



# Sikh Research Journal

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# **Cosmopolitanism, Tradition and Identity: Framing the Sikh Experience in California**

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Revised, August 18, 2016

## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes academic accounts of major aspects of the Sikh experience in California. In addition to providing an overview of various studies of the Sikh community, this paper points out implicit assumptions in these studies, as well as gaps in the literature. Issues discussed include Sikh religious identity, cultural practices and socioeconomic status, as well as the evolving national and global context in which the California Sikh community has grown. A specific academic framing of the community that is analyzed and critiqued is the classification of Sikh immigrants into “cosmopolitans” versus “transnationals,” the former term being imbued with normative desirability as more cultural flexible or adaptive. The critique offered here challenges historical representations of the early twentieth century Sikh community in India that underlie this framing, as well as highlighting insufficient consideration of societal contexts and constraints facing the community in twentieth century California.

# **Cosmopolitanism, Tradition and Identity: Framing the Sikh Experience in California\***

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## **Introduction**

Based on inferences from US Census data (which record data on languages spoken at home), there are about a quarter million Sikhs in the United States. About half of these are in California.<sup>1</sup> The Sikh presence in California is therefore quantitatively important, as well as having a long history. Indeed, historically, Sikhs dominated the population of “Asian Indians,” constituting perhaps 50 to 70 percent of that US Census group from 1910 to 1940, and 80 to 90 percent of those in California.<sup>2</sup> More recently, large influxes of Indian immigrants associated with the growth of information technology have made Sikhs and Punjabis a much smaller percentage of Indian Americans, but they still represent a significant presence, especially in California, and they are an important part of the state’s societal mosaic, along with many other minority ethnic groups.

This paper seeks to focus attention on the current state of knowledge of the Sikh community in California.<sup>3</sup> There have been several academic studies of this community, but many of them are

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\* I am immensely grateful to Rahuldeep Singh Gill for extensive comments and intricate conversations that helped me immeasurably in shaping and revising this paper. Michael Hawley also provided similarly extensive and patient comments. The final product is well short of meeting all the issues and challenges they raised, and they are totally blameless for that shortcoming.

<sup>1</sup> These figures are based on data constructed by Sanjoy Chakravorty, who, along with Devesh Kapur, are my co-authors on a forthcoming book on Indians in America (Chakravorty, Kapur and Singh, 2016, forthcoming). I am indebted to them for many ideas and a great deal of information, although they bear no responsibility for the material in this paper. There are a little over three million people of Indian origin in the US, or about one percent of the population. The number in California is about 560,000, or about one-sixth of Indian Americans. Therefore Indian-Americans have disproportionately settled in California (which has about one-eighth of the US population), and Sikhs even more so.

<sup>2</sup> These estimates are based on numbers reported in Leonard (1993) and La Brack (1988a), but which were compiled from earlier studies of immigrants from India, referenced in those works. Further inferences are required here, since these earlier Censuses did not collect language data. Since the numbers were quite small (about 2,500 nationwide), direct tabulation from local records has been used by various authors to establish that immigrants from India who were in rural California in this period were almost all Punjabis, and predominantly Sikhs within that group.

<sup>3</sup> The Sikhs are a faith community founded in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century by Nanak, who is considered by Sikhs as their Guru, or spiritual guide and teacher. He was succeeded by nine others, Guru Gobind Singh being the last of these human successors, and subsequently the sacred text, Guru Granth Sahib, serves the role of the community’s spiritual

dated. Thus, we have access to multiple historical accounts, and scattered ethnographic studies, but there has been no major study for several decades. After providing an overview of academic studies on California Sikhs, the paper discusses the framing of these existing works, pointing out certain analytical features that have not been previously highlighted, especially in juxtaposition. In particular, the issue of Sikh identity surfaces in a manner that deserves further attention. Specifically, this paper surfaces and critiques an academic framing of the community that classifies Sikh immigrants into either “cosmopolitans” or “transnationals,” the former term being meant to connote cultural flexibility and pluralism, and the latter being characterized as embodying cultural narrowness. The critique offered here challenges historical representations of the early twentieth century Sikh community in India that underlie this framing, as well as highlighting insufficient consideration of societal contexts and constraints that shaped the Sikh immigrant experience in twentieth century California. The penultimate section of the paper goes on to discuss the global and national context in which the California Sikh community has evolved, and some of the current challenges it faces. The paper ends with a summary concluding section.

