikh faith as a *sahjdhari* Sikh, not taking on the external code of dress and hair.[3] With his indisputable sincerity and love of the *gurbani* (Gurus' hymns), he was accepted and welcomed by the community as a member of the *sangat* (congregation). From its earliest days, Macauliffe was among the leaders of *Singh Sabha*, the Sikh reform movement, founded in the mid-1870s, which sought to expose contemporary Sikhism's degeneration into dogma and ritualistic practices and to formulate and disseminate a more authentic Sikh spirituality and way of life.

In 1893, Macauliffe resigned from his highly paid position as district judge to undertake full-time research, translation and writing on Sikhism. His home during the 1890s at 2 Cantonment Road, Amritsar was described by Professor Harbans Singh as 'a school of divinity where theological discussion and literary and linguistic hair-splitting went on all the time'.

THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CLIMATE

Macauliffe lived during the period of Sikh revival when the Sikhs were struggling to emerge from their infancy as a faith, to communicate their theology to the wider world, and to found institutions that would ensure the stability and growth of the faith. They were doing so in an age of shifting political sands. The British rulers maintained power through a highly effective practice of divide and rule; a reward system for favors created pockets of influence in the local population. Religion was a useful tool in this; when all else was uncertain, people clung to faiths that promised peace and prosperity on this earth and a place with their deity in heaven. In the Punjab, local leaders scrabbling to be a pocket of influence were often aided by corrupt Sikh religious leaders who claimed descent from the Gurus and possession of a special message from them to the people. To increase their power, these 'holy men' were happy to collaborate with the politicians even if it meant robbing their followers.

For illustration of this religious and political climate, we need only recall that even the most valuable heritage of the Sikhs, *Kartarpur Bir*, the original manuscript

of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, was presented as a personal gift to a petty British officer in return for meager favors. Sadhu Singh Sodhi who had possession of the holy book had earlier refused to give it to Maharaja Ranjit Singh yet offered to present it to a British officer for shipment to England. There, John Lawrence, the representative of the British Viceroy, was to receive the gift and present the manuscript to the India Office Library in London. Fortunately for the Sikhs this tragedy was averted, ironically by the British-appointed translator of the Guru Granth Sahib, Dr Ernest Trumpp, who wanted the original volume for his translation work. He succeeded in preventing the shipment at Calcutta Harbor and the volume was returned to the Punjab.

An editorial in the December 15, 1904, edition of the Sikh weekly, *Khalsa Advocate*, summed up the state of nineteenth-century Sikhism thus:

> false gurus grew up in abundance whose only business was to fleece their flock and pamper their own self-aggrandizement. Properly speaking, there was no Sikhism. Belief in the Gurus was gone. The idea of brotherhood in the Panth was discarded. . . . Sikhs were engulfed in superstition and idolatry. . . . The Sikh tradition had thus lost all that was good and life-giving in the faith.

The community was frustrated and confused. It was eager to support new movements that would define its faith and history in the context of the Gurus' teachings, modern logic, and new challenges of the time; and would carve a place for the Gurus' doctrine in the world community. This was the vaccum that was waiting to be filled, and many talented and committed revivalists did emerge in the fields of Sikh history, theology, literature, social and religious reforms.

In 1873, Singh Sabha, a milestone movement in Sikh history was founded at Amritsar with a rival Singh Sabha starting at Lahore in 1879. Distinguished leaders of the movement included Professor Gurmukh Singh (1849–98), Bhagat Lakshman Singh (1863–1944), Bhai Jawahir Singh (1859–1910), Gyani Dit Singh (1853–1901), Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha (1861–1938) and the Irishman, Max Arthur Macauliffe. The Singh Sabha leaders undertook extensive projects to identify the religious and moral practices traceable to Sri Guru Granth Sahib and to traditions that had evolved directly under the ten Gurus. They were vigorous in their determination to cast out any belief or practice that did not have these as a point of reference.

However, with one exception all of them were from the north-western region of the Indian subcontinent and did not possess knowledge of foreign languages or culture. Macauliffe was the timely exception who could interpret the Sikh

heritage in English language for the Western world and for those in the East who were increasingly coming under the influence of English as their language of instruction and scholarship, and of even of daily use. His first paper, 'Diwali at Amritsar' appeared in the *Calcutta Review* in 1875 and from then onwards he wrote prolifically. Thus, Macauliffe was part and parcel of the Singh Sabha movement from its early days and fulfilled an important need.

Along with his fellow reformers, Macauliffe was very concerned about the impact of the dominant Hindu culture on Sikhism and was vehement in expressing his opposition to it:

> Hinduism is like the boa constrictor of the Indian forests. When a petty enemy appears to worry it, it winds around its opponent, crushes it in its folds and finally causes it to disappear in its capacious interior. Sikhism may go this way. Brahmins and Sikhs mix today. Brahmins help Sikhs to be born, help them to wed, help them to die, and help their souls after death to obtain the state of bliss. Brahmins, with all the deafness of the Roman Catholic missionaries in Protestant countries, have partially succeeded in persuading the Sikhs to restore to their niches the images of Devi, the Queen of Heaven, and the saints and gods of their ancient faith.[4]

Sikhism in danger remained a theme in Macauliffe's intellectual development, as it did in many undertakings of Singh Sabha leaders of that time. His solution was to take Sikhism to the educated people of the West:

> I am not without hope that when enlightened nations become acquainted with the merits of the Sikh religion, they will not willingly let it perish in the great abyss in which so many creeds have been engulfed.[5]

Macauliffe presented Sikhism as a distinct religion and a universal ethical system akin to that of Christianity in the West.

> We have seen that Sikhism prohibits idolatry, hypocrisy, caste exclusiveness, the co-cremation of widows, the immurement of women, the use of wine and other intoxicants, tobacco-smoking, infanticide, slander, pilgrimages to sacred rivers and tanks of Hindus, and it inculcates loyalty, gratitude, truth, honesty, and all the moral and domestic virtues known to the holiest Christians.[6]

With a reformer's zeal, Macauliffe did not turn a blind eye when it might have been convenient for all concerned. He condemned the practice of Sikh leaders joining their British colleagues or negotiators for a drink during their meetings,

and of Sikhs drinking among themselves. For example, according to the minutes of the Khalsa College Managing Committee meetings, wine was served during the breaks. Macauliffe persuaded the Singh Sabha Amritsar, the most influential Sikh body of the time, to pass a resolution condemning drinking as an evil.

Macauliffe was also acutely aware of the importance of promoting and taking pride in the Sikh inheritance. According to fellow activist, Bhagat Lakshman Singh, it was at Macauliffe's urging that the Lahore Sikhs celebrated the 1899 bicentenary of the appointment of the *Khalsa Panth*, the sacred Sikh Community, as the heir of the Guru.[7] (It is this tradition that Sikhs around the world are preparing to celebrate again in 1999.) Macauliffe himself contributed 100 rupees to cover expenses. He had hoped that his scriptural translation and biographies of the Gurus and saints – his ultimate promotion and expression of pride in his faith – would be ready for publication in 1899 but the rigorous demands of communal scholarship delayed publication another nine years.

THE FIRST TRANSLATION

After annexing the former Sikh state of the Punjab in 1849, the British realized they would have to deal with the Sikhs for a long time to come. Shrewd conquerors, they sought to understand the Sikh character.[8] During the mutiny of 1857, the Governor-General of India asked the Chief Commissioner of the Punjab to have the Sikh scriptures translated. It took thirteen years to locate an English-speaking scholar cognizant of the many languages used in the Granth Sahib and willing to undertake this Herculean task.

In 1870, the German missionary and linguist, Dr Ernest Trumpp, was recruited for the job. After completing his theological studies at the University of Tübingen in 1848, Trumpp had undertaken linguistic studies in France, Italy and then England where he taught Latin and German before returning to Germany to enter the service of the German Missionary Society. In 1854, he visited Karachi to carry out linguistic researches. Here, he learned Sindhi, Hindi and Sanskrit. He visited Palestine for a brief time to learn Arabic. In 1862, he proceeded to Peshawar to learn Pashto and Persian for eighteen months. Later he was appointed to the Chair of Semitic Language and Literature at the University of Munich.

Trumpp moved to Lahore in Pakistan to translate the Guru Granth Sahib. Although Trumpp called the Guru Granth Sahib 'the treasure of the old Hindu dialects', he also described it as 'incoherent and shallow in the extreme and couched in dark and perplexing language hardly expected of any attraction of its study'.[9] His superficial knowledge of the languages of the Guru Granth Sahib –

mistaking Sanskrit words for Persian or Arabic and vice versa – ignorance of the faith, missionary bias, and the arrogance he displayed in habits such as smoking while working with the holy book, insulted the Sikhs.[10] It was Macauliffe who brought this last matter to the attention of the Sikh *sangat* and also wrote to the British authorities to complain.[11]

With his attitudes and habits, it was not surprising that Trumpp received no help from the Sikh gyanis (religious teachers). After seven years, having completed one-fourth of the translation, he fell ill and gave up the project in despair. Publication of Trumpp's partial translation of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib in 1877 aroused widespread protest in the Sikh community and among many scholars. As a result, the translation was withdrawn although a reprint is now available from Oriental Publishers.

THE MACAULIFFE TRANSLATION

The Trumpp episode alarmed the Sikh community and raised questions about the motivation and ability of foreigners to assist them in translating their teachings into English. No published commentaries were available for help; the exposition of Sri Guru Granth Sahib had come down by word-of-mouth through gyanis and from the Udasi and Nirmala sects, two Sikh sects known for carrying the scholarship of Guru Granth.[12] But while gyanis remained reluctant to deliver texts or any other help to writers who would try their hand at fathoming the meaning of the Gurus' word, Sikh intellectuals were in no mood to humor fears which they believed were holding back the recognition and development of the Sikh faith. In 1877, the year that Trumpp's translation was published, Maharaja Bikram Singh of Faridkot appointed a syndicate of Sikh scholars to prepare a commentary on the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

It was in these circumstances that Macauliffe became the man that the Sikh community recruited for the very highest level of service. Nevertheless, although Macauliffe was researching and writing throughout the 1880s, it was some time before his translation of the Scripture finally rumbled into life as an official Sikh project. In May 1893, the Singh Sabha of Ferozpur wrote to Macauliffe urging him to persuade the British government to assign him to fully translate the Guru Granth Sahib as they had Dr Trumpp. The Khalsa Divan, a major Sikh organization of the time, voiced a similar request on behalf of the Sikh community whose intelligentsia was learning and using the English language with increasing frequency.

Macauliffe accepted their invitation. He was quite frank about the motivation. 'One of the main objects of the present work is to endeavor to make some

reparation to the Sikhs for the insult which he [Trumpp] offered to their Gurus and their religion.'[13] Far from assisting with the project, the British government was cool to the idea and began to distance itself from Macauliffe. The responsibility lay with the Sikh community; full support, both moral and financial, was promised by the Khalsa Divan, local gurudwaras, the Sikh clergy and Sikh princes. Raja Bikram Singh of Faridkot assured Macauliffe of his salary for six months. Financial help also came from Raja Hira Singh of Nabha, Maharaja Rajinder Singh of Patiala, Raja Ranbir Singh of Jind, Tikka Ripduman Singh of Nabha, Sardar Ranjit Singh of Chachhrauli and the Gaekawar of Baroda.

Macauliffe had also lost a large fortune in commercial investments but nevertheless, with his faith in the Guru, the assurance of the Sikh community and a half-hearted assurance from the British government to provide a grant, he resigned from his job in 1893.

Macauliffe knew that the project was a lifetime commitment but he was willing to give up his career, his comforts, the religion of his forefathers, his British friends and whatever was in his possession for his mission. He said, 'I bring from the East what is practically an unknown religion. The Sikhs are distinguished throughout the world as a great military people, but there is little known even to professional scholars regarding their religion.'[14] He also said:

> All persons of discrimination acquainted with the Sikhs set a high value on them, but it appears that a knowledge throughout the world of the excellence of their religion would enhance even the present regard with which they are entertained, and that my work would be at least of political advantage to them.[15]

Macauliffe undertook to master the languages used in the Guru Granth Sahib, studying Sanskrit, Prakrit, Arabic, Persian, Marathi, Gujarati and the different dialects of Punjabi. His studies also included the works of the Hindu and Muslim saints whose compositions had been included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. During this time, for his biographies of the ten Gurus, he read all volumes of *Suraj Parkash* and the *Gur Bilas*, the two most comprehensive Sikh history treatises available at that time. He was always conscious of the fact that Trumpp had produced a translation that was unacceptable to Sikhs. He was also sensitive to the profound difficulties of translating poetry not only across language but across time and culture. 'Literal translation of words without coming to terms with the milieu in which they were written often left faulty and imperfect impressions for those unacquainted with Sikhism.'[16]

Macauliffe exhibited humility and caution in claiming authority in Sikh history, language or scriptural studies. According to Professor Harbans Singh, he sought the guidance and opinion of every Sikh scholar or clergyman available. He moved to 2 Cantonment Road in Amritsar to avail himself of the material and talent at the center of Sikh activities. He frequently visited Nabha and spent summers in Mussoorie and Dehra Dun, retreats in the Himalayas visited by scholars during summer to avoid the heat of the Punjab plains and work on their projects uninterrupted.

Contrary to the lack of co-operation shown to Trumpp, Sikh scholars made themselves freely available to Macauliffe, and he developed deep and continuing contacts. The ruler of Nabha spared the services of his foreign minister, Bhai Kahan Singh, and other aides. The most learned scholar of the day, Bhai Kahan Singh was versed in the languages of the Scriptures and English. Other leading scholars of the Scriptures who gave their full support included Bhai Dit Singh, Hazara Singh, Sardul Singh and Sant Singh. Macauliffe also remained in active contact with Bhai Fateh Singh, Bhai Darbara Singh, Bhai Bhagwan Singh of Patiala and Bhai Dasaundha Singh of Ferozpur. Help also came from the Sanskrit scholars such as Bhagat Balmokand.

Macauliffe went so far as to advertise in Sikh newspapers inviting all whom it might concern to visit him, inspect and, if necessary, correct the translation. He sent his work-in-progress to Sikh scholars all over India and abroad with a request that they should provide critical suggestions. He also sought criticism from friends in the Udasi and in non-Sikh traditions.

These conscientious efforts resulted not only in letters of constructive critique but also of appreciation of his work. Divan Leila Ram, Subordinate Judge at Hydrabad, Sindh, wrote that he had gone through more than twenty-five translations of the Japji, the opening hymn of the Guru Granth Sahib, some in English and others in Persian, Urdu, modern Punjabi, Hindi and so on, but none of them matched Macauliffe's translation in accuracy and quality. Professor Max Mueller, the great German scholar and editor of the ground-breaking Sacred Books of the East series of English translations, was similarly appreciative.

Nevertheless, the task Macauliffe had set himself was not easy, especially with regard to the holy men; it was scarcely possible to find two gyanis who would agree on any interpretation and none knew English. Skill and tact were required to communicate with them and to decide between the rival, often contradictory, versions. Furthermore, although Macauliffe constantly sought the help of Sikh clergy, he was aware of the fact that there were few people who understood Sri Guru Granth Sahib. At the annual session of the Lahore Singh Sabha in 1886,

he had said, 'Sri Guru Granth Sabhib is matchless as a book of holy teachings but, to my regret, there are not even fifty Sikhs in the whole of the Punjab who can interpret it.'

It was sixteen years from Macauliffe's resignation from his job until his work was published. Despite the assistance of the Sikh organizations and nobility, during the first six years of his work, he incurred a debt of 35,000 rupees. This included salaries of gyanis whom he had employed. The total cost of the project was estimated in the vicinity of 200,000 rupees. The offer by the British government of the Punjab of a 5,000 rupee grant was repeated but it was rejected by Macauliffe, as it had been the first time, as an insult to his labors and the importance of his work. He added, 'Its acceptance would not be of much material advantage to me, neither would it enhance my reputation in the eyes of the Sikhs or the general public.'[17]

Macauliffe began publishing sections of his work in journals as early as 1897, and in 1900 his partial translation of the Scripture was published as *Holy Writings of Sikhs*. In 1909 the complete six volumes of *The Sikh Religion, Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors* was published by Oxford University Press. Even though it did not include the entire Scripture in translation as Macauliffe had originally planned, the work provided an unparalleled study of the lives of the Gurus, their followers and contemporaries, interspersed with extensive translations of their poetry from Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The first volume contains a lengthy introduction to Sikhism and the life and sacred verse of its founder Guru Nanak. Volume Two covers the next three Gurus, Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das and Guru Ram Das. Volume Three deals with the life and works of Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, who founded the Khalsa, built the Golden Temple and compiled the Guru Granth Sahib. Volume Four covers the lives of Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai and the martyred Guru Tegh Bahadur. Volume Five describes the life and times of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru, an essay on Banda Singh Bahadur who took over the army command from him, as well as annotations on the ragas and musical measures of the Scripture. The sixth volume provides sketches and translated poetry of the Hindu and Muslim saints whose works were included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Before its publication, Macauliffe sent a copy of the text to the seat of Sikh authority, the Golden Temple Committee. The Committee set up a review and then, at a large gathering and to tremendous ovation, the work and its translation of the sacred verses was officially accepted on behalf of the Sikh Panth. A special prayer was offered for Macauliffe.