### **Studies of the Sikhs in California**

There are three major book-length scholarly works on the Sikh community in California, in addition to shorter studies that have been conducted.<sup>4</sup> The earliest of these was by Bruce La Brack (1988a), which was based on work primarily done in the 1970s, though it incorporated follow-up fieldwork done through 1985. The title of his book, *The Sikhs of Northern California 1904-1975*, is a good indicator of its broad scope.<sup>5</sup> La Brack provides a quite comprehensive linear account of the Sikh community in California, including its early days and the transition effected by the opening up of immigration in 1965 through the Immigration and Naturalization Act. The well-known narrative is one of a community that was static in numbers on the one hand and cut off from its homeland roots on the other, as a result of restrictive immigration policies introduced in the 1920s, being replenished through family reunification provisions once those restrictions were relaxed. Punjabi Sikh men could now bring brides from India, as well as other relatives, and Punjabi and Sikh traditions were renewed in the California Sikh community, as it

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preceptor. Almost all Sikhs are from the Punjab region of South Asia, the site of the founding of the faith, or descendants of those from that region, so Punjabi cultural and social patterns have been significant in Sikh tradition and practice. These brief statements are meant as an introduction for those with no knowledge of the community, and do not bring out the complexities of identity and history that form much of the background for this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard (1993) surveys numerous studies going back to 1923, and through the 1970s, including several books, but these are often not purely academic works in the modern sense. One of these, Jacoby (2007), is essentially a reprint of a manuscript that originally dates back to 1978, and was based on research conducted in the mid-1950s, but it includes many detailed interviews that are still of value.

<sup>5</sup> The dissertation version of La Brack’s work is descriptively subtitled *A Socio-historical Study*. La Brack also discusses food, dress, language, marriage, family structures, and leisure activities.

grew once more. La Brack discusses these changes in cultural and social norms, as well as the economic and family life of the community, in a careful, systematic manner.<sup>6</sup>

A second book-length study was that of Margaret Gibson (1988), *Accommodation without Assimilation: Sikh Immigrants in an American High School*. The fieldwork for this book was done in the early 1980s. As the title indicates, the focus of the book was quite different than La Brack's broader study. Gibson analyzed the experience of Punjabi (almost all Sikh) high school students in a community in the Sacramento Valley. The name of the community is disguised as "Valleyside" to provide anonymity, but it was in all likelihood in or around the Yuba City area, which is the site of a large Sikh community. Gibson provides a sympathetic portrayal of the community and their challenges. Several themes emerge, including the prejudice and pressures to "westernize" faced by the Sikh immigrants, the conscious efforts of the community to balance old and new cultures (captured in the title of the book), differences between first and second generation with respect to the acceptable level of acculturation along with shared values across generations, and a strong desire for economic betterment through education and hard work. These are familiar themes in analyses of immigrant experiences in America, but Gibson provides a richness of detail and particularity that is valuable in understanding major aspects of the California Sikh experience in one of the community's largest concentrations.

The third academic book on the Sikh community in California is that of Karen Leonard (1992), *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans*. This book is similar to that of Gibson in its relatively narrow scope, as opposed to La Brack's broader canvas. As the subtitle indicates, it focuses on a very specific and atypical subset of the community, which came into existence almost exclusively between the two world wars, in the era of severe restrictions on immigration and citizenship. Several hundred Punjabi men (almost all Sikh and most of the rest Muslim) married Hispanic women, and raised families in the Imperial Valley near the Mexican border. Some of these families were also formed in, or moved to, other parts of California, including the Yuba City and Stockton areas. Leonard interviewed many of these individuals across the state in the early 1980s. Her book shares with La Brack's its historical focus, and La Brack also analyzed this specific community, including making comparisons with other Sikh communities in California and elsewhere in his own work.<sup>7</sup> The book's title summarizes its conceptual theme, which is used to frame and organize the detailed ethnographic research in the book. Leonard explicitly downplays approaches to ethnic identity that emphasize inequalities of power and marginalization, instead asserting about the Punjabi immigrants and their descendants that they "view their ethnic identity as a resource which they employed flexibly over the life cycle."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> La Brack (2012) provides a very useful summary account of the earlier period, updated to include newer research by others. This includes the formation of the Ghadar Party (discussed later in this paper) and the role of the Stockton gurdwara in the religious, social and political life of the early Sikh community.

<sup>7</sup> See La Brack (1988b). La Brack and Leonard (1984) also collaborated on an analysis of Punjabi-Mexican families.

<sup>8</sup> See Leonard (1993), p. 18.

All three of the above studies have overlaps as well as differences. What is striking about them, however, is how long ago they were conducted: the fieldwork for them was done in the 1970s or early 1980s, over three decades ago. However, these studies have continued to influence academic study and perceptions of the Sikhs. Gibson's work is, in fact, cited much more than the other two: using Google Scholar counts as a metric, it has over 1100 citations.<sup>9</sup> However, Gibson's work appears to be relatively less known in Sikh Studies, instead having its impact in broader studies of immigrants and education in the US.<sup>10</sup> This direction of impact was possibly influenced by Gibson's switch away from studying the Sikhs to examining other California immigrant communities, after her work on Sikhs was completed. Bruce La Brack also moved on to other academic pursuits, but has stayed in touch with the Sikh community, and offered recent perspective pieces, but not new research. Interestingly, given the seminal nature of his work, his book (including the dissertation version) has only about 80 citations in Google Scholar.<sup>11</sup> Karen Leonard has also not done any subsequent empirical work on the California Sikh community after the work for her book, focusing on other communities like Hyderabad Muslims in their diaspora. However, she has written regularly on religious pluralism in America, and continues to comment on aspects of the Sikh experience in that context. Her book on Punjabi-Mexicans remains her best-known work, with over 350 citations in Google Scholar.

## Identity

Identity is, of course, a complex phenomenon, with many dimensions. We have thus far used the terms 'Sikh' and 'Punjabi' without examining them, but they are central to the focus of this paper. The term 'Punjabi' is perhaps less difficult, if taken as a designation of location of birth. This can be extended straightforwardly to descendants as well, but when 'Punjabi' is interpreted in terms of culture, the term becomes more complicated, since the components of culture are neither fixed nor circumscribed.<sup>12</sup> At one level, the term 'Sikh' is even more complicated, because of the variations in beliefs and practices that it encompasses.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this

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<sup>9</sup> The citation numbers from Google Scholar are from August 1, 2016: these numbers grow over time, so will be different depending on when this paper is read. Google Scholar has the benefit of being wide-ranging, but it is obviously not the only measure of citations, or of academic influence more generally. It is also important to recognize that citation counts of related articles are not included in the tallies reported here.

<sup>10</sup> A reasonable conjecture is that most of Gibson's citations come from outside Sikh Studies.

<sup>11</sup> Arguably, this illustrates both the limitations of intellectual processes in academia (a function of the venue of publication and the location of the author) as well as those of any specific citation count.

<sup>12</sup> Obviously, this statement is relatively bland, but underlying it is an enormous theoretical literature that seeks to come to grips with 'culture.' For example, see Bourdieu (1977) and Clifford (1988). Furthermore, while it is clear from history that Sikhs originated as a faith community, much of that history is intertwined with Punjabi culture, even among Sikhs not born in the Punjab. Recently, perhaps following a usage among Jews in America, some diaspora Sikhs describe themselves as 'culturally Sikh,' implying that they do not observe beliefs or practices of the faith. However, in this case, it is arguable that they primarily mean 'culturally Punjabi' – sometimes with additional specificity, such as being Jat or Khatri.

<sup>13</sup> A tendency has arisen in Sikh Studies to frame this variation as a 'problem' for Sikh identity, but this is typically done in isolation, without acknowledging that such diversity can be found in every faith tradition, and even in

paper, it is enough to recognize the complexities, but also the fact that there are some clear implications of what each of these terms implies, as well as their differences.