THE FINAL YEARS

After the publication of the book, Macauliffe was shunned even more by many in the British Christian community for having 'turned Sikh'.[18] Before he returned to England where he died, he ate his meals alone in a hotel room in Rawalpindi Cantonment. In 1912, he wrote to Bhagat Lakshman Singh saying that a lobby had started working against him and the Sikhs. Singh later wrote, 'Mr Macauliffe started as a Sikh Research Scholar and died as a Sikh, boycotted by the members of his own service and race.'[19]

Although the overwhelming majority of the Sikh community approved and supported Macauliffe's efforts, as with many other Sikh leaders of the time, his relationship with certain groups within the community had not always been plain sailing. A parody he wrote about the *sardars* (Sikh landlords) of Amritsar in response to their apathy towards translating the Guru Granth, is cited as the reason for these sardars noticeably cooling towards him.[20] They were not alone; taking their cue from their British rulers and on account of jealousy with his work, others in the community also distanced themselves from Macauliffe in his last days. In 1911, the Sikh Educational Conference (SEC) held in Rawalpindi refused to sponsor a resolution commending his works. This rejection by a major association of Sikh intellectuals and educationalists of a man who had given his life to the faith was, however, rectified at the SEC's annual meeting in Ambala in 1912. The Conference overwhelmingly approved a resolution expressing approval and appreciation of Macauliffe's works, which was promoted by Bhagat Lakshman Singh and Diwan Bahadur Leela Ram Singh of Hydrabad, the Conference President and an eminent scholar.

But lack of approbation from fellow Britons or fellow Sikhs never deterred Macauliffe. To the end of his days in his West Kingston home on March 15, 1913, he remained faithful to his mission and to the Guru's hymns. Upon his death, his Punjabi Muslim servant, Mohammad, wrote in his simple English to Bhai Kahan Singh, informing him that his dear friend had passed away and adding that Macauliffe was reciting the Japji until 10 minutes before his death at 8.10 pm.[21]

According to Bhai Kahan Singh,[22] Macauliffe's death prompted a great debate within the local English community. Because he had 'turned Sikh', the town's Christians put up a resistance to Macauliffe's body being buried in the local cemetery which, they argued, was meant for Christians.

Meanwhile, the Sikh Educational Conference passed a resolution commemorating the death of Macauliffe, paying homage to his leadership in the community and stamping a seal of approval on his works. Under the leadership of Bhagat

Lakshman Singh, a Macauliffe Memorial Society was founded with the support of Sikh leaders. Sardar Bahdur Sunder Singh Majithia and Bhai Vir Singh were among those who offered their support and personally contributed to the fund. The British Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer wrote a letter of support and sent a contribution for a library in Macauliffe's name. G.A. Wathen, Principal of Khalsa College, was also listed as one of the supporters. Unfortunately, the library did not materialize although a Macauliffe Memorial Gold Medal for the best student in Sikh theology and history was instituted at the main Sikh Institute, Khalsa College, Amritsar, and continues to be awarded on an occasional basis.

THE LASTING CONTRIBUTION

Although not born on Punjabi soil or with the benefit of a Sikh upbringing, Macauliffe's contribution to the Sikh renaissance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was invaluable. His words and actions made an indelible impact on the growth of modern Sikhism. His works remain essential to any library, course of study or scholar of Sikhism.

Describing the place of Macauliffe in Sikh history and scholarship, Bhagat Lakshman Singh wrote, 'for to speak nothing of that time [of the Singh Sabha movement], even nowadays there is not one Sikh of Mr Macauliffe's learning and resources'.[23]

The Sikh writer Teja Singh described Macauliffe as among 'the best lovers of Sikhism'[24] and in an address to Macauliffe to acknowledge his great service to Sikhism, the Singh Sabha Amritsar said:

> *Akal Purakh* [the Timeless Eternal Soul] granted you the credit of performance. As the holy Guru Tegh Bahadur foretold that men would come from beyond the sea to assist the Sikhs, so you have been rendering us mental and bodily assistance.[25]

Notes

1 Barrier, N.G., 'Trumpp and Macauliffe: Western Students of Sikh History and Religion', in Fauja Singh (ed.) *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs*, Oriental Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1978, p. 177.

2 Fauja Singh (ed.) *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs*, Oriental Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1978, p. 173.

3 *Sahjdhari* Sikhs are people who have adopted Sikhism as their religion but not completely adopted the code of an *Amritdhari* (baptism by double-edged sword). Their commitment to the faith is established by their declaration and their deeds. Since 1699 when the Khalsa and the code of dress and hair were established by the tenth Guru, right through the period of the Singh Sabha (see below), there were followers of Sikhism who served the *Panth* (Community) as sahjdhari Sikhs.

4 M.A. Macauliffe, 'Religion under Bana and its Present Condition', *Calcutta Review*, CXLV, 1881, p. 168.

5 Macauliffe's lectures in Paris as quoted in *The Punjab Past and Present*, XVI–II, 1982, pp. 484–540.

6 M.A. Macauliffe, 'The Sikh Religion and its Advantages to the State', lecture at Simla c. 1903, p. 27.

7 On the day of Vaisakhi 1699, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, designated the entire Sikh community, known as the *Khalsa Panth*, as his successor, and initiated the ceremony of baptism using sweetened water sanctified with a double-edged sword and recitation of prayers.

8 See, for example, the detailed discussion of Sikhism and its political implications in *Foreign Political Affairs*, 1859, pp. 141–2; *Foreign Secret*, 1851, pp. 37–44; *Foreign Journal*, 1869, pp. 68–9W.

9 E. Trumpp, *The Adi Granth: The Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, reprint 1970.

10 Gopal Singh, *A History of the Sikh People 1469–1978*, World Sikh University Press, New York, 1979, p. 619.

11 Macauliffe's account in Government of India *Home-Books*, June 1907, 121–1A; also Macauliffe comments on Trumpp in *The Holy Writings of the Sikhs*, Allahabad, 1900, pp. 25–6.

12 *Udasis* were the followers of Guru Nanak's son, Baba Sri Chand, who continued to preach the Guru's theology without participating in the community infrastructure of the Sikhs. *Nirmalas* started with Bhai Mani Singh who founded the first Sikh seminary under the direction of Guru Gobind Singh to train scholars of Sikh scriptures.

13 Macauliffe comments in *Home Public*, August 1902, 192A.

14 Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion . . .* , Preface, p. vii.

15 Ibid., Preface, p. v 19.

16 Macauliffe comments in *Home Public*, August 1902, 192A.

17 Homage paid by the then State Government of the Punjab quoted in a personal communication from Gyani Gurdit Singh of Sri Guru Singh Sabha Shatabadi Committee, Chandigarh, 1992.

18 Bhai Kahan Singh in a letter now in the Ganda Singh Archives at Punjabi University, Patiala. Transcription provided by Professor Harbans Singh who published part of the letter in Fauja Singh (ed.), *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs*, *op. cit.*

19 Ganda Singh (ed.), *Bhagat Lakshman Singh–Autobiography*, Sikh Cultural Center, Calcutta, 1965, p. 158.
20 Gopal Singh *A History of the Sikh People, op. cit.*, p. 922.
21 Original letter in the Ganda Singh Archives at Punjabi University, Patiala.
22 Personal communication from Gyani Gurdit Singh of Sri Guru Singh Sabha Shatabadi Committee, Chandigarh, 1992.
23 Ganda Singh (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 124.
24 Teja Singh, *Guru Nanak and His Mission*, A.S. Marwaha, Los Angeles, 1969, p. 1.
25 Ibid.; Fauja Singh (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 158.

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CHAPTER 7

Poetry Urges Poetry

From the Guru Granth to Bhai Vir Singh

NIKKY-GUNINDER KAUR SINGH

When I think about the writer Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957) (Figure 91), I am reminded of the lines from the *Japji*, the opening hymn of the Guru Granth Sahib:

> Within the mind itself
> Lie all kinds of jewels, rubies and pearls.
> (*Japji*, GGS 2)[1]

This luminosity of mind is what an artist expresses – it is what a designer expresses with a pattern, what a jeweler expresses with a necklace, and it is what Bhai Vir Singh expresses with his poetry.

Mere Saian Jio (*O My Beloved*), Bhai Vir Singh's last collection of verse, was published in 1957 when he was 81 years old. Behind him lay a lifetime of writing – poetry, drama, ethical writings and, while he was still at school, the novel. In the words of Professor Harbans Singh, this last collection has 'the same deeply-felt longing of the heart and the same sensitive energy of expression as his precious Rubaiyats or haunting Kashmir poems written in the beginning of the century'.[2]

The source of Bhai Vir Singh's inspiration was the Sikh faith and the pre-eminent principle governing his literary activity was the resurrection of the Guru's message. *O My Beloved* interprets sacred themes from the Guru Granth, in a modern, secular and poetic voice. Not through commentary but through poetry

Figure 91 Bhai Vir Singh. Photograph courtesy of Dr Molinder Singh, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, National Institute of Punjab Studies, New Delhi

is the poetry of the Sikh scripture grasped. Bhai Vir Singh is, to use Emerson's analogy from *The Poet*, a glass through which later generations can see the Guru Granth Sahib in all its philosophical, spiritual, ethical and aesthetic richness.

Central to the poetry of the Guru Granth, and to that of Bhai Vir Singh as its modern exegete, is the deep longing for the Infinite One and, most importantly, the realization that this longing does not take us away from our worldly existence. On the contrary, our desire for the Divine draws us ever more deeply into our life and our relationships with our family, friends, community and the natural world. It energizes us physically, mentally and spiritually.

Poetry was Bhai Vir Singh's most natural mode of expression. His epic poem, *Rana Surat Singh*, which ran to 12,000 lines, was published in 1905. In this epic, the final stanzas of Guru Nanak's 'Japu' in the Guru Granth, which describe the realms of spiritual awareness, are symbolically and comprehensively explained by the protagonist Rani Raj Kaur as she journeys through light and radiance with a celestial female guide. Several collections of shorter poems appeared after *Rana Surat Singh*. The form of these poems was an innovation in the Punjabi literature

and they became instantly popular. While introducing new and quicker lyric tunes and measures into Punjabi prosody, the short poem also introduced new words and images.

Trel Tupke (Dew Drops) was the first collection of poems, to be followed at brief intervals by *Lehran de Har* (*Garlands of Waves*), *Bijlian de Har* (*Garlands of Lightning*), *Preet Veena* (*Veena of Love*), *Kant Maheli* (*The Year of Trysting*). An anthology of songs in praise of the Sikh Gurus was published in 1933 under the title of *Kambdi Kalai* (*The Trembling Wrist*). The last collection was *Mere Saian Jio* (*O My Beloved*). The common theme of these poetic works is the evocation, elucidation and expansion of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Let us now look at the final masterpiece and how, through the delicate beading of opposites – of tradition and modernity, proximity and distance, male and female, human and divine, emptiness and fullness – Bhai Vir Singh illuminates the Sikh scriptural message.

ONE GOD, ONE LOVE

The Sikh scripture begins with the *Ikk Oan Kar*, literally 'One Reality Is'. Transcribed as a single symbol with an open upward-reaching arch, *Ikk Oan Kar* is both the numeral one and uncircumscribable infinity. It signifies the Divine Beloved for whom the soul reaches, the source and the destination of the songs of the Guru Granth Sahib. From the opening lines of 'O My Beloved' the poet recalls the love and longing for this One Ultimate Being which is the message of the Guru Granth Sahib:

> My songs,
> My Beloved!
> Songs sung for you. . . .
> The waves rise like wind from the ocean,
> My silent voice bursts forth like the nightingale's song,
> As from a child's throat
> May the tremors reach forth
> To your Presence,
> O my Beloved.

All songs are for the Divine Beloved whose presence is ardently affirmed and desired, whose Being or Is-ness (*Kar*), is the source and the destiny of the soul. As so often in the Sikh scriptures, the soul is depicted as a young woman in love. Hers is a personal witness of Divinity. And it is imaginatively expressed; her

silent voice has burst forth like the nightingale's song. The experience is at once vast and intimate; the waves of song rise like the wind on the ocean, and like tiny tremors in a child's throat. The destination, 'Your presence, O my Beloved', may be far, as evoked by the wind on the ocean, but it is also close enough for a child's voice to call to it.

SO NEAR AND SO FAR

In the exquisitely delicate poem 'Nikki God Vic' (In the Tiny Lap), we see again this central paradox of Sikh theology: the infinitesimal and infinite nature of the Absolute One who is so very close, hidden within every form, and yet so very far, beyond the confines of time and space.

> At the touch of light today
> When the morning was beginning to stir . . .
> In the silky lap of a blossomed rose,
> You were playing my Beloved
> How, yes, how
> Did you enter that tiny lap?
> My great and vast Beloved.
>
> (BVS 195)[3]

As Guru Nanak says, 'In whatever direction I turn my eyes, I see You' (GGS 1343), and, in the words of Guru Arjan, 'Formless and yet archetypal, It takes on substances that enchant all' (GGS 287).

In 'Sadke Teri Jadugari De' (Homage to Your Wondrous Feats), this Presence that is all around is also experienced by Bhai Vir Singh's heroine deeply inside herself. Again it is a presence that is both near and far:

> In me, deep inside, deep inside somewhere
> is my Beloved hidden!
> Yes,
> You strike me with your melodious tunes,
> Touching
> My inner strings.
> They sing songs –
> Songs of separation from you, songs of anticipation
> of union with you.
> These do cast magic upon me.

I gaze all around,
Trembling, quivering. . . .
O Beloved,
Behind sight, hidden Beloved
Very near, but far, far
Far, far, but near, very near
Homage to your miracle.

(BVS 191–2)

The woman needs no logical, philosophical or moral proofs of her Beloved's existence; she knows, she feels and, therefore, she yearns for the presence (*hazuri*) of her Beloved. As in the scriptural tradition, the longing for the Beloved is itself evidence of the Beloved. We are enchanted, we feel and sense the Divine within and all around, and yet in 'Dil Saddhar' (Heart's Desire) the heroine declares 'Unfathomable, amongst the most unfathomable are you, my Love' (BVS 205). Again, Bhai Vir Singh echoes a Granthian theme:

You, the Primal Being, you are the Infinite Creator
None can fathom you.
But within each and every being you are
Equally, constantly ever.

(GGS 448)

IN BODY AND MIND

This unfathomable presence of the Beloved lyrically affirmed in 'O My Beloved' is experienced by the heroine within both her mind and her body. His single glance of benevolence (*ikk nadari*) breathes new life into her. His single beautiful gesture (*ikk naz de gamze*) fills her with fragrance.

An aroma struck the mind again,
Intoxication overtook consciousness.

(BVS 199)

An aroma, a hint from Him of the yonder, formless, intangible reality is both powerful and aesthetically pleasing; it touches her as a physical sensation and her mind becomes intoxicated with longing for Him. Body and mind are connected; there is no dualism in the desire which comes from the depth of her being. This combination of materiality and spirituality underscores the message of the Guru Granth Sahib, and finds voice in the genius of Bhai Vir Singh; the poetry is very sensual, comfortable and concrete.

With the vista of the garden as the backdrop, our young woman knows that the entire universe is dependent upon its one 'Gardener', another classic image from the Guru Granth Sahib: 'My world is the garden; my lord is its gardener; ever he guards it, leaving none without protection' (GGS 118). Through his twentieth-century protagonist, Bhai Vir Singh paraphrases this Granthian evocation of the creative and nurturing dimensions of the metaphysical One. In this brief poem 'Tuhon Buti Eh dai Si' (You are the One Who Planted This Sapling) she repeats the title of the poem several times (BVS 199). For their origin and sustenance, the individual shrub and garden as a whole depend upon Him: 'If you forget us even for a moment, how will we remain in bloom or be fragrant?' she asks.