La Brack is explicitly focused on the Sikh community, and invariably uses the term, although often pairing it with Punjabi. Gibson refers to Sikhs in her title, but then shifts – with a clear explanation – to the term ‘Punjabi,’ to encompass a small proportion of non-Sikh families in her observation sample. Leonard does not use the term ‘Sikh’ in her title, but does acknowledge their preponderance among the Punjabis who married Hispanic women. However, her view of Sikh identity is heavily influenced by the highly contested work of Harjot Oberoi (1988). She writes, “In particular, he [Oberoi] has shown that Sikh-Hindu boundaries were fluid and that a separate Sikh community began to be constructed only in the nineteenth century.”<sup>14</sup> This claim about the nineteenth century construction of a separate Sikh community is historically inaccurate, and has been refuted by many, including the foremost scholar of Sikh history, Jagtar Singh Grewal, in several definitive works (e.g., Grewal, 1990; 1997). Grewal provides a careful counterpoint to Oberoi’s specific arguments, and makes clear that, in the main, Sikhs viewed themselves as a distinct faith community from at least the seventeenth century, during their founding period.<sup>15</sup>

In line with her reliance on Oberoi, Leonard favors the term ‘Hindus’ to describe Punjabi-Mexicans. In fact, this term was applied to all immigrants from South Asia in the early twentieth century, including Sikhs and Muslims. It was a combination of a racial, ethnic and national term, although the three religions were distinct traditions,<sup>16</sup> and while India was not an independent nation at this time, as part of the British Empire, British India was a recognized entity. Indeed, the use of the term ‘Hindu’ had strong racist and xenophobic connotations. Nevertheless, Leonard, based on her interviews with second-generation Punjabi-Mexicans, asserts that they

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subsets of larger traditions (e.g., diversity among Catholics, as opposed to the obvious split between Catholics and Protestants). The most prominent example of this approach is McLeod (1989). Michael Hawley has emphasized to me the complexities of identity that go well beyond the scope of the current paper, suggesting that “notions of consciousness, personhood, agency, and truth” are involved in the concept, and that considering a combination of subjectivity and experience might provide a more satisfactory conceptual framework. These issues will have to be tackled elsewhere, in future work.

<sup>14</sup> See Leonard (1992), p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> La Brack and Leonard both characterize the Sikh faith as being built on an amalgam of Hindu and Muslim antecedents, though this position is not present in La Brack’s sole-authored works. This was a common view at one time, but has since been discredited. An alternative academic claim, that Sikh belief is essentially built on a so-called Sant tradition, has also been shown to be both ahistorical and conceptually problematic: see Singh (2001). Mann (2010) provides the clearest and most comprehensive analysis of the founding of the community. Gill (2016) provides a fresh analysis of the early-sixteenth century work of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla, in which the distinctiveness of the Sikhs as a faith community is quite apparent.

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the problematic category here is not ‘Sikh,’ but ‘Hindu,’ since the extent of diversity and temporal change within that appellation has been quite radical. Oberoi’s statement of this is typical of many scholars, “An extralocal religious community of Hindus is therefore a modern creation; linguistic and historical evidence indicates that it never existed in the past” (Oberoi, 1994, p. 17); but then he inaccurately seeks to establish a similar claim for Sikhs. It was also common for outsiders to use ‘Hindu’ as a term for any inhabitant of South Asia, whatever their faith tradition.

embraced this Hindu appellation: they “took pride in an ethnic identity as “Hindus” in rural California until new immigrants from South Asia challenged their claim to that identity.”<sup>17</sup>

The sympathetic view of the self-identification of the second-generation Punjabi-Mexicans as Hindus may be reasonable, but in later writings, though not based on any new fieldwork, Leonard (2007) extends her perspective to contrast earlier and later Punjabi immigrants. Repeating her views on the supposedly recent development of a distinctive Sikh identity, she claims “The first Punjabi diaspora reflected the Punjab’s late-nineteenth-century plural society, where occupation and language were more important than religion [p. 54],” and “The Punjabi pioneers, most among them Sikhs, were cosmopolitans [p. 55].”<sup>18</sup> From this perspective, she goes on to claim that, “Arguably, the religious pluralism still lingering at the time of the early Punjabi immigrations abroad has given way to a narrow transnationalism in the late twentieth century, an emphasis on the Sikh religion at home and in the diaspora for the sake of identity [pp. 55-56].” This interpretation relies heavily on the faulty claims of Oberoi discussed earlier in this section, namely, of a lack of a separate identity for Sikhs until the late nineteenth century and of fluid religious identities in the Punjab of that period.

The two terms, ‘cosmopolitans’ and ‘transnationals,’ also need some explication. There is a large literature that explores this dichotomy, but here we rely on Leonard’s own interpretation, leaving the larger issues to future research.<sup>19</sup> Cosmopolitans are individuals who are familiar with, or familiarize themselves with other cultures, and can move between cultures. Transnationals, on the other hand, create insulated cultural worlds typically based on family and religious ties. The problem here is in the oversimplification of the dichotomy used by Leonard, versus the complexity of the real world. There is also a related tendency in the literature that treats religious faith expressed in a form that differentiates a community from the mainstream, or that requires conformity within the faith to such differentiating norms, as being somehow undesirable.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Leonard (1993), p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> In other writing, Leonard (2006) offers yet another perspective, where she acknowledges that “Constrained by laws that denied them citizenship, prevented them from bringing wives or brides from India, and limited their marriage choices in the United States, the Punjabi men could not be transnational and became cosmopolitan. [p. 95]” This is quite different from her other claim that these individuals came to the United States from a cosmopolitan society in Punjab.

<sup>19</sup> See Leonard (2006), pp. 92-93. Leonard explicitly appeals to the work of Stuart Hall (1996) and Pnina Werbner (1999), but her application of their theorizing is arguably problematic, as discussed later in this paper. Michael Hawley has emphasized that there is a very large and recent literature that is relevant here, but discussing it is beyond the scope of the current paper.

<sup>20</sup> As an illustration of this tendency in the Sikh context, Pashaura Singh (2013), wants to allow “the multiplicity of Sikh voices throughout the Sikh World today and throughout Sikhism’s history to be heard without privileging any singular one [p. 47]” so as to get away from “the meta-narrative of the Khalsa [those who undergo the initiation ceremony that includes maintaining long hair]. [p. 27]” He explicitly sees this removal of privilege as the only way to avoid “the trap of ‘essentialism’ [p. 47]” but in doing so he postulates a binary which is much more extreme than that used by Leonard. A potential consequence of Pashaura Singh’s position is a rejection of the validity of any shared norms as a basis for a faith community, which is itself an extreme but unacknowledged normative position. Of course there is a difference between a scholar wishing to examine all perspectives and all expressions of a particular identity without privileging any, versus the perspectives of those within the community, but Pashaura

The problem is that crucial aspects of the Sikh experience in California do not easily fit Leonard's model of so-called cosmopolitanism. This is apparent in her own fieldwork. She writes, "In outward appearance, the Sikhs initially had been marked by the beard, long hair, and turban required by orthodox Sikhism. Retention of these characteristics proved difficult in the face of American (*sic*) prejudice. Moreover, many [Mexican Catholic] wives preferred their men to be clean-shaven. Several women explicitly linked the giving up of the turban and beard to their wedding day."<sup>21</sup> Her desire to adhere to the thesis that Sikh religious identity was a later (and implicitly undesirable) addition to the self-perceptions of Sikh pioneer immigrants leads her to discount her own examples, such as the Sikh who "changed his name from Singh to Ram because, having taken off the turban and beard, he felt he was no longer a Sikh and did not want to dishonor the Sikh religion..."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, as explained by La Brack as well as Leonard, children in this community did not learn the language of their fathers, and were socialized in the religion of their mothers.<sup>23</sup> All these examples suggest a set of constraints that are not consistent with the image of insouciant cosmopolitans, but instead point to a "fraught co-existence."<sup>24</sup>

While Leonard describes a situation that existed before World War II, Gibson (1988) shows that the pressures faced by the Sikh community in "Valleyside" were similar, coming from the majority community in this case. The opinion of Valleysiders, or non-Hispanic Whites in the community is clear, "Maybe we feel threatened by seeing these people not becoming Americanized. I don't think the people already here are going to make any effort to socialize unless they do westernize themselves."<sup>25</sup> And again, "Valleysider students said they believed in religious freedom and the right of every individual not to conform, but in practice they penalized those whose standards were different. Sikh students were even pressured to abandon unshorn hair, turban, and steel bangle – all outward marks of their Sikh faith and identity... 'We have numbers on our side,' explained one Valleyside senior, a bright, popular student and a class officer... To this Valleysider youth, being American meant 'acting like white people.'"<sup>26</sup>

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Singh's position appears to deny any dominant set of shared values normative validity, since such values must, according to him, be an expression of "essentialism."

<sup>21</sup> See Leonard (1992), p. 128.

<sup>22</sup> See Leonard (1992), p. 127.

<sup>23</sup> Jasjit Singh (2015) documents the importance of families in imparting religious traditions in the context of British Sikhs.