The fragrance which the Gardener bestows upon the sapling is both her elemental energy and her desire for Him; this identity between her vital life-force and her longing for the Gardener, the Beloved, constitutes the thematic core of the poem. It lies at the heart of the Sikh scriptural message and of the poetry of Bhai Vir Singh. In a popular verse from the Guru Granth Sahib, 'Only a person who appreciates the fragrance can know the flower' (GGS 725). In 'Saian Ji di Sian', (Recognition of the Beloved), Bhai Vir Singh's heroine underscores the importance of fragrance:

> Yes, the bouncing, dancing
> Fragrances reveal your identity
> To those who have appreciation, my Beloved.
> (BVS 195)

Sikh philosophy does not accept the Cartesian mind–body split with the senses subordinate to the intellect. On the contrary, the Sikh Scripture celebrates their togetherness. They are regarded as a vital partnership in connecting us with the Transcendent Reality. They fill us with desire and drive us towards the Divine. Light to the eyes, music to the ears, scents to the nostrils, tastes to the tongue are all part of the sensual vocabulary of the Sikh scriptures: 'Compassionate, beneficent, beloved, enticer of hearts, full of flavours, ever-sparkling like the lala flower' (GGS 1331).

The symbol of light, as both *jyotisam jyoti* and *nur al-anwar*, from the Hindu and Islamic traditions, respectively, is used extensively in the Guru Granth in its evocation of the Absolute.

> Wheresoever I turn, I see your light,
> what a wondrous form you have.
> (GGS 596)

Allah first created light and from it were all made,
From the One Light came the whole cosmos,
who then do we call good, who bad?
(GGS 1349)

Bhai Vir Singh's heroine also avails herself of this imagery. In 'Jio Aian Nu' (You are Most Welcome) she exclaims, 'Your light pervades the earth and skies' and asks, 'How can I reunite with your radiance?' (BVS 191). In the poem 'Hans Pheri' (The Circling Gazelles), she describes her lover as the 'pearl' that is always shining (BVS 199). She wishes to be struck by his ray of light and implores her transcendent Beloved: 'Bestow your vision upon me, O light of lights' (BVS 199).

In 'Rasa, Rasia, Rasal', 'Delight, Savorer of Delight, Bestower of Delight', the term *rasa* and its variations, associated with the flavors of music and of food, provide the poetic fulcrum. In the opening line of this poem, the young woman expresses her amazement at the marvellous aspect of the Beloved. In the second line, she celebrates the richness and beauty of his songs. In the third line she directly states, 'You yourself are the song, you the music and you the essential taste.' In the final line she addresses him as the aesthetic delight itself (rasa), as the relisher of aesthetic delight (*rasia*), and as the provider of aesthetic delight (*rasal*). The passage echoes the Guru Granth Sahib: 'It Itself is the relisher of rasa, It Itself is the essence, It Itself is the bestower' (GGS 23). The Beloved is all-encompassing: the one who experiences, the object experienced and their source.

These sights, sounds and tastes are metaphors but also divine in themselves because, to return to the central paradox, all these subjects and objects of the senses are forms of the Formless One. This is never more beautifully articulated than in the famous verse by Guru Nanak:

You have a thousand eyes but without eye are you.
You have a thousand forms, but without form are you . . .
You have a thousand noses but without nose are you,
I am left thoroughly enchanted.
(GGS 13)

We note here another element in the Sikh scriptural worldview which is carried forward by Bhai Vir Singh. Although in our references and most translations, the Absolute is referred to by male pronouns, in Bhai Vir Singh's original composition, 'My Beloved' is constantly beckoned grammatically in the second person, as *tun*, the neuter 'you'. Thus the Beloved is encountered informally, intimately

but without the emphasis upon 'His' form – or indeed on any form. Nowhere are any contours drawn to sketch a final form or personality. In one passage, she rhythmically repeats 'You, You, You', an echo of the Granthian style of salutation, as in Guru Arjan's words 'You are my father, You my mother, You my friend, You my brother' (GGS 118). While shattering the monopoly of male symbols used to depict the Ultimate Being, this also expresses the intimate relationship between one and the One. What is projected is the absolute singularity – the is-ness – of the Sikh ultimate reality, which encompasses both genders yet is beyond all gender. Indeed, beyond all polarities.

RECOGNITION AND REVELATION

As with the scriptural vision, Bhai Vir Singh's vision of the Transcendent One is of positive and joyous images. Yet, ultimately there is no image; for it can never be formalized into a figure but remains as experience. *O My Beloved* unfolds the essential ideal enshrined in the Sikh holy text that 'That One' (*Ikk Oan*) is the object of ardent quest by the self, fueled by ardent longing. But the Absolute cannot be intellectually apprehended or made the object of reasoning. It is felt. Infinite and unfathomable yes, but not an impossible goal; in the poem, 'Saian Ji di Sian' (Recognition of the Beloved), Bhai Vir Singh's protagonist refutes those who think that the metaphysical One is impossible to know.

> Who are they who say:
> 'Your Beloved cannot be known?'
> (BVS 195)

Then she directly addresses her Beloved, saying that those who see, hear, smell, touch and taste, can discern Him.

> Those who have eyes recognize You
> From your brimming beauty
> Which pours from the scenes onto the eyes
>
> Those who have ears recognize You
> From your melodious word
> Reverberating all around.
>
> Yes, the bouncing, dancing
> Fragrances reveal your identity
> To those who have appreciation, my Beloved.

And those devoid of fear
Recognize you
From your throbbing, sensuous touch.

Your throbbing
Ambrosial drops
Trickle into the mouths of those
Who longingly sing like the papiha bird
At some auspicious moment
They tell the taste of Your existence . . .
(BVS 195)

The emphasis is upon *sian*, recognition, an immediate and exhaustive recovery, re-seeing. The Beloved is here, there, everywhere. The vast and magnificent panoramas, the dulcet symphony echoing throughout the universe – these are hints of Presence. For human beings, it is our five senses that provide the crucial channel. The process is not an arduous one; it does not call for asceticism, it does not call for the stifling of the senses. On the contrary, the physical senses have to be sharpened and heightened so that they are able to recognize the spaceless and timeless Beloved. It is as if Bhai Vir Singh were illuminating for us the third stage of spiritual awareness, the Realm of Aesthetics (*Saram Khand*) described in Guru Nanak's Japji as the state wherein 'consciousness, perception, mind and wisdom are sharpened' (GGS 7–8). With the heightening of the senses, the ordinary is experienced as extraordinary. Says Bhai Vir Singh's heroine, 'Those who transcend the ordinary seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting, yes, You yourself reveal yourself to them' (BVS 195).

The process of recognition which underlies the Sikh envisioning of the Transcendent is further elaborated in the poem 'Andarle Nain' (Inner Eyes). Physical sensation, knowledge and intelligence are not enough; recognition on the part of the individual and revelation/showing (*lakana*) from the Beloved are needed. The poem in its entirety:

Eye, the human eye
Could not see you,
My Beloved.
Darkness has overtaken,
Knowledge and intelligence,
Yes, the strong light of intellect,
It still cannot see You,

The brilliance is too dazzling.
Do cast a favorable glance,
Do please open the inner eyes,
Which would see You,
Whether it be light, dark or bedazzling,
You, my Beloved! Beloved!
In every place, in every color, in every direction
Playing, yet remaining apart,
Handsome, you are the acme of splendor.
(BVS 196)

It is reiterated that the Beloved is all pervading, not only in light of the senses but also in the absence, the darkness, of sensation where they do not go. He plays within all yet paradoxically remains apart (*rahinda asang*) from everything; constantly maintains His distance. But a favorable glance (*nazar*) from Him opens the inner eye and thus provides insight into the Divine Reality all around. This is the fourth stage of spiritual ascension, the Realm of Grace (*Karam Khand*) – as outlined by Guru Nanak in the Japji. Grace, that is His glance of favor, is what the maiden seeks. Touched by His grace, her inner eye encounters the dazzling brilliance. The merging of eyesight with insight lies at the juncture where human effort is touched by divine grace. It is the moment of revelation.

BRIMMING WITH EMPTINESS

The longing for the vision of the Beloved, for a mystic consummation between one and The One is the dominant motif of Bhai Vir Singh's anthology, as it is of the Guru Granth Sahib; yet the longing remains sheer longing. The finale of *O My Beloved* is 'The Cup of the Name' ('Nam Piala') which encapsulates the Sikh message:

The cup of the beautiful Word
Is overflowing O friends.
Who will have sip of it?
Keep watching, O friends.
She whose own cup of longing is brimming,
She alone will receive a sip of nectar . . .
(BVS 212)

There is so much in these few lines; the single word 'overflowing' provides a vision of *Ikk Oan*, The One, as perennial movement, perennial abundance. The

poem recalls the historic moment more than 500 years ago when, while bathing in the river, Guru Nanak had the revelatory experience of 'primal paradox' – he received the ambrosial cup of the Divine Name and was given his guruship, given the robe of honor (*siropa*) and launched on his mission. Through the medium of twentieth-century Punjabi poetry, Bhai Vir Singh acknowledges that primal moment in Sikh history and projects it into the present and future. The heroine of 'The Cup of the Name' is addressing her female friends. The future of society depends upon them and their male counterparts. Their mission will be launched with the drinking of the ambrosial Word.

But who will be able to sip it? Who will savor it? There is a verse in the Guru Granth Sahib in which Guru Nanak says that the sparrow who longs for God and sings *khudai khudai*, an Arabic word for God, is much higher and greater than the elephant who sits around eating and belching pounds of *gur* (GGS 1286). It is not how big we are but how empty. The individual whose cup brims with longing – that is, who brims with a sense of a emptiness wanting to be filled – she or he is the one who will be filled. For the emptier the inside, the stronger the urge, and hence, the greater the chance of receiving the divine nectar. And the fuller the experience of union. Again the paradox, the encompassing of opposites to make the whole.

This fusion of opposites – near and far, infinitesimal and infinite, human and divine, empty and full, male and female, past and future – marks the spiritual lineage of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry. Through the maiden's songs one realizes that, in the Sikh tradition, these opposites do not violate or exclude each other, rather they enhance and lead to each other. The unfathomable, infinite Beloved is 'seen' in the dew-drop shimmering in the silky lap of a rose at dawn. Fearlessly the maiden expresses the emotion of love of the Guru Granth Sahib and weaves together the chasm between human and divine. It belongs to all women and all men.

For who is the protagonist of *O My Beloved*? We do not know who she is, we do not know from which caste she comes, we do not know her social or religious background or indeed anything about her other than her experience of divine longing. This is the secularity of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry, as of the Guru Granth. It is universal. It does not tie itself to a set of religious, social or cultural practices. Our heroine is any woman and any man. The poetry is truly open.

Human language and art explode and participate in the communication with the divine. Art – the art of Bhai Vir Singh – is a disclosure, it offers a place of change and transformation. From the Gurus and saints of the scriptures to Bhai Vir Singh. Poetry urges poetry. By singing, by hearing the verses, something

happens. We are transformed. No rituals, no religious hierarchy, only appreciation; the path is direct in any direction, an aesthetic heightening of the senses. That is paradise. That is where our songs are sung, where poetry is recited.

Notes

1 GGS indicates Guru Granth Sahib. All translations by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh.

2 Harbans Singh, *Aspects of Punjabi Literature*, Bawa Publishing House, Ferozepur, 1961, p. 30.

3 BVS indicates *Bhai Vir Singh Racnavali, Volume I: Poetry*, Punjabi Bhasha Vibhag, Chandigarh, 1972.

CHAPTER 8

Critical Ecstasy

The modern poetry of Puran Singh

SURJIT SINGH DULAI

> The poet has the whole abundance of Heaven at his back and his will is the will of God.[1]

Early this century, the poet – Puran Singh (Figure 92) was above all a poet – suddenly rose in the firmament of Punjabi literature, a brilliant star, appearing at a time when the literary world of Punjabi had lain in virtual darkness for well over half a century, since the Punjab had fallen to the English. The prolificity, spontaneity and power of his poetry and prose are astonishing. He is the first fully modern writer of Punjabi, his works expressing quintessentially modern ideals of individual integrity, fulfillment and freedom, while remaining authentically grounded in the traditional Indian ideals of self-realization and freedom from illusion.

Sant Singh Sekhon once described Puran Singh (1881–1931) as a miracle of Punjabi literature. The remark captures the phenomenon of Puran Singh quite profoundly: it seems a miracle that genius so vast in its horizons found voice in the marginalized Punjabi language, and yet, for centuries, the 'language of the Sikhs' had been imbued by its literature with a miraculously 'modern' freethinking outlook that made it a natural midwife for such genius.

It will no doubt be argued that the father of modern Punjabi literature is Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957). In a sense, that too is true. Each important phase of

Figure 92 Puran Singh. Photograph courtesy of Dr Molinder Singh, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, National Institute of Punjab Studies, New Delhi

history, literary or other, usually has more than one initiator. Indeed, as we shall see, meeting Vir Singh prompted the critical turning point in Puran Singh's own spiritual and literary career.

However, unlike Vir Singh, whose primary concern was as a Sikh religious reformer, Puran Singh was a writer who happened to be a Sikh, not a writer of Sikhism as such. He consciously connected with the entire literary heritage of the Punjab, building on the legacy of all its great poets, including the Sikh Gurus whom he saw as prophets of the land rather than teachers of just one sect. Furthermore, his studies in Tokyo brought him into direct contact with the beauty of Japanese Buddhist traditions and with Hindu Vedanta. He was a practicing Hindu for ten years. Thus, whereas Vir Singh's inspiration and concerns remained confined to Sikhs and Sikhism (notwithstanding the universal reach of his mysticism), Puran Singh embraced wider realities of the Punjab, India and the world, putting the literature of his native tongue in touch with the old and the new of East and West. This said, his Sikh heritage was of paramount importance in determining the character of his writing and the very fact that he wrote in

Punjabi. Two related developments in the history of the Punjabi language are important here, one fortunate, the other essentially a misfortune, even if it produced a writer such as Puran Singh.

THE MISFORTUNE AND FORTUNE OF PUNJABI

The misfortune of Punjabi was the decline from being the language of the region to being the religious language of one of the region's minorities. Under the later Mughals, Urdu had evolved as the language of culture at the major courtly centers for middle India. When the British moved in, they made English the first official language of the state, but adopted Urdu as the vernacular for most of northern India, including the Punjab. All Punjabis received their early education in Urdu, English becoming a requirement at the high school level, and Punjabi being available as an option in lieu of Urdu from upper middle level only. Mostly Sikhs, but not even all Sikhs, took Punjabi as a subject. Punjabi was relegated to the backwater, those learning it doing so to read the Sikh scripture and related literature or for quite rudimentary reading and writing.

Around the turn of the century, the quickening of religious communal reform and rivalry among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs hardened boundaries, including linguistic ones. The Muslims, the majority of the state's population, automatically identifed with Urdu because it had evolved as the state vernacular in association with Muslim rule. The largest minority, the Hindus, were less bothered about the matter of language but, when they did have a preference, it was for Hindi. By and large, only Sikhs, a much smaller minority, were left to own Punjabi as their language. They alone could not abandon it because it was the language of their religious heritage. Quite paradoxically, Punjabi, once the local language, thus became the avowed language of a small minority, just 13 per cent of the pre-partition Punjab's population. In the twentieth century, no significant writing in Punjabi has come from a Muslim. Only a few Hindus have used the language for serious literature. Modern Punjabi literature has had to depend almost entirely on the contributions of Sikh writers – a sad circumstance for the language.

On the fortunate side, this connection with the Sikhs has proved beneficial to the birth of a modern Punjabi literature. In its outlook and practice, Sikhism has strong affinities with modernism. The religion started and grew as a social-religious reform movement. It emphasizes responsible social action, without which the spiritual quest has no meaning. Further, Sikhism envisions society from a universal perspective, recognizing the equality of all human beings beyond differences of race, caste or creed. Although, over time, Sikhism acquired a distinct identity of

its own as a religion, its true spirit is to sink all religious differences in the common bond of humanity. Politically, this gives Sikhism an essentially democratic and secular leaning. Philosophically, its stress on engagement in worldly life endows it with an openness to empirical and scientific inquiry, and to the formation of a rational outlook. Such a progressive orientation provided a strong foundation for the growth of a modern sensibility and for writers such as Puran Singh.