<sup>24</sup> This phrase is due to Clifford (1994), p. 328, where he states, "[T]he diaspora discourse and history currently in the air would be about recovering non-Western, or not-only-Western, models for cosmopolitan life, nonaligned transnationalities struggling within and against nation-states, global technologies, and markets – resources for a fraught coexistence." This conceptualization is subtler than Leonard's: although it uses the term 'cosmopolitan,' it does so while recognizing that it does not have to imply a Western model of what that term implies. Clifford does not have the Sikh example specifically in mind, so an interesting project for further investigation is to examine how the case of the Sikhs of California might modify his conceptual model.

<sup>25</sup> See Gibson (1988), p. 74.

<sup>26</sup> See Gibson (1988), p. 161. This situation is not restricted to Gibson's field site, or to her time of investigation. The author can attest to at least one Sikh family in Silicon Valley in the 1990s cutting their sons' long hair in the face of constant bullying and teasing in school. The father had a PhD and had studied in Europe, and the mother was also an educated professional, so they were 'cosmopolitan' in every aspect, it seems, except their desire to transmit a

Gibson characterizes a community that wants to “become proficient in the ways of white America but to maintain a strong anchor within the Punjabi community [p. 141],” with generational differences about the appropriate speed of acculturation, but agreement that members of the community should not be pressured into changing: “if a girl wishes to wear a *salwaar-kameez* or if a boy wishes to keep his long hair and wear a turban, they should not be teased and made to feel that they must conform to the majority standard. [p. 141]” It is important to realize that Gibson’s observations are made in a community where many Sikhs have given up their outward marks of faith. They may not follow the route of the Sikh in Leonard’s study who changed his name from Singh to Ram when he cut his hair, and, instead – like those in Leonard’s study who traveled to the Stockton gurdwara when they could – their local gurdwara still serves as a social and political center as well as a spiritual one. Gibson’s fieldwork provides a picture of the mainstream Sikh community that is more nuanced and accurate than Leonard’s, one where Sikh identity has meaning and persistence, and where being Punjabi does not overwhelm being Sikh as a form of self-identification.<sup>27</sup>

## Context and Implications

Both the earlier and more recent Sikh history in California need to be understood in the context of more expansive events. An obvious set of developments were the changes in US immigration laws, first tightening and then loosening the entry of South Asians into the country. The tightening occurred after World War I. After World War II, the Luce-Celler Act of 1946 and the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 allowed a tiny number of new immigrants from South Asia and restored the possibility of citizenship. These changes eventually allowed Dalip Singh Saund, a Punjab-born Sikh, to become the first Asian-American to be elected to the US Congress in

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particular non-mainstream expression of their faith. This example further illustrates the conceptual weakness and empirical problems of Leonard’s analysis. It is also worth pointing out that Gibson’s title, *Accommodation without Assimilation*, captures something of an alternative conceptualization of the perspectives of the Sikh community. There is also a different perspective, which echoes Leonard in some respects, and comes from Sikhs who do not maintain long hair and feel marginalized within the community: see, for example, Mooney (2015). Michael Hawley, who drew my attention to this article, makes a similar observation. Fenech (2014) provides one possible response to this position, as to the status of certain external observances: “The Khalsa in certain texts not only inherited the spiritual mantle or ‘robe’ of the Guru but was even metaphysically equated with him...” (p. 241).

<sup>27</sup> As a further example, in October 2015, the author gave a talk to a section of the Sikh community in Fresno, in California’s southern central valley. Later, the host for the visit, a college-going Sikh who had not grown up with a beard and turban but adopted these articles of faith as a young adult, took us for dinner to a local pizzeria. The host explained that the term Punjabi was the common form of self- as well as external identification in Fresno and surrounding areas, but also that there were five gurdwaras in the area, all thriving. During dinner, several younger Punjabi/Sikh families came in. All the men had short hair, as is true of the majority of the community in that area, but in one case, a son – a small child – was being brought up with long hair. Men in two of the families came out of their way to greet us, and one expressed his happiness (and implicit pride) in seeing two turbaned Sikhs together in that setting.