RELIGIOUS DEVIATION

The inspiration of Puran Singh's genius is deeply religious. In this respect, he resembles the Bengali poet Tagore, and Iqbal, a fellow poet from the Punjab and a close friend of Puran Singh's, who wrote in Urdu and Persian. They all agree as to the true meaning of religion, and what it is not. They all start with the rejection of ritualism and the religious establishment. Like Iqbal who says, 'If I may speak the truth, my Brahmin friend,/The idols of your house of gods have grown old . . .',[2] in the poem 'Aaveen Tun Rabba Meria' (Come My God), Puran Singh calls on God to do away with established rituals:

> Pray come my God,
> Come in a rush,
> Impatient,
> And snatch and throw away
> These bells, these cymbals
> That I hold in my hands for your worship,
> And come extinguish with your very own hand
> These lamps I hold on a platter
> To wave before you in homage![3]

Union with the Divine lies beyond the external forms of worship. The externals are even a hindrance to real devotion to, and union with, the subject of worship. From the start, Puran Singh was seeking a divine reality which he could experience directly and personally. His was a mystical quest. Because of its intensity and purity, it involved dissent from, and if necessary, abandonment of the established forms of his family's religion. The search for meaning through deviation from convention was enabled, on the one hand, by the freethinking absorbed from the modern West, and, on the other hand, by an appreciation of the true spirit of Indian religion.

At the age of 19 Puran Singh went to study pharmaceutical chemistry at Tokyo University. There under the influence of Buddhism, and later Swami Ram Tirath,

a college professor from Lahore turned *sannyasi* (ascetic), he renounced the world and abandoned Sikhism to become a *sannyasi* himself. He wrote to the brother of his fiancée that, because of the step he had taken, he could no longer marry. But on his return to India, his mother and dying sister persuaded him to marry as agreed.

Puran Singh settled down to a family life, but his mind was not fully in the world. He saw it as a transient place; even though it may not be abandoned, one must free oneself from it to enter a state of spiritual bliss. Things of the sensory world had no ultimate value. Ultimate value lay in the self-realization of the spirit. This dichotomy between the mundane and the supramundane continued to dominate Puran Singh's outlook for some time. He remained a devoted follower of Swami Ram Tirath until the latter's death in 1906. Later he wrote a book on Ram Tirath, *The Story of Rama: The Poet Monk of the Punjab*. Ram Tirath often said to his other disciples that Puran Singh was another form of his, that is Ram Tirath's, own self. During the time when Puran Singh lived in Lahore, many of these disciples and other seekers of the spiritual life gravitated to him. People called him Swami. Although, unlike Swami Ram Tirath, who had left his home and family, Puran Singh continued to live as a family man, inwardly he practiced a renunciation akin to the Hindu ideal of *sannyas*.

In 1912, when he was about 31, Puran Singh met Bhai Vir Singh (see Chapter Seven) at the Sikh Educational Conference held at Sialkot. The meeting had a profound effect on Puran Singh. It brought about a crucial reorientation in his thinking. Although he had always valued the spiritual dimension as the most sublime aspect of human experience, rejection of day-to-day reality had never truly appealed to him. He was a born poet, closely tied to the world of senses and emotions. In his poetic temperament there was no opposition or discord between the spiritual and the physical-emotional dimensions of life. They were experienced as a unity; and in this unity lay the power of his poetry.

However, until the meeting with Bhai Vir Singh, this had presented him with an intellectual conflict. The ideal of renunciation, as he apparently understood it from Buddhism or Swami Ram Tirath, assumed a fundamental opposition between the sensory-emotional world and the spiritual; the former had to be transcended to reach the latter. As a result of his meeting with Vir Singh, Puran Singh saw that Sikhism taught the acceptance of a simultaneous engagement with both the worlds. This insight struck him like a new revelation, a revelation that resolved his conflict, bridging the gap between his poetic and intellectual perceptions. He returned formally to the fold of Sikhism, and his poetry and other literary writing blossomed in fullness.

In returning to Sikhism, Puran Singh still did not particularly concern himself with the externals of the religion. His return simply meant a renewed affinity with the essence of its message. Such an affinity had always been inherent in his temperament. Now it was confirmed and conscious. With the exception of *The Spirit Born People*, a slim volume about Guru Tegh Bahadur, and another on Guru Gobind Singh published posthumously, he did not write about Sikhism as such. He is not a didactic writer of the religion. Sikhism appears as a subtle quality permeating all of his work. It is a quality reinforced by his contact with the outside world and the influence of both the Asian and the modern Western civilizations. It manifests itself in his leanings towards mysticism; love of nature; love of Punjab and its people; individualism; sense of self-worth and the value of human life; and, perhaps above all, a feeling of abandon and freedom.

Let us consider these elements in his writing.

THE POET AS PROPHET

For Puran Singh, mystical experience, or a perception of the Divine, is a prerequisite for the best in literature. His exposition of this in *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry* provides insights into his own poetic inspiration:

> Hours spent with the Beloved in sweet calm . . . are diviner by far than the chants of His songs without His Presence. . . . Mere literature is starvation. Unless we see His tent somewhere in the forest, the landscape is empty. To that messenger alone do both man and nature give their love and sacrifice, who proclaims where the camp of the Beloved is pitched today. Our idea of the poet is that of a man who can, by the mere opening of his eyes, enable ours to see the Divine. . . . [4]

Puran Singh defines poetry as the name of a condition, a state of being, not just the words of composition. It is the condition in which one's soul has realized itself and God. This condition is what makes the poet an extraordinary being. For Puran Singh, the greatest poets were Jesus Christ, Gautama Buddha, the Prophet Mohammed, Guru Nanak and the authors of the Vedic Upanishads. They are divine, themselves God.

> The poet is not one of us, he is the messenger of God, His Prophet; he is God in human clay. . . . It is born in no one else to do what he does. . . . No one else can talk like him with the Invisible. Miracles and the miraculous

> accompany the poet like his shadow. . . . The poet has the gift of gods whom we on earth know not; his powers are not acquired, but are as natural to him as light is to the Sun. The poet has the whole abundance of Heaven at his back and his will is the will of God.[5]

With eye 'fixed on Beauty within', the poet becomes the 'fountain of life', his poetry, 'the perennial stream that flows out of this fountain'. It is essential to existence. 'Take away our songs, we die. Mere bread and butter is starvation. Poetry is not simply a momentous pleasure, it is our very life.'

The poet's word brings solace and bliss to care-worn humanity: 'we are transported, the air of our prison cell becomes light and fragrant'. Poetry puts us in 'the company of the Beloved. . . . Love-intoxication akin to that of Omar.'[6] Our soul is carried to 'its own center [where it] can participate in the pleasures and pursuits of life with good grace'. Ignorance and the illusions of life dissolve:

> Once reached, all is silent there; the disciple stands face-to-face with the Beloved. . . . Truth is realized; the tree of life is in blossom, its fragrance floats in the air, and man forgets all else. The Great Illusion has melted into Truth itself. Thenceforth Life is pure rapture. When the soul is full of Him, perfection is everywhere; nothing mars the sense of the Infinite.[7]

Things of the world can have no freedom by themselves without realization of the Infinite within them. The poet delivers us to this:

> He takes me there and says: 'Behold the Glory – God's soul runs through all things. As beads are strung on one thread so all things are in Him. It is all God.'[8]

The loftiest poetry is thus 'the birth of God on earth. It is as silent and as loud as the burst of the white lotus on the blue waters.'[9] And it follows that 'Our poet is the incarnation of *Logos.* None is ranked as a poet whose flesh is not scented with the perfume of God.'[10]

Puran Singh distinguishes the poets of the highest order, the Divine poets, from other poets. The latter he calls poetic, but not poets. Yet his expectations of the 'poetic' are still very high:

> The poetic among us are the highest men who, in higher altitudes touch the Footprints of the Sacred Poets that came down to us as Inspired Beings from on high.[11]

Next in order is the *bhakta*, the devotee who gives his life to the love of God:

> He is always wending towards the Shrine of the Beloved. He burns with an inextinguishable desire for the Divine. . . . His life is like the fluttering of an imprisoned eagle who pants for freedom. In the wild simplicity of the infinite expanse of his own self, he seems in his verse almost insane. But his abundant childlike carelessness is balanced well in the wisdom of Self-realization. The Divine Mind directs his hands and feet, his impulses seem omniscient in relation to the exact fitness with the general scheme of things. . . . His mind . . . talks with stars, drinks wine with flowers and 'exchanges his turban' with the red poppies. . . . He is God, who has driven man into the street and occupied the Temple of the human body as an ever new Palace of Life.[12]

These bhaktas, disciples on the path of love, live in continuous rapture, enjoying things of the world that delight them. However, they do not decide about these things 'once and forever' but, rather, according to their mood:

> Sometimes they like the bitter and discard the sweet; on other days the reverse. Of what use is life if the Divine idea grows less in proportion to the Illusion that already overwhelms us? To be in sympathy with the Universe by being ourselves is our vocation; all else matters nothing.[13]

'This feeling', says Puran Singh, 'is the *Faqiri* [the spiritual abandon] of the East, its poetry, and its religion. We are bond slaves of this God-like omniscience of sympathy for love and freedom.'[14]

In the light of his criteria for true poets and poetry, Puran Singh examines the entire range of poetry that he knows – Western, Persian, Indian and Japanese. He considers the Bible as truly divine. Among the Western writers, he gives high praise to Dante, Goethe, Milton, Blake, Burns, Carlyle, and Hugo. Interestingly, he finds Shakespeare and Tolstoy wanting, the former 'not able to pierce reality beyond the surface-movements of the ego', the latter having 'the tastes of an Eastern poet', but making 'his mind sick with renunciation'. He is rhapsodic in his admiration for Whitman – 'in him we find the true wildness of the poet' – and Thoreau – 'the very mention by him of the meadows and the brook is poetry beyond comparison'.[15]

About the poetry of Japan, he says, 'There is no jarring in old Japan; it is all music of silence.'[16] Persian poets 'are like the roses of Persia, fleeting companions, evanescent but glowing. They are Gods that have no shadow.'[17] Urdu poetry

is mostly 'world-poetry . . . heavy with the sadness and wistfulness of unfulfilled desire. It is as charming as a wonderful beauty in distress.' Nazir Akbarabadi is a rare exception – 'original, sympathetic, free, rich and self-realized'. He comes 'nearest to Walt Whitman. His passion for the masses is unequaled and unsurpassed by any other Hindi or Urdu poet.'[18]

Of course, with the Sikh scripture, Puran Singh has a special, personal relationship:

> of all the great gifts of Divine poetry, of the Realized Being to mankind, the most fascinating is . . . *Guru Grantha*. It is the Scripture of all nations, for it is the lyric of Divine love, and all people of this earth subsist on such glowing lyrical prayer! *Guru Grantha* is but one song, one idea, one life. . . . Look at it from any place, it is the sea whose billows capped with white foam dance eternally. It is like the smile of the Infinite. *Guru Grantha* is not full of repetition; it has a thousand blank pages with the one song of His heart, copied out on every page.[19]

WHERE NATURE, HUMANITY AND THE INFINITE MEET

Puran Singh's mysticism thus lies at the heart of all his experience and his own poetry. His God is not separate from the world. The world is in God, and God is in the world. To the self-realized, all is Divine. Puran Singh's poetry is the poetry of such realization. He asks the *koel* (black cuckoo) in the poem of that title:

> Koel! What lightning fell? What singed thy wings?
> What keeps thee fresh, yet charred?
> Concealed in the mango-leaves, thou singest!
> Thy high pitched strains wake in my soul a thousand memories!
> Why so restless that thy spark-shedding notes go forth
> kindling fire?
> Lo! The roses are on fire which winds and waters catch!
> The shades of mangoes burn!
> What a rain of sparks art thou, O little bird!
> Koel! What lightning fell? What singed thy wings?[20]

'Dil Mera Khacheenda' (My Heart Feels a Pull) portrays the connection of the self with the source of its being:

I am someone's kite,
The one who holds the string pulls,
The kite flies,
High in the wind,
It waves, it stops,
Pause on pause, it rises,
Dives in the blue depths,
Fluttering, it raises its head,
Flies higher and higher,
Soughing in mid-sky,
Again and again I feel the pull
Repeatedly filling my breast with joy
As a lover comes and hugs one close,
But I cannot know who it is.[21]

Puran Singh expresses his feeling about God's omnipresence with a humility and honesty that make his statement authentic. In 'Lokeen Kehn Rubb Subh Vich Hai, Subh Kujh Hai' (People say God is in Everyone, is Everything), he sees God only now and then.

But my eyes have not yet opened well.
My sight is rather tiny;
Only once in centuries, I
Now and then, thirsting, gasping, with torn body, fluttering, writhing,
Momentarily, for a glimpse, have seen the divine sight,
At times on a broad brow shining with love,
At times in the upward swing of a beautiful woman's arms,
At times in the renunciation of an ascetic,
At times in the field of war's massacre,
At times in a young man reclined on flowers,
At times in a mosque, or temple bell, or the Muslim call to prayer,
At times in distress, at times in comfort,
At times in giving, at times in taking,
At times in being alive, at times in a great death.
I don't know what happens,
I see God only now and then.[22]

Nature, humanity and the Infinite, meet in one in Puran Singh's poetry. In 'Mera Tutta Jiha Geet' (My Broken-Looking Song), he sings in the ecstasy of his experience of harmonious unity.

The world seems a miraculous lake of colors,
Orchards and wild forests are all my toys.
Mother has set my cradle in misty spaces,
And all the stars play peek and hide with me,
Mother rocks my cradle with her hand,
Singing sweet lullabies in the infinite blue.[23]

In Puran Singh's poetry, nature is suffused with an unearthly beauty. It is always benign and touched with human feelings, as in 'Parbhat Akaash Vich' (Morning in the Sky):

Morning carrying the blue-ish basket of stars comes there,
Flowers shower from her basket as, swanlike, the lovely
young woman walks
With one step turning dark to light,
With the second, ushering in darkness.
The bright beautiful lady comes;
Covering under her veil the sun of gold,
Descends softly on yonder snows,
Scatters gold, spilling it limitless,
Rolling the oceans of light with her feet,
She came, she went;
She, the embodiment of nectars.[24]

A POET OF THE PUNJAB

Puran Singh is a poet intoxicated with the joy of existence and celebration of life. This celebration finds its most intense concentration in his love of the Punjab. In the collection, *Khullay Maidaan* (*Open Plains*), he devotes a whole section to poems on the Punjab. Besides, the Punjab is present everywhere in his writing. He sees the Punjab's beauty in the humblest of its sights, as for example in 'Punjab di Ahiran Gohe Thupdi' (A Punjabi *Ahiran*[25] Making Dung Patties).

O, nowhere did I find an air cool as the Punjab's
Nowhere the water as sweet and suited.
Whenever, after wanderings abroad, I returned here,
I expanded like the sky,
Walked endlessly swinging and spreading my arms,
An impulse of joy rising in me,

Urging me to tear my clothes in elation,
The body warmed all over,
And I would not set my foot on the earth, or the sky. . . .

Before my eyes, against the wall dappled by the sun,
Stood a young woman, tall, an ahiran making patties of dung,
Her muslin scarf flying from her head in the breeze,
Skirt of a common green cloth, pale green,
Slightly torn in places, and patched,
But though old, its color still deep and pretty,
With the cloth worn thin, the color still more sharply shone.
On the fabric, yellow embroideries, deep yellow,
The crimson border two inches wide.
The skirt hung in waves from the ahiran's waist like a billowing lake;
And in the lake played the colors of the sun's golden rays.
Above the skirt she wore a grubby shirt of thin muslin
And she sat patting patties.[26]

'Des Noon Asees Sadi Garibaan Di' (A Prayer for the Homeland from Us Poor) describes the land's vast empirical reality drenched in a love that reminds one of Whitman's love of America.

May your palaces and mansions flourish,
May your crops expand and fructify.
Long live your pippals and lovely mangoes.
Long live your evergreen banyans,
Long live your mulberry trees of all kinds,
May your beris live,
Long live falahis, acacias, your bushes and shrubs.[27]

The poem provides a vivid and detailed picture of the Punjab's landscape, cataloging details of its day-to-day reality. The list never becomes insipid or prosaic. Every item on it rings with the intensity of deeply felt truth, every item sparkles with life and love.

In several poems Puran Singh pays homage to the Punjab's cultural and literary heritage. The themes of such poems vary from a reverence for the nobility and greatness of this heritage to nostalgia for its vanished past. The poet sees the Punjabi culture as the common legacy of all Punjabis regardless of caste or creed. Its culture is the very life of the Punjab. Without it, the life of its inhabitants would be barren. In 'Hir te Ranjha' (Hir and Ranjha), Puran Singh addresses

the hero and the heroine of the Punjab's most beloved poem of love, Waris Shah's *Hir*:

Come, Brother Ranjha.
Come, Sister Hir.
Do not abandon us alone,
Without you we are empty.

And I may see the seed of love sprout again,
See the new buds glowing red,
See the million beauties you hold within,
And the countless writhings of your heart.[28]

Most conspicuous in the cultural heritage of the Punjab is the place of the ten Sikh Gurus. Puran Singh sees them as the gurus of the whole Punjab rather than the teachers of a single sect, his approach truly ecumenical and universal. His liberalism stems on the one hand from a profound understanding of the true spirit of Punjabi culture and of Sikhism, and on the other from the expansion of his outlook under the influence of modern ideas. There is not a trace of sectarianism in his view of the Gurus. He sees them as one with Punjab and humanity. In 'Punjab de Darya' (Rivers of the Punjab), the waters themselves sing the *Japji*, the sacred composition by Guru Nanak:

Khad Khad[29] run in my dreams
The rivers of Punjab,
Aflame with the fire of love,
Singing sweet *Japu Sahib*,[30] cool and cooling, loving.[31]

In 'Punjab di Ahiran Gohe Thupdi' (A Punjabi Ahiran Making Dung Patties), we witness repeated glimpses of the sacredness with which the poet finds his native land filled.

Here the word of the holy Master[32]
Melted stones,
Mardana's rabab[33] struck its song
The mountains bowed in homage,
All vegetation danced in ecstasy,
Every particle of Punjab's soil thrilled.
In the same *Ilahi* note[34] the rivers flow.
This is the land of rivers born fresh of ice.[35]

Puran Singh sings about the distinguishing qualities of the Punjabi character. He admires Punjabis for their openness, simplicity, pride, spirit of sacrifice in friendship and love, courage, and carefree ways. This mystique of Punjabiat often appears as the specific subject of many of his poems. It also colors his poetry as a whole and his own persona as a poet. 'Javan Punjab Dey' (Young Men of the Punjab) presents a summary of this romantic mystique.

These care-free souls of Punjab
Jest with death,
Unafraid of dying.

They become slaves if loved,
Sacrifice and give away their lives,
But do not submit to anyone's arrogance,
Standing up with clubs raised on shoulders.
Stubborn, full of abandon, from the beginning.
Men freed by the *satgurus.*[36]
Punjab neither Hindu nor Musalman,
The whole Punjab lives on the Guru's name.

Free from the world
and free from creeds too.
Thrilled and melting at tiny drops of love,
Can run away spurning big things.[37]

Puran Singh prizes these qualities of self-dignity and pride above all. Cherishing self-worth and self-sufficiency is a repeated theme of his works as, for example in 'Mull Pa Toon Apna' (Recognize Your Worth):

My beautiful one, recognize your worth,
More and more, yet a great deal more,
Still more yet, more, more,
You are invaluable,
Beyond all values,
You Joseph of Josephs. . . .

Stand up like a cypress
On your own feet,
And firm on your roots;
See on the high top of your heart stars hanging;
The moon, hiding, plays behind your height,

And the beauty of the world, diving
In your heart, comes out washed in brightness.[38]

Modern individualism is cleansed and brightened by its marriage with the traditional Indian ideals of self-realization and personal responsibility.

THE IMPULSE FOR FREEDOM

For Puran Singh, complete fulfillment of the individual as an individual comes only through freedom, the breaking of all kinds of bonds – social, conventional, civilizational. The impulse for freedom is the central impulse of his poetry and personality. It runs throughout his work and life. His poetry – all his work is essentially poetic – represents a continuous act of 'carnivalization'. He constantly seeks release from all cultural, physical, even metaphysical regulations, breaking or wanting to break the barriers of these regulations to reach the exultation of freedom. He had before him the example of the divine prophets and sages intoxicated in their love of the higher self who shattered these illusory barriers and dwelt in freedom.

Puran Singh lived in a world where the dimensions of a number of different worlds – among them the Hindu culture, sectarian Sikhism, and British rule – tended to contain and limit him. His was a lifelong quest to break loose from the shackles of all these worlds to gain himself. The range of the freedom so pursued is endlessly vast, from the realm of gods to that of beasts.

We have dwelt long on the God-end of this infinite unity. Let us consider the other end, the animals, in 'Pashu Charday' (Cattle Grazing).

On the green, green grass,
The grazing of cows and buffaloes.
Bending their heads low,
In dumb silence,
The grazing, satiation, and the running of cattle.
Watching, I yearn again and again
To be an animal once more,
Tired of having to be a man.
These cattle have tiny, tiny tasks all,
And their beautiful irresponsibilities . . . .[39]

In a way, the existence of the different worlds allows Puran Singh to play one against the other. The interaction and tension between these worlds facilitate his

entrance into *faqiri*, the state of abandon that comes from awareness of God. Thus, paradoxically, his freedom derives its inspiration from all these worlds, traditional and modern.

Puran Singh's poetry with its mysticism, acceptance of the world's beauty, empiricism, individualism, and quest for freedom is the result of a true blending of the East and the West. He assimilates into Punjabi literature his experience of the world beyond the Punjab, and while renewing its connection with the past, also expands it to embrace the world's new and wider realities. In this manner he gives direction to the future of Punjabi literature and becomes its first modern voice. Without him Mohan Singh, Amrita Pritam and Shiv Kumar Batalvi would not have been possible.

Notes

1 Puran Singh, *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry*, p. 2.
2 *Naya shivala* ('The New Temple'), in Sir Mohammed Iqbal, *Baang-i-dra*, pp. 88–9.
3 *Khullay Maidaan* (*Open Plains*), in M.S. Randhawa (ed.) *Puran Singh: Jivni te Kavita*, pp. 247–8. All translations by Surjit Singh Dulai.
4 *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry*, p. 1.
5 Ibid., p. 2.
6 Ibid., pp. 3–5.
7 Ibid., p. 5.
8 Ibid., p. 6. Puran Singh is quoting the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 8.
11 Ibid., p. 9.
12 Ibid., pp. 10–11.
13 Ibid., p. 12.
14 Ibid., p. 14.
15 Ibid., pp. 28–9.
16 Ibid., p. 30.
17 Ibid., p. 37.
18 Ibid., pp. 60–2.
19 Ibid., pp. 82–3.
20 *The Sisters of the Spinning Wheel*, p. 3 (originally written in English).
21 *Khullay Maidaan*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
22 Ibid., p. 250.
23 Ibid., p. 173.
24 Ibid., p. 176.
25 A woman of the Ahir caste.
26 Ibid., pp. 211–12.

27 Ibid., pp. 208–9.
28 Ibid., pp. 215–16.
29 *Khad khad* is a vivid word picture replicating the powerful sound of the river waters.
30 *Japu, Japuji, Japji* and *Japu Sahib* are all names for the most widely known and recited composition of Guru Nanak. It is the opening composition of the Guru Granth Sahib.
31 *Khullay Maidaan, op. cit.*, p. 208.
32 Guru Nanak.
33 The musical instrument of Guru Nanak's disciple and close companion, Mardana.
34 Divine musical note.
35 *Khullay Maidaan, op. cit.*, pp. 211–12.
36 Literally 'the Gurus with Divine Truth'. It refers to the ten Sikh Gurus.
37 *Khullay Maidaan, op. cit.*, p. 229.
38 Ibid., pp. 200–1.
39 Ibid., pp. 176–7.

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CHAPTER 9

Old Culture, New Knowledge

The writings of Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid

ARDAMAN SINGH

NIRVIKAR SINGH

Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid was born in 1881, thirty-two years after the conquest of Punjab by the British and eight years after the first meeting of what became the Singh Sabha movement to reform and revitalize the Sikh faith and community (Figure 93). He died in 1936.

That span of fifty-five years witnessed the rise of the *Akalis* (saint-soldiers) as the main political organization, the redefinition of Sikh identity, and the reassertion of Sikh political and religious rights. Much of the change came about through direct political action. But right from the beginning of this period of momentous change, the written word played an important role in effecting the transformations. This chapter seeks to describe the contribution of Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid's writing to the Sikh renaissance.

As the suffix 'Vaid' implies, Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid was a doctor of traditional Ayurvedic medicine. While following this profession he found the time to write in Punjabi some 200 books, stories, pamphlets and essays, including numerous translations from other Indian languages and from English. What motivated this extraordinary output? Some aspects of motivation are self-evident. Bhai Mohan Singh's earliest published writings, when he was about 18, were responses to the attacks on Sikhism by the revivalist Hindu movement *Arya Samaj*. These were part of a much larger number of Sikh writing to counter the Arya Samaj, which initially was seen as an ally of Sikhs in countering Christian

missionary influence, but which subsequently turned against the followers of Guru Nanak.

Thus, one motive for Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid's literary efforts was explicitly religious: a direct defense of the faith. The ascendancy of the British brought a direct challenge to the religions of the sub-continent. It caused each of the indigenous traditions to redefine and reassert itself. In that process these resurgent traditions themselves clashed in new ways.

Throughout India, the painful fact of subjugation also created a certain tension. On one hand was the desire to compensate for defeat by glorifying, or perhaps simply rediscovering, the precolonial past. On the other side was the wish to rectify the weaknesses that led to conquest, by absorbing knowledge from the conqueror. Old culture, new knowledge: we can see a pragmatic, synthetic approach in the work of Bhai Mohan Singh, an approach itself in keeping with the philosophy of Sikhism.

An example of this synthetic approach can be found in Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid's writing on medicine and science. He translated and adapted numerous essays and articles in these fields to bring Western knowledge to the Punjabi reader. At the same time, he wrote extensively on the traditional Indian system of medicine, which he practiced. Western knowledge had its place, but could not supplant indigenous wisdom. In some areas there was no clear conflict of traditions: in writing about economics, life in America, or natural phenomena, Bhai Mohan Singh was simply expanding the amount of knowledge available in Punjabi. But in these works, too, the consciousness of tradition remains. The subject matter is often related to the tenets of Sikhism, including quotes from the Guru Granth Sahib as illustrations of these tenets.

REFORMING THE SOCIAL FABRIC

In addition to the goal of absorbing useful knowledge from the West, there was the wish to reform the social fabric. This might often be put in the form of a return to the rules of some golden age, but in practice it often meant new social rules. The process was less contradictory for Sikhs than for Hindus. For example, Hindu scriptures might be less than satisfactory guides for twentieth-century thinkers on such issues as the status of women in society. The Sikh tradition provided a much firmer basis in matters such as this: reform could be more clearly a return to abandoned ideals rather than something alien and new. Much of Bhai Mohan Singh's writing was motivated by a desire for social reform within the context of adherence to the Sikh faith. This aspect will be spelled out below,

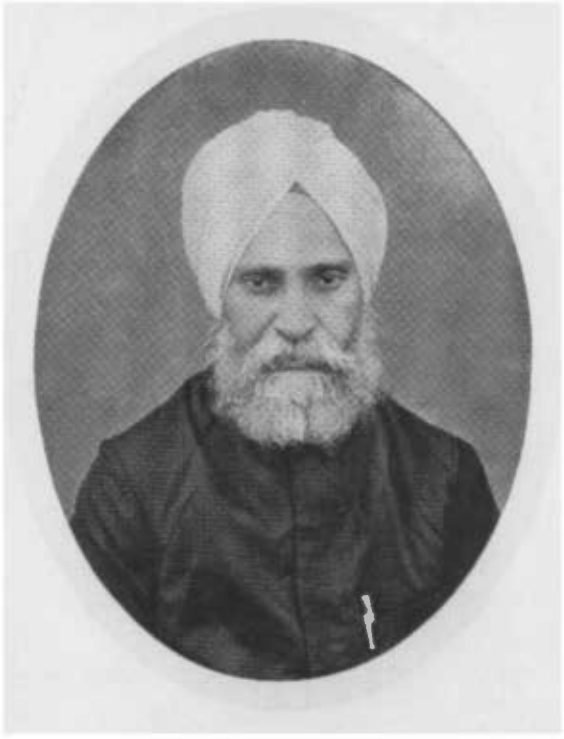

Figure 93 Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid. Photograph courtesy of Dr Molinder Singh, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, National Institute of Punjab Studies, New Delhi

including a brief comparison of Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid's novels with those of Bhai Vir Singh, and an attempt to explain their goals, their success in achieving those goals, their relation to Sikhism and their present-day lessons.

Punjabi writers in the second half of the nineteenth century were following in the footsteps of writers in Bengali, Hindi and Urdu. The novel, in particular, was a recent transplant to India; and it became a major vehicle for Sikh writers. The best known of these writers is Bhai Vir Singh (see Chapter Eight), who wrote several influential historical novels, set in the turbulent eighteenth century The heroes and heroines of these novels were larger than life. They struggled against tyranny with superhuman efforts. These stories created for their avid readers an ideal of Sikhism rooted in Guru Gobind Singh's *Khalsa*, community of the Pure.

Bhai Mohan Singh's novels presented a different, complementary aspect of the Sikh ideal. Following the work of the Singh Sabha movement, and the writing

of Dr Charan Singh, Bhai Mohan Singh's novels focused instead on contemporary life and social issues. This was typical of much of the literature of that period in other regions and countries. What is special about Bhai Mohan Singh's fiction is his integration of distinctive Sikh perspectives. The obvious manifestation of this was the inclusion of verses from the Sikh scripture in the text and in the introductions to his novels. But the essence of the Sikh perspective pervaded his entire literary enterprise.

Right from the time of Guru Nanak, the Sikh religion had rejected the life of asceticism that was the culmination of experience for the Hindu male of tradition. Being a householder was not only consistent with spirituality from the Sikh perspective, but in fact desirable. Bhai Mohan Singh, himself deeply religious, was of course aware of this aspect of Sikhism; and this is reflected in the themes and subject matter of this novels. At the same time, he was also a pragmatist: he noted that a householder's life is not easy. His own experiences as he simultaneously followed the paths of worldly responsibility and spiritual uplift bore this out, as did the stories that unfolded in his novels.

ORDINARY LIVES

Bhai Mohan Singh's original novels – as distinct from a dozen or so adaptations and translations – include *Sushila Noonh* (*The Devoted Daughter-in-Law*), *Kamai Di Barkat* (*The Benefits of Trade*), *Sukhi Parvaar* (*A Happy Family*), *Sukhdev Kaur* (subsequently published as *Naastik*, *The Atheist*) and *Istriaan Di Azaadi* (*The Liberation of Women*). They were written around or shortly after the First World War. These stories revolve around household themes: marriage, earning a living and other aspects of daily life. The behavior of some characters follows the enlightened tradition espoused by Bhai Mohan Singh and other Sikh reformers. Others are attracted by the allure of the West, particularly its religion and its sexual freedom, but these wayward souls – such as Sukhdev Kaur in *Naastik* and Sheela in *Istriaan Di Azaadi* are, in the end, brought back to the Sikh ideal. The protagonists are not heroic in the sense of being larger than life. They are ordinary people struggling with social change and dramatic external influences. To paraphrase Dr Satinder Singh Noor, it is the Sikh philosophy and code of conduct which integrate their lives after the fragmentation produced by the influences of social change.

In *Naastik* (*The Atheist*), Labhu Ram is the only son of Bhai Gurmukh Das, a well-off businessman whose family are followers of Guru Nanak as Sahjdhari Sikhs – Sikhs who do not follow the codes of external appearance. Unlike his

father who visits the gurudwara every morning, Labhu Ram, educated up to an MA, 'had a very good government job. He considered Punjabi an uncultured language, and disliked Hindi too. If he liked anything, it was the English language, English food, English manners, and English dress' (p. 8). Labhu Ram is married to Sukhdev Kaur, who is a devout Sikh. This prompts him to say to her: 'I have already said that Punjabi women are absolute, brainless fools. If you were educated like me, I would have convinced you that there is no such thing as God' (p. 13). He abandons Sukhdev Kaur and marries an Englishwoman, but she deserts him. He returns to his parents' home and the faithful Sikh wife to whom he says at the end:

> My love, I am totally changed now. I am no longer an Englishman. I have been punished enough for my follies. I am convinced that Indian women may not be as clever as Englishwomen, but are truly devoted wives, perfect in the household. I realize now the goodness of the qualities that I disliked in you. I made you suffer a lot, for which I am ashamed.
>
> (p. 108)

One of the major social issues that Bhai Mohan Singh addressed, in his pamphlets and handbills as well as his fiction, was the status of women in society. Here also he was putting forth the Sikh principle of the equality of women. This ideal is apparent in the Sikh scriptures but was not necessarily a part of contemporary practice. The Sikh reformers re-emphasized this aspect of the religion, and Bhai Mohan Singh made it one of the main themes of his fiction. He used his writing to create strong female characters, such as Sukhdev Kaur, Saroop Kaur and Susheela. The latter two were in adaptations of Hindi novels,[1] but he added his own thoughts on the liberation of women, for example, advocating widow remarriage, in disagreement with the Hindu writer of the original story of Susheela. Women who 'stand by their men' may seem less than liberated today; but in the context of the period, these may be seen as progressive portrayals of women. Further, these women were not mythic heroines in the mold of Bhai Vir Singh's Sundari, but rather they provided believable role models for their contemporaries.

In *Susheela Noonh*, Kaushalya, the sweet, devoted daughter-in-law of the title, is mistreated by her mother-in-law. Her husband is away studying in college. The mistreatment prompts her sister-in-law, Kirpal Kaur, to say to her mother, 'A mother-in-law and father-in-law are like parents. If they do not love us and are unkind to we poor girls whose husbands are away from home, then who will

console us?' (pp. 19–20). Later, the narrator comments, 'A country where thousands of women consider women inferior to men will degenerate. This is the country where the unique reformer and protector, Guru Nanak, said "Why consider women inferior? Even kings are born of women." '

The setting of these stories is the urban Punjab of the early twentieth century. Sikh reformers were slowly re-establishing their religion in keeping with the legal and political structures imported by the British. Whereas boundaries of identity may earlier have been indistinct and traditions eclectic, the new order called for a sharper focus of identity and action. Urban Sikh reformers eventually mobilized the rural masses as well and achieved most of their aims by 1925 with the passage of the Sikh Gurudwaras Act. With this as a background, Bhai Mohan Singh wrote about the practical issues of daily life and its ups and downs. His avowed goal was to entertain in a manner that would allow him to drive home his message. And this message was to show that Sikhism provided an excellent guide to the problems of daily living, even in a time of social upheaval.

A WINDOW ON THE TIMES

In the process of communicating this message, Bhai Mohan Singh also gives us a window on the manners, mores and struggles of that period of Punjabi history. We have already noted the way that some of the protagonists of the novels seek to copy British customs of dress, speech and worship. This was presumably a significant trend in all of Indian society of that time. Other impacts of British rule are also brought to our notice; in *Sukhi Parvaar*, we learn that the world war is taking place in Europe and that the British have ordered deductions of 20 rupees per month from the salaries of government clerks towards the cost of the war, resulting in domestic hardships. Prices of various items are quoted, as for example:

> No sister, there is no sign yet of the end of the war. These days there is heavy fighting in France. The war has entered its fourth year, but no end is in sight. Food is getting more and more expensive, creating famine-like conditions. Cloth prices have doubled. Paint prices have gone up fifty times. I don't know what God wills, but goodness will ultimately prevail. . . . We live as God wills us to.
>
> (p. 26)

What people eat and drink is described, sometimes in great detail. (Even in this respect, the writer is always the social reformer: in *Sukhi Parvaar*, one of the characters gives advice to some children on cooking and nutrition.) Contemporary

customs of marriage and dowry are illustrated. Thus, a different reading of these novels as social history can give us a picture of middle-class Punjabi society of that time.

ENRICHING THE LANGUAGE

Just as the process of writing to effect social reform had the by-product of delineating contemporary society, so too did Bhai Mohan Singh's use of language serve a conscious purpose as well as having additional implications. The conscious purpose was to enrich and develop the language, including making available in Punjabi a variety of works in other languages. This led to his translation and adaptation of novels, stories and essays from Hindi and English, his extensive writing on different subjects to make available knowledge in Punjabi, and his original fiction. In the introduction to *Sukhi Parvaar* (one of his original novels), he described his motive for writing translations:

> My aim is . . . that all the best literature in other languages which I come across or hear about should be given a Punjabi version so that Punjabi readers do not complain nor are disappointed that books of every type and subject are not available in their own sweet native language.

The by-product of this effort to increase the extent of literature in Punjabi was to develop and further popularize a style of writing fiction that was direct, simple and natural. Traditional literature in Punjabi was, of course, devotional: poetry such as the Guru Granth Sahib and moral instruction such as the Janam Sakhis.

Writers such as Bhai Vir Singh were also poets, and the language of their novels reflected this. Bhai Mohan Singh wrote in a style that was more straightforward prose, though he was capable of evocative descriptions of natural scenes. Some sense of this use of language is retained in translation. In the beginning of *Susheela Noonh*, he sets the stage for describing Kaushalya's predicament as the unloved but hardworking daughter-in-law with these words:

> Nearly six hours have passed since the sun god hid his face. Silence has settled all around. Night has covered the world with its black sheet. It is winter. The cold has come down in full force as if it does not intend to visit again. The shooting icy wind is piercing bodies like an arrow.
>
> (p. 3)

Soon we glimpse Kaushalya:

> One after the other, twelve strokes of the clock announce that it is midnight. But, in the kitchen of Bhai Ram Singh's house, a tiny earthen lamp is alight. Now and then the sound of utensils is also heard. On this cold winter night, with the cold wind blowing, goddess sleep has pervaded the whole house. But one woman is seen working in the kitchen, cleaning utensils, seemingly with ice-cold water.
>
> (p. 4)

Linguistically, Bhai Mohan Singh's style was something of a departure from the norm established by Bhai Vir Singh. In the prose writings of Bhai Vir Singh, one can see the influence of the Lehndi (Western Punjabi) dialect. Bhai Mohan Singh, on the other hand, used what has become the standard form of Punjabi, the dialect of the Majha region, between the Beas and Ravi rivers. He was also conscious of minimizing the influence of Braj Bhasha, Urdu and Persian in his writing. In his non-fiction he was willing to coin new words in Punjabi when appropriate ones, such as for scientific terms, did not exist. Thus, his writing has a place of importance in Punjabi literature, along with the work of the other giants of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sikh renaissance, such as Kahn Singh Nabha and Bhair Vir Singh.

Do we have any measure of the influence of Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid on the literature of the Sikhs, now that, two generations later, much of his work is out of print and consigned to libraries and archives? We can offer a couple of examples. The novelist Nanak Singh, in a brief tribute, wrote how Bhai Mohan Singh's work was among the first literature that he read, how this sparked his interest in reading in Punjabi (in Gurmukhi script), and how it played a role in his own decision to become a writer. Gurbaksh Singh, the founding editor of the Punjabi literary magazine *Preet Lari*, also wrote about the influence of Bhai Mohan Singh and his work. He read this work as a child, with eagerness and pleasure, and later was encouraged by Bhai Mohan Singh in his launching of *Preet Lari*. Numerous others have paid tribute to Bhai Mohan Singh's general efforts on behalf of the Sikh community, of which his literary efforts were only one aspect. Details of these may be found in Munsha Singh Dukhi's biography of Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid.

Times change; literary fashions change. Bhai Mohan Singh's fiction may now be of more interest to historians and students of literature, but the average contemporary reader also can find in his novels and stories glimpses of a momentous time in Sikh tradition. His non-fiction, discussing the social issues of the time, or making knowledge available in Punjabi through translation, became one of

the precursors of larger projects in the universities of Punjab state in independent India. But, most importantly, the idea of literature as a medium for social change remains a valid one. It is true that film and video have supplanted some of that role. But the written word can be quietly persuasive. Independence and partition produced trauma for Punjab; and Sikh writers, among others, have created a literature about that experience. But Punjabi and Sikh society are faced with a new set of circumstances; and one would like to see once again a literature emerging that, while grappling with these complex issues, is rooted in the ideals of Sikhism as a way of life. The work of Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid and his contemporaries provides an inspiring example.

Acknowledgement

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Note

1 *Raminder Kaur* is an adaptation of Bankim Chandra's Bengali novel *Radha Rani*. *Susheela Vidhwa* was based on Pandit Lajja Ram's Hindi novel and *Dampti Pyar* on the same author's Hindi novel, *Adarsh Dampti*. All of these are out of print.

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CHAPTER 10

A Mirror to Our Faces

The short stories of Khushwant Singh

ABDUL JABBAR

Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* stands as the crowning achievement of his literary career. However, we cannot fully appreciate the hard-nosed realism and subtle optimism of Singh's warm and witty genius unless we also look at some of his short stories (Figure 94). Notable themes concern the taint of violence as well as the gift of resilience innate in human nature, religious intolerance, racial conflict, prejudice, self-delusion, mysteries of sexual passion, family dilemmas and, last but not least, the capacity of human beings to redeem themselves.

His style is marked by irony, sarcasm, sardonic wit and earthy, bawdy and irreverent humor used to relieve the seriousness of his themes. The language is stark, concrete and evokes the milieu in which his characters live. Most of his stories are like series of film clips, presenting incidents and actions without overt authorial comment, leaving it to the readers to draw their own inferences. Some of his fragmentary narratives invite the reader's participation to finish the story.

In his study, *Khushwant Singh*, Vasan Anant Shahane accurately sums up the essential structure of Singh's stories:

> The stories are episodic in some measure since episodes, or units of action, often seem to dominate other elements in the story such as character, theme, symbol. The action is unfolded in a series of complications which evoke curiosity and create suspense. A conflict in situation and character is created

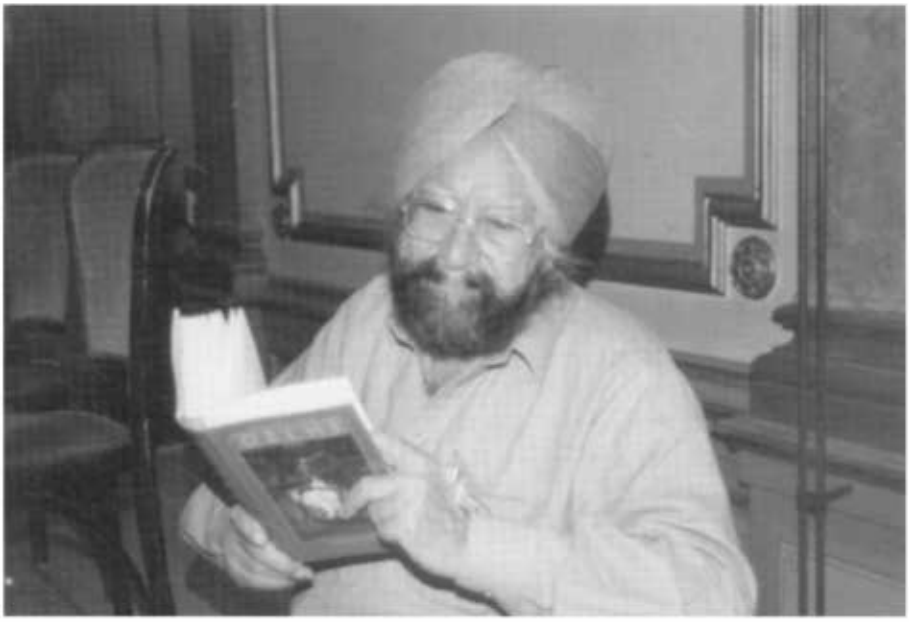

Figure 94 Khushwant Singh. Photograph courtesy of Dr Molinder Singh, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, National Institute of Punjab Studies, New Delhi

and developed, and resolved through a succession of scenes. The resolution of the conflict brings out the point of the story which is sometimes a surprise, sometimes an unexpected tragicomic outcome or revelation; but it is always a fitting finale to the interesting sequence of events.[1]

For a sampling of Singh's range of themes and style, we need to select from his serious, comic and serio-comic stories.

VIOLATIONS OF FAITH AND NATURE

'The Riot' remains one of Singh's most anthologized stories. Perhaps the reason for its great popularity is the author's use of humor and consummate craft to explore the inexplicable taint of violence in human nature. Employing the device of parallel sets of human and animal characters, the story suggests that, in spite of all their claims to the contrary, human beings are not only no better than animals but actually much worse. Animals appear superior to human beings in that they know how to live in harmony with nature – an ability human beings woefully seem to lack.

The story opens with a memorable sentence: 'The town lay etherized under the fresh spring twilight' (*Vishnu*, p. 72).[2] This symbol of the sick town – etherizing being the prelude to surgery – pervades the entire story. Instead of renewal and rebirth that spring brings for the rest of nature, for human beings it brings only death and destruction.

The main characters are a male and female dog – Rani and Moti – belonging respectively to the Hindu shopkeeper, Ram Jawaya, and the Muslim greengrocer, Ramzan. Ram Jawaya's generosity, we learn, has saved Rani and her first litter of eight from starvation. This generosity, however, does not characterize human relationships. Human beings have been killing each other in communal riots. Besides divorcing themselves from the creative rhythm of nature, they even create problems for the animal life. Rani and Moti's annual spring mating ritual, for example, is stymied by human beings, since Ramzan has kept Moti locked up inside the house. The dog is tied to Ramzan's cot for defense against intruders. We are told that every spring Rani comes around Ramzan's stall, has her rendezvous, and in early autumn 'she presented the shopkeeper's [Ram Jawaya's] household with half a dozen or so of Moti's offspring' (*Vishnu*, p. 73).

This canine relationship, thus, establishes a positive, life-giving connection between a Hindu and a Muslim. However, this particular spring, filled as it is with human violence, the two dogs suffer the indignity of unnatural restraints. Rani waits around for Moti; but as curfew and the fear of riots grip the town, Moti's incarceration continues. With her natural animal's instinct, Rani realizes that spring comes only once a year and seldom would there be such an opportunity when humans – confined to their homes – won't be able to desecrate the canine mating ritual by hurling stones at them. Even though sorely disappointed at what she might have perceived to be Moti's infidelity, she acquiesces into accepting as her mate whoever comes out victorious from the competing dogs. While 'the illicit liaison of Rani and the black pariah was being consummated . . .' (*Vishnu*, p. 75) outside Ram Jawaya's house, Moti 'heard the snarling in the street and smelled Rani in the air'. He then 'sent up a pitiful howl to his unfaithful mistress' (*Vishnu*, p. 74). Tugging and straining at the leash, Moti wrenches himself free and flees toward Rani with Ramzan in hot pursuit to bring the dog back.

As Moti leaps at Rani's lover, other dogs join the mêlée. Ram Jawaya, who has spent many sleepless nights, comes out and throws a rock at the barking and snarling dogs. That rock accidentally hits Ramzan in the solar plexus. The stone does not cause him any serious injury. However, startled by the suddenness of the assault, he yells 'Murder!' This seemingly trivial incident triggers a chain reaction.

> Tins of kerosene oil were emptied indiscriminately and lighted. Flames shot up in the sky enveloping Ram Jawaya's home and the entire neighborhood, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh alike. . . . What had once been a busy town was a heap of charred masonry.
>
> (*Vishnu*, p. 76)

This dramatic climax leads into a quiet but equally dramatic conclusion. Some months after the riot, Ram Jawaya comes to inspect the ruins of his old home and finds Rani in a little clearing in the middle of the rubble 'with her litter nuzzling into her dried udders. Beside her stood Moti guarding his bastard brood' (*Vishnu*, p. 76). The story's last sentence lifts Moti to the stature of a superdog, who makes the human characters look inferior. Where humans have totally failed to accommodate one another, Moti guards Rani's 'bastard brood' as though they were his own. After the initial misunderstanding, Rani and Moti are seen together in a spirit of reconciliation and compromise.

Continuing the theme of religious prejudice, 'The Great Difference' focuses on the disparity between what all religions preach and how their practitioners behave. The narrator is a Sikh while the other two characters are a Muslim *maulana* and a Hindu *swami*. Their destination is Paris, where they will attend the World Congress of Faiths. Despite the purpose of their journey to come together with people of all faiths in mutual understanding and respect, we find the maulana and swami clinging tenaciously to prejudicial views of each other. Singh portrays the chauvinism, self-righteousness and narrow-mindedness so common among unenlightened practitioners of all faiths. The maulana says to the narrator:

> I wonder when God will teach these Hindus some sense! . . . Even your Guru Baba Nanak, great personality, failed to get them off idol worship, cow worship, Ganga worship, and hundreds of other unintelligent things. He tried to unite Hindus and Moslems, but the Hindu is incapable of reason. He only understands the sword.
>
> (*Vishnu*, p. 102–3)

As for the swami, it seems that even his moral character is suspect. Perhaps ridiculing the trendy devotion to Indian swamis for miraculous remedies, the story mentions how the swami enabled the barren Vicereine to conceive with the aid of his 'rare herb'. Nine months after the swami's visit, the Vicereine had given birth to a male child. We are left to come to our own conclusions about the logistics of this miraculous event.

The swami is so lost in the intricacies of his own prejudice that he can see nothing worthwhile in other religions. Claiming 'the superiority of the Hindu over other systems of learning', he declares that:

> all the West possessed was actually borrowed from the Hindu Shastras. European scholars had stolen invaluable Sanskrit documents, translated them into their own languages, and utilised this purloined learning in producing – their philosophy, their medicine, their science, their railway trains, motor cars, aeroplanes.
>
> (*Vishnu*, p. 99)

Whereas the maulana, in a gesture of common humanity, does at least offer to share his food with the other two characters, the swami 'ate by himself without even a suggestion of sharing it. It was obvious [the Sikh narrator tells us] that he did not approve of either of us' (*Vishnu*, p. 101). With attitudes like these, the story seems to caution us, we are going to drift farther apart. Instead of dwelling on the surface differences, we need to focus on our fundamental and great similarities.

Singh uses the Sikh narrator to balance the seriousness of the story's theme with lusty humor. The narrator is certainly no saint either. The nudes of *Vie Parisienne* magazine interest him much more than matters of faith. His lustful description of Mlle Jeanne Dupont, the French woman who seeks enlightenment from the Hindu and the Muslim, is a case in point:

> While other delegates were being introduced, a girl walked up to us with her autograph album. She looked too much a creature of the flesh to be seen in realms spiritual. But there she was – fair and buxom with her fuzzy hazel hair scattered in profusion about her shoulders. Her breasts were protestingly straitjacketed under a soft, silky pullover. Her steatopygous behind was an invitation to lustfulness forbidden by the laws of man.
>
> (*Vishnu*, p. 104)

The narrator's role is that of an entertainer and a peace-maker between the swami and the maulana. He describes with wry humor the overblown, proselytizing zeal of the two characters. When the maulana grabs the opportunity to enlighten the French woman before the swami can do so, the narrator explains to us how hurt the swami feels: 'An innocent maiden being led astray by a lecherous cow eater?' (*Vishnu*, p. 105). The swami insists that the lady must know about Hinduism also. To keep both parties satisfied, the narrator, acting as an interpreter and

moderator, arranges a meeting between the swami and the French lady. Although not an avid practitioner of Sikhism, the narrator also puts in his bid, insisting that his religion should have its chance too. Knowing the narrator's predilections, we have reason to suspect his intentions along with those of his colleagues.

The French woman is confused by this variety of religions but makes appointments with all three proponents. Singh ends this story on his characteristic note of ambivalence. The French woman keeps her appointments with the maulana and swami. However, she calls off her meeting with the narrator. Her note of apology says, 'I understand the difference very well.' The irony of this conclusion is enhanced by the fact that both the maulana and the swami speak no French, and the woman speaks only French. What does she learn from the two men in her private meetings with them? Why doesn't she wait to receive further enlightenment from the Sikh narrator? What does she mean when she says she understands the difference very well? Her statement invites some irreverent speculations. Is she perhaps referring to the difference between the two Indian religious leaders' sex organs – one circumcised, the other not? Or is she alluding to the different ways in which they have sex? How could she have possibly learned anything about spiritual matters since neither one of the religious leaders speaks her language? The story leaves us with all these puzzling questions.

It is easy for Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs alike to find this story offensive. However, Singh's target for attack and ridicule is not the religions themselves. His focus is rather on the abuses of religion perpetrated to gratify baser instincts and to fan the flames of hatred.

LOVE, LOATHING AND RACIAL IDENTITY

Shifting the focus from religious intolerance to racial identity and conflict, 'Karma' and 'A Love Affair in London' deserve special attention. By sitting in the first-class compartment, Sir Mohal Lal, the protagonist of 'Karma', hopes to converse with British officials and thus 'commune with his dear old England' (*Vishnu*, p. 15). Instead of satisfying his longing for polite English company, two ill-bred, aggressive tommies throw him out; in their words, they 'get the nigger out!' Being English, these tommies think of themselves as superior to any Indian, even to the Oxford-educated Lal.

The concept of karma that controls this narrative suggests that Lal earns his fate by his slavish imitation of everything English and his rejection and ridicule of everything Indian. In rejecting his true identity, he doesn't realize that he is like the Indian-made mirror in which he looks at himself while dressed in

impeccable English clothes. The 'red oxide of its [the mirror's] back had come off at several places and long lines of translucent glass cut across its surface' (*Vishnu*, p. 11). This encounter of flawlessly tailored suit with the flawed mirror is symbolic of the defects in Lal's own self-image. He deserves to be jolted out of his complacent, excessively self-regarding, albeit erroneous, sense of belonging to the English elite. He learns that in a moment of crisis like the one he encounters on the train, and when confronted with racist individuals, it is not education and culture but the color of the skin that matters.

Besides this divorce between illusion and reality, there is another ironic reversal at the story's end. Lady Lal, who travels in the lowly inter-class compartment and who seems to be little more than a vassal to her domineering husband, comes out triumphant. She enjoys herself eating Indian food and conversing with other travelers. While Sir Lal lies prostrate on the platform, Lady Lal, from the freedom of her lowly compartment, spits out the window 'a jet of red dribble' that had been accumulating in her mouth as she chewed on betel leaves. We cannot help but wish it had landed on her husband.

In 'A Love Affair in London', racial identity also provides a strong dynamic. The story and its themes turn on a coincidence. However unsatisfying the use of chance may be as an artistic device, it does not weaken the thematic design; the events point to tenacious ties that work in mysterious ways to underscore the common humanity we all share in spite of misunderstandings, racial stereotyping and ill will.

The tale unfolds through a flashback as the main character Kamini is about to land in London for the first time in her life. Kamini, who comes to London for studies, has never met an Englishman before. Her only encounter – hard to describe as a meeting – was with Robert Smith, the magistrate who had sentenced Kamini to a seven-day detention for her part in the 'Quit India' movement. Kamini's negative impression of English people is strengthened as she recalls how her family had suffered at the hands of Englishmen. Her father and brothers had been subjected to imprisonment and beatings for taking part in the passive resistance movements.

Kamini remembers the curious details of her trial. All other girls in her group had pleaded guilty and were let off with a warning. The magistrate 'was engrossed in reading a book and did not even look up at the people being tried' (*Bride*, p. 116).[3] When he found out that Kamini was only 17, he had asked the clerk to tell her 'to go back to school and mind her studies' (*Bride*, p. 116). Kamini had retorted by asking the magistrate to go back to England and mind his country's business.

> The magistrate looked up. His steel-gray eyes wandered from her face framed by masses of raven hair down to where they fell in profusion about bare shoulders; to her long neck and youthful figure, and back again to meet her eyes sparkling with defiance.
>
> (*Bride*, p. 116)

Kamini's face, reminding the magistrate of something unexplained, had drawn out from him this response: 'Incredible. . . . Incredible coincidence.' When he had asked her if they taught poetry at her school, she had been defiant once again: 'What has that got to do with the case? . . . Do they pay you to read fiction in court?' (*Bride*, p. 117).

The magistrate had given her a seven-day sentence, 'A' class. The next day, Kamini received in jail a copy of a beautifully bound volume of the collected works of Hilaire Belloc. The note from the magistrate said, 'Pleasant reading in jail. With compliments from the man who sent you there.' The following lines from a poem had been marked for Kamini's special attention:

> Her face was like a King's command,
> When all the swords are drawn.
>
> (*Bride*, p. 117)

Kamini had resolved to tell the media about the magistrate's strange conduct. She was sure she could get him dismissed from service. However, soon after sentencing Kamini, Smith resigned and returned to England. Kamini had vaguely understood that the lines from the poem were meant to be a compliment to her looks, but that had not made her change her negative opinion of Englishmen.

Landing in London shakes her out of her reverie. Feeling homesick and lonely in London, she busies herself in the daily routine and starts harboring the hope that she might meet Robert Smith by chance. The more she tries to dismiss that thought, the more it persists and grows into an obsession. 'She believed that if she willed it, somehow, somewhere, she would run into him' (*Bride*, p. 120).

One day she joins the crowd of people gathered to catch a glimpse of the Queen and a visiting monarch. The procession of band players, marching guards, cavalry, and royalty concludes; and the crowd disperses. Kamini notices that only one woman remains motionless. When Kamini hears her sobbing, the embarrassed woman explains: 'I am silly when it comes to soldiers and processions. They always make me cry' (*Bride*, p. 121).

Kamini responds, 'It was very moving. And so beautiful. Don't you think a lot of soldiers together look beautiful?' Kamini's response leads to the denouement as her interlocutor says:

> It's odd you say that. My friend used to say that a beautiful woman looked like thousands of soldiers with drawn swords. As a matter of fact he was always saying that to me. He had been in India too and liked it.
> (*Bride*, p. 121)

Kamini comes to know the sad truth that Robert Smith had been killed in the war on D-Day. The conclusion leaves many important impressions on the reader's mind, one of which is that Smith had liked India, but who would have thought that he liked India from the way he conducted his duties? How was Kamini to know his real feelings when they had met as a magistrate and a criminal? Other notable impressions and questions concern the reason why Smith resigned his position and left India. Did he do so because he disliked the unpleasant task of punishing Indians for demanding their rights? Or did he resign because he wanted to fight for his country's honor? Would this new awareness make Kamini change her negative view of the English? What is the love affair of the story's title? Does the title allude to the love between Smith (now deceased) and the woman Kamini meets in London? Is this also a reference to the love that Kamini has started to feel for Smith? Could this also be the love that Kamini has begun to feel for this Englishwoman? It seems that Kamini had reminded Smith of this Englishwoman. The story, like so many of Singh's stories, ends on a mysterious note only partly resolved.

THE MYSTERIES AND MISADVENTURES OF SEXUAL PASSION

Under the rubric of mysteries of sexual passion and lust, Singh's notable stories are 'The Rape', 'The Morning After the Night Before' and 'Maiden Voyage of the *Jal Hindia*'. Lust, in both its positive and prurient shades, is a part of Singh's creative process. 'The Morning After' and 'Maiden Voyage' are comic renditions of lust, whereas 'The Rape' is a serious treatment of this topic.

The setting of 'The Rape' is an extremely hot, humid and still night in a Punjabi village. The oppressive heat and invading mosquitoes stretch Dalip Singh's patience to the limit. However, a torture that is even more unbearable than the weather is Dalip's passion for Bindo, his cousin, whom he espies on the adjoining rooftop. Since Bindo's father, Banta Singh, murdered his brother (Dalip's father),

the relations between the families have been severed. On the night in question, as a soft breeze begins to blow, Bindo stands up beside her bed.

> She picked up her skirt from the two corners which fell just above her knees and held it across her face with both hands, baring herself from the waist to her neck, letting the cool breeze envelop her flat belly and her youthful bust. Then someone said something in an angry whisper and Bindo let down her skirt. She dropped on her charpoy [cot] and was lost in the confused outlines of her pillow.
>
> (*Vishnu*, p. 78)

Dalip is haunted in his dreams by Bindo's figure that starlight had revealed to him. His eyes were shut 'but they opened into another world where Bindo lived and loved, naked, unashamed and beautiful' (p. 79). Awakened in early hours before the dawn by his mother, Dalip goes through the motions of plowing his fields – all the time thinking about Bindo. As the day disappears into the night, he goes out to his fields to clear the water channels for irrigation. Having done his work, Dalip 'stretched himself on the cool grassy bank. . . . Then the world relapsed into a moonlit silence' (p. 81).

The sound of the splashing of water jolts Dalip out of his reverie. He notices Bindo washing herself by the stream.

> She rinsed her mouth and threw handfuls of water over her face.
> Then she stood up and leaving her baggy trousers lying at her feet.
> She picked up her shirt from the front and bent down to wipe her face with it.
>
> (p. 82)

Dalip's frenzy hurls him on Bindo. He 'smothered her face with passionate kisses and stifled her frightened cry by gluing his mouth to hers' (p. 82). Bindo resists but is soon exhausted and gives up.

Later, Bindo's tearful eyes make Dalip feel remorse, because he 'had never intended hurting her. . . . Bindo opened her large black eyes and stared at him blankly. There was no hate in them, nor any love' (p. 82). Bindo's companions have been calling out for her, but she remains quiet. One of her friends discovers what has happened and calls for help as Dalip disappears into the dark.

The story moves forward smoothly. The events have a deep causal link, and the pace is effortlessly swift. Bindo's wealthy father, Banta Singh, bribes the officials so that there is no delay in the administration of justice, and all is set for Dalip to be sent to jail. But Dalip persuades the magistrate to ask Bindo whether

she had gone to him of her own free will. 'Through the many folds of the shawl muffling her face Bindo answered "Yes"' (p. 85).

Having artistically etched the story's events, Singh makes his quietus with characteristic aplomb. He leaves it up to us to grapple with questions of morals and morality, which the surprise ending leaves unanswered. Is this story about the rape of Bindo, or is it about Bindo's clever seduction of Dalip? Is Dalip more 'sinned against' than a sinner, to use a phrase from Shakespeare's *King Lear*? Does Bindo resort to her strategy of enticing Dalip because she wants to marry him in opposition to her family's plans? Since Dalip's passion for Bindo is genuine and sincere and since he never intends to hurt her in any way, would it be valid to infer that public knowledge of consummation of his passion would inevitably lead to marriage – to the mutual happiness of both of them? In view of the prevailing cultural values that emphasize the woman's purity, wouldn't Bindo, as a rape 'victim', become undesirable to another man, thus nullifying her family's plans of marrying her off to someone else? Such plans are not stated in the story, but the hostility between the two families is apparent from the murder of Dalip's father by Bindo's father. Viewed from this perspective, far from being a victim, Bindo would seem to be the architect of her own fate. In yet another different reading of this story, may we not be inclined to perceive in Bindo a ruined and 'tainted' woman at the mercy of Dalip, whom she had followed not to be raped but to be loved? All these questions are hard to avoid as well as answer. Once again, the reader has to fill in the missing details in this story, in which what is excluded from the narration is as important as what is included.

It is important to note that 'The Rape' is not a social commentary on relationships between young men and women in a Punjabi village. Such passionate encounters occur rarely, but when they do, they often have tragic consequences. Singh simply takes a familiar setting to deal with an archetypal tension of human life, especially in youth, when love and desire conflict with responsibility to others and to the social order. Two images intensify and enrich the story's thematic design. One is the soft, cool breeze that stirs the trees, symbolizing the stirring of Dalip's passion and the awakening of desire in Bindo. The other image, of the plough and the earth, provides a graphic prefiguration of the encounter between Dalip and Bindo. Dalip 'pressed the plough deeper with savage determination and watched its steel point concupiscently nosing its way through the rich brown earth' (p. 80).

Like 'The Rape', Singh's story about 'The Morning After the Night Before' also treats a lustful encounter, but here the primary purpose is to entertain. For

bringing sheer delight through clever manipulation of plot, this story is among Singh's best.

The first-person narrator has set out to prove that he is a 'he-man' by outdrinking his companions. One of the several ironies is that this character is not particularly fond of drinking and finds alcohol distasteful. Nevertheless, as the narrator tells us:

> In our group, the capacity for drink was the recognized test of a good fellow and a he-man. I had an obsession for popularity. It had also to prove my manliness since insinuations had been cast on me on that score.
>
> (*Bride*, p. 109)

Armed with this resolve to prove his manliness, the protagonist overindulges in drink, losing self-control and judgment. He starts lusting for the woman with whom he is dancing:

> She had tried to squeeze all her protrusions in tight-fitting clothes. But her flesh had voluptuously overspread its narrow confines. Her bulbous breasts were ever on the verge of escaping from the narrow strap of cloth which held them down. One couldn't keep one's eyes off them. . . . She was vulgarly desirable. I knew I should not dance with her, but I did. . . . I held her so close that the fleshy folds of her breasts flattened against my chest. . . . I became embarrassed at my own reactions. The one was to take her off the dance floor behind the herbaceous border. The other to divert my vulgar intentions towards legitimate channels and seek my wife's company.
>
> (*Bride*, p. 111–12)

At this point, reality blends into a dream-like state, in which he undoes 'the little strap that held her bust in subjection' and puts it in his trouser pocket. In the morning, he comes to know that he had gone to sleep in his dinner jacket, stiff collar and bow. He becomes panic-stricken when he finds a silk brassière in his trouser pocket. 'Had I really gone that far in drink?' he thinks. 'What would my wife say when she discovered it?'

After he has carefully destroyed the evidence of his 'amorous escapade' by tearing it up and flushing it down the toilet, he prepares to face his wife. The conversation between the husband and wife is a good example of Singh's ability to use dialogue with precision and economy.

'I must have had a lot to drink last night,' I said.
'You certainly did,' she snapped back.
'Did I misbehave much?' I enquired apologetically.
'You certainly did,' she snapped again.
'What did I do?' I asked again.
'What do you do when you are drunk. I have to put up with it . . .
Where are my what-nots? You put them in your pocket.'

(*Bride*, p. 113)

With the realization that his steamy encounter of the previous night was with his own wife, our narrator's headache vanishes 'as if someone had bored a hole in the head and pulled it out'. The story concludes on a comically moralistic note: 'that's the only amorous adventure a married man undertakes without recriminations'.

In 'Maiden Voyage of the *Jal Hindia*', Singh maintains this comic style but uses a broader canvas by including European characters as well as Indians and Pakistanis. The plot revolves around an amorous intrigue between the diminutive Professor Chakkan Lal and the big Nordic woman referred to as the Blonde. This intrigue leads to a confrontation between Europeans on the one hand and Indians and Pakistanis on the other, all of whom are on the maiden voyage of the *Jal Hindia*.

The story's climactic moment occurs when Mrs Tyson visits Lal in the ship's surgery, where he is recovering from a blow administered to him by Mr Tyson when he caught Lal peeping through the porthole at Mrs Tyson's naked body. 'She ran her fingers through his [Lal's] hair and asked him it if hurt.' She tells him, 'I was very much flattered that I should have diverted your attention from your object [the Blonde]. It wasn't me you wanted to see that night, was it, Professor? It doesn't pay to be fickle. Your friend is most offended by your disloyalty' (*Bride*, p. 59). Mrs Tyson correctly perceives that Professor Lal, while looking for the Blonde's cabin, had been distracted and waylaid by Mrs Tyson's nude figure.

Mrs Tyson is able to end the rift between the two parties. The captain announces a fancy-dress ball, and the story ends in a very unexpected manner: as Mrs Tyson invites Professor Lal to dance 'The Blue Danube' her irate husband leaves the hall in dismay. Later John Tyson returns: 'He had a black eye and his shirt was torn. He hobbled in on a pair of crutches and came to the center of the dance floor. Then, he slowly turned round on his heels. On his back was a placard with the legend in bold letters: "WRONG CABIN."

Here we have the typical teasing conclusion that we so often find in Singh's short fiction. Into whose cabin had John Tyson trespassed? Who gave him the black eye? Was it possibly an Indian or a Pakistani, who gave him a taste of his own medicine? Was Mr Tyson led to his misadventure by a feeling of jealousy and wanting to even the score with his wife? We are left wondering about the answers.

Singh seems to be searching for a formula for civilized coexistence by people of various religious beliefs and racial origins. His mix of characters and interactions between them are a proof of that search. This is a serious matter of global importance. However, his characters often behave in such a ridiculously confrontational and prejudicial manner – mirroring the unpleasant reality of racial and religious intolerance – that the result is highly comic. The effort towards harmony does yield some positive results because, after the fury of violence, an understanding between conflicting parties begins to emerge, as in the case of the Tysons and Professor Lal and, in fact, between all Europeans and Indo-Pakistanis in this story.

THE DARK FACE OF THE SOCIAL ORDER

There is no doubt that Singh prefers to depict human foibles and failings in a comic way. However, a sampling of his full artistic range should not leave out his ability to treat serious subjects seriously. 'A Bride for the Sahib' deals with the social evil of marriages arranged by families with more attention paid to the size of the dowry than to compatibility of husband and wife. Very few comic touches lighten this dark tale.

Srijut Santosh Sen is a WOG – a westernized oriental gentleman. When his mother pushes him to settle down in life, he submits: 'Alright Ma, you find me a wife. I'll marry anyone you want me to marry' (*Bride*, p. 10). Sen's mother and uncle place a matrimonial ad in a newspaper and select a girl who is expected to bring in a large dowry.

It is obvious that the bride and groom have hardly anything in common. The wife, Kumari Kalyani, does not touch alcohol, whereas Mr Sen not only enjoys drinking but probably expects his wife to drink as well. He enjoys listening to Western classical music, for which Kumari has no taste. They don't even eat the same food, and she enjoys her betel leaves while he smokes his pipe.

On the wedding night, Sen falls asleep while listening to Smetana's musical composition, 'The Bartered Bride'. Kumari had fallen asleep earlier after waiting for him. She had put mascara in her eyes. 'Her tears had washed some of it on

to her cheeks and the pillow had a smudge of soot' (*Bride*, p. 24). In the morning she touches his feet and tells him, 'I am unworthy.' She is indeed the bride who has bartered away her life for nothing. Unknown to the two families, Sen does not consummate the marriage. Kumari goes to spend a few days with her family. Her husband is expected to bring her back, but he does not do so until his father-in-law writes to him, inquiring about his intentions.

The story ends on a shocking note with the wife's suicide. 'Sen put his hand on her forehead. It was the first time he had touched his wife. And she was dead' (*Bride*, p. 33). Kumari had left two envelopes beside her bed. One was addressed to her mother in Bengali, and the other was for him. The story ends on a note of deep pathos we feel for Kumari:

> A haunted smile came on his lips as he read the English address:
> 'To,
> Mr. S. Sen, Esq.'

We are left wondering how to parcel out the blame for this tragedy. Clearly, Sen's mother and uncle share some of the responsibility because they give greater importance to a large dowry than to anything else that would have made for a happier match. We also wonder how a westernized, grown-up man like Sen could surrender himself so completely to his mother in the important matter of selecting a wife for him. It is also intriguing to speculate as to what Kumari's hopes had been that made her consent to this travesty of marriage. And, as she quickly realized that they were too far apart to be ever united in marriage, why didn't she leave Sen instead of killing herself? This story raises all these questions, and no perceptive reader can refrain from thinking about the evil customs that promote such totally incompatible and tragic matrimonial pairings.

A glance at these stories by Khushwant Singh reveals that in matters of form, Singh seems to subscribe to a Poe-like concept of the short story: The practitioner of the craft of the short story conceives 'a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out. . . . In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design.'[4]

Singh's realism brings to mind Hamlet's famous words that an artist's role is 'to hold . . . the mirror up to Nature; to show Virtue her own feature, Scorn her own image, and the very Age and Body of the time his form and pressure'.[5] And Singh's scalpel of wit and humor, used to relieve the underlying seriousness of his themes, is akin to that of George Bernard Shaw. Shaw's words, from his Preface to the *Complete Plays*, help us understand the comic

mode observed also by Khushwant Singh: 'If I make you laugh at yourself, remember that my business . . . is to "chasten morals with ridicule"; and if I sometimes make you feel like a fool, remember that I have by the same action cured your folly.'

Notes

1 Vsant Anant Shahane, *Khushwant Singh*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972, p. 32.

2 All quotations from Singh's volume of stories, *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories*, London: Saturn Press, 1950, will be identified in the text by the abbreviated title of *Vishnu*, followed by the page number – both in parentheses.

3 All quotations from Singh's volume of stories, *A Bride for the Sahib and Other Stories*, Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1967, will be identified in the text by the abbreviated title of *Bride*, followed by the page number – both in parentheses.

4 Edgar Allen Poe, *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914, VII, pp. 38–40.

5 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene ii, lines 23–5.

APPENDIX I

The Ten Sikh Gurus

First	Guru Nanak	1469–1539
Second	Guru Angad	1504–52 (Guru 1539–52)
Third	Guru Amar Das	1479–1574 (Guru 1552–74)
Fourth	Guru Ram Das	1534–81 (Guru 1574–81)
Fifth	Guru Arjan	1563–1606 (Guru 1581–1606)
Sixth	Guru Hargobind	1595–1644 (Guru 1606–44)
Seventh	Guru Har Rai	1630–61 (Guru 1644–61)
Eighth	Guru Har Krishan	1656–64 (Guru 1661–4)
Ninth	Guru Tegh Bahadur	1621–75 (Guru 1664–75)
Tenth	Guru Gobind Singh	1666–1708 (Guru 1675–1708)

APPENDIX II

Contributors to the Guru Granth Sahib

The Guru Granth Sahib was compiled by the fifth Guru and includes selections of his own and the earlier Sikh Gurus' works as well as those of Hindu and Muslim saints. The tenth Guru later added poetry by his father, the ninth Guru. Aside from a single verse, his own works were compiled in the Dasam Granth.

CONTRIBUTOR	NUMBER OF VERSES
Sikh Gurus	
Guru Nanak	974 hymns
Guru Angad	62 hymns
Guru Amar Das	907 hymns
Guru Ram Das	679 hymns
Guru Arjan Dev	2,218 hymns
Guru Tegh Bahadur	115 hymns and slokas
Guru Gobind Singh	1 slok

Hindu bhaktas and Muslim sufis (twelfth to sixteenth centuries)

Sunder	1 hymn
Satta and Balvand	1 var
Sadhana (b. late 1400s)	1 hymn
Surdas (b. 1478)	1 hymn
Sain (b. early 1400s)	1 hymn
Kabir (b. 1398/1440)	292 hymns
Jaidev (b. 1170)	2 hymns
Trilochan (b. 1267)	4 hymns
Dhanna (b. 1415)	4 hymns
Namdev (b. 1270)	60 hymns
Parmanand (1500s)	1 hymn
Pipa (b. 1425)	1 hymn
Sheikh Farid (b. 1173)	130 slokas
Beni (late 1200s)	3 hymns
The Bhatts	112 swayyas
Sheikh Bhikan (b. 1574)	2 hymns
Mardana (b. 1459)	3 slokas
Ravi Das (b. 1384)	41 hymns
Ramanand (b. 1299)	1 hymn

APPENDIX III

Music and Structure of the Guru Granth Sahib

The 5,894 poetic compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib are – with a few exceptions – classified according to *raga*. A raga is a scale of certain notes and combinations of these notes that provide the basic structure around which the musician improvises. Different ragas are associated with different moods and times of the day and year. Of the 31 ragas used in the Granth, 14 are actually ragas and 17 raginis but this distinction is not made in the text.

As well as the ragas and raginis, there are 22 compositions in the Granth that are *vars;* that is, the tunes of popular ballads. Nine of these vars are given a specific tune and the rest can be sung in any popular tune.

The poetic compositions are clustered together in ragas and then arranged in an order that generally follows a uniform pattern, based on raga sub-groups. Three norms emerge as the basis for assigning a composition to a particular raga sub-group:

1. *The number of stanzas*: by far the largest number of hymns in the Granth are what those with four stanzas which the Granth calls *caupade*. Then come the *chand* with eight stanzas, the *astapadis* (*asatpadia*) and the *dupade* with two, the *tipadas* with three and the *pancapadas* with five stanzas.

2. *The* gharu *or 'set' of the composition*: this appears to be a variant within the raga pattern which provides more specific musical information. There are seventeen different gharu notations in the Granth. Sometimes, instead of giving the number of the gharu, there is a reference to the first words of another composition with the instruction to sing this composition according to its gharu.
3. *Authorship*: this is an important norm. A major division is between hymns of the *mahla* or Guru and the hymns of the *bhagats*. In any raga, the mahla hymns always come first, beginning with the earliest Guru from 'Mahla 1' (Guru Nanak) onwards, and with the *caupade* if there is one.

It needs also to be noted that on the last page of the Granth, a *ragamala* or list of six ragas is given that are said to have five wives and eight sons each. This gives a total of six ragas, thirty raginis and forty-eight 'sons'. The presence of this list of ragas is puzzling and has been a source of fierce controversy. It is not an index of the ragas used in the Granth because the list does not correspond to those ragas. Some scholars have pointed out that it was a list which existed before the compilations of the Granth and should be attributed to a certain Alam who is said to have composed it in 1583 CE. For these scholars the ragamala is *Gurbani* ('inspired words of the Guru') like the Granth. Others doubt the sanctity of the list and even question whether it was included in the earliest version of the Adi Granth. In an important meeting in Amritsar in 1849, it was decided that the ragamala is not Gurbani. However, the connection of this list to the ragas that were used in the Granth and the purpose for including it remain unknown.

APPENDIX IV

Collections of Sikh Art

This list is not comprehensive.

ON PUBLIC VIEW

United Kingdom

Bradford Art Galleries and Museum, Bradford
British Library, London
British Museum, London
British Royal Collections
Dalhousie Collection, Colstoun, Scotland
Castlereigh Museum, Bradford
National Army Museum, London
Osborne House, Isle of Wight
Royal Armories, Leeds
Victoria & Albert Museum, London

United States of America

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
San Diego Museum of Art, California

India

Academy of Fine Arts and Literature, New Delhi
Chandigarh Museum, Chandigarh
Lahore Fort Museum, Lahore
Lahore Museum, Lahore
Motibagh Palace Museum, Patiala
National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
National Museum, New Delhi
Qila Mubarak, Patiala
Sikh Museum, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar
Victoria Memorial Museum, Calcutta

Russia

The Hermitage, St Petersburgh

PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

United Kingdom

Dr Kartar S. Lalvani, London
Howard Ricketts, London
Twin Studio, The Wirral

United States and Canada

Suresh P. Singh Bhalla, Toronto
G.S. Bhullar, Virginia
Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu, California
Narinder S. Kapany, California
Oscar De La Renta, New York

India

Maharaja Amarinder Singh, Patiala
J.S. and Patricia Uberoi, New Delhi

Glossary

Akalis The saint-soldiers of Ranjit Singh.
See also *Nihangs*.
amritdhari 'One who has taken the nectar'. An individual who has undergone the initiation ceremony and is a Khalsa Sikh.
Bani 'Utterances/compositions'; the compositions recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib
Ghorcharras The Sikh cavalry of Ranjit Singh which also served the British Raj.
Gurbani The sacred verses of the Gurus.
gurudwara Literally a door, *dwara*, to revelation, *guru*. It refers to the building which enshrines the Guru Granth Sahib. It is the center of community life and has a community kitchen attached to it, in which meals are prepared and served. Also spelt *gurdwara*.
gyani Sikh spiritual teacher.
Janam Sakhis Literally, 'birth stories'. The term used to refers to the traditional narratives recounting stories of the life of Guru Nanak.
keshdhari 'Hair-bearing'. A Sikh who retains *kesh* (hair).
Khalsa Literally, 'the Pure'. The Khalsa is the religious order established by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 during the fight against the Mughal oppression. It is an initiated body of men and women who make a commitment to live as

warriors for freedom. Each man takes the name Singh ('Lion') and each woman the name Kaur ('Lioness' or 'Princess').

langar Community kitchen attached to every gurudwara in which meals are served to everyone regardless of caste or creed.

Nihangs The saint-soldiers of Ranjit Singh. See also *Akalis*

Panth The Sikh Community.

pir Muslim saint, spiritual teacher.

raga A scale of certain notes and combinations of these notes that provide the basic musical structure around which the musician improvises. Different ragas are associated with different moods and times of the day and year.

Sabad Literally the Word. Sabad is the primal sound, the holy Name, the 'unstruck melody', pervading the universe and resonating within each of us. It is the Divine Revelation. A stanza to be chanted from the Guru Granth Sahib is also sabad.

sahjdhari Sikhs Those who have not completely adopted the code of dress and hair of an *amritdhari* (someone who has received baptism by double-edged sword). Their commitment to the faith is established by their declaration and their deeds. Since 1699 when the Khalsa and the code of dress and hair were established by the tenth Guru, there have been Sikhs who served the Panth (community) as sahjdharis.

sannyas In Hindu culture, the last of the four stages of life when all worldly possessions and attachments are relinquished.

sannyasi Someone in the last of the four stages of life. See *sannyas*.

Sardar A term of respect. A gentleman or nobleman.

Sat Sri Akal 'God is Truth'. Common Sikh greeting.

Sikh 'Disciple'. Any person who believes in God, in the Guru Granth Sahib, in the ten Gurus, and in the Khalsa initiation ceremony.

toshkhana Treasury.

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- introduce the world to the progressive ethics, lyrical mysticism, artistry and heroism of the Sikhs
- contribute Sikh perspectives to issues of common human concern
- generate the highest quality resources for the academic study of Sikhism
- advance Sikh arts and culture across the disciplines by advancing the tradition of critical thought and creativity that gave birth to the faith.

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- a photo library of Sikh art
- documentary and feature films for international broadcast and video release.

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