1956.<sup>28</sup> The major legal change occurred in 1965, with the Immigration and Naturalization Act: in particular, the family-reunification provisions of that legislation favored early immigrants like the Sikhs of California in bringing their relatives to the US. To varying degrees, La Brack, Gibson and Leonard all contend with the consequences of this change for the Sikh community in California, but only its early implications, since their empirical work was done in the 1980s or earlier.

At the same time, the new law was creating a more dispersed Sikh community, and one which was a smaller percentage of the overall Indian-American population. An even bigger change came with the information technology (IT) boom, which led to a great increase in the number of Indians coming to the US to work in that sector, especially in California's Silicon Valley. Circumstances in India led to more of those new immigrants coming from southern states of that country, and from urban areas, as opposed to the migration from rural Punjab that had been sustained by family reunification rules. Arguably, this has made the Indian-American story a far broader and more complex one, and reduced the relative significance of the specific story of the Sikhs of California. This is one possible explanation of the lack of major new academic studies of that community, while works on various other Indian-American groups have proliferated, as have studies of the overall Indian-American experience.<sup>29</sup> Sikhs have not been totally neglected, but the most recent book-length academic work focuses on taxi-drivers in New York, a highly visible but very small and specific group.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, another development also shifted focus from the case of the Sikh community in a specific place like California. This was the political unrest in Punjab state in India, which had been an undercurrent of Indian nation-building ever since independence from British rule in 1947. Reasons for this included the religious minority status of the Sikhs, their position on the borders with Pakistan and with the contested region of Kashmir, and issues of economic competition and stability. The situation of Punjab and the Sikhs was not unique, or even the most problematic, in India's complex, heterogeneous quasi-federal system, but it deteriorated in the late 1970s and early 1980s with destabilization of the region after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, accelerated concerns about modernity and loss of tradition among many Sikhs, and covert political manipulation of these concerns by the national government. The year 1984 saw the national government's military attack on the Sikhs' most sacred site in Amritsar, the

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<sup>28</sup> To be fair, Saund had cut his hair and married a European, and thus would fit Leonard's model of a 'cosmopolitan.' He also had a PhD from UC Berkeley, and was in a different socio-economic position from many of his fellow Sikhs, although he, too, struggled with discrimination at various junctures of his life in California.

<sup>29</sup> The broader story is comprehensively told in Chakravorty, Kapur and Singh (2016, forthcoming). Earlier studies of Indian-Americans are referenced in that volume.

<sup>30</sup> See Mitra (2012). There are also small studies of Sikh entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, which are briefly described in Chakravorty, Kapur and Singh (2016, forthcoming), and other studies on the practice of Sikh kirtan (singing of sacred texts), Sikh use of the Internet, and so on, but nothing at the level of the detailed fieldwork described in the three books considered in the previous section. An excellent overview of the history and evolution of the Sikh community in the US is provided by Gurinder Singh Mann in Mann, Numrich and Williams (2001), but that is relatively brief and already 15 years old.

retaliatory assassination of the prime minister in Delhi, and pogroms against Sikhs all over India as counter-retaliation. There followed almost a decade of militant violence and brutal but effective repression by the army and police, restoring a type of normalcy, but with deep and lingering scars.

Events in India had major impacts on the Sikh community in every diasporic location. Understandably, academic attention shifted to the global ramifications of the Punjab violence on these multiple Sikh communities. La Brack, Gibson and Leonard had all done their fieldwork before the events described in the previous paragraph. In any case, Leonard focused on a small, atypical sub-community formed under specific circumstances, while Gibson, who looked at more contemporary concerns, was rooted in the desire to examine immigrant educational processes. La Brack's work was broader, but also done the earliest, primarily in the mid-1970s. Each of them tried to address these new events in their books or articles that were published after 1984 (the publication lags after the fieldwork were substantial), but obviously could not incorporate new observational work.

To the author's knowledge, there has not been any systematic, large-scale ethnographic work done on the individual and collective responses of the Sikh community in California or elsewhere in the United States<sup>31</sup> to the events of the 1980s in Punjab. Indeed, given the heightened passions of the time, suspicions of terrorism (such as the Air India bombing that has been linked to Canadian Sikhs) and the likely presence of Indian intelligence agents within Sikh community institutions, it would have been almost impossible to conduct such academic work. This gap was filled by more generic work on the Sikh diaspora: interestingly, having discovered the topic, some academics seem to have aligned their new understanding with the claim that the diasporic Sikh community did not self-identify as such, preferring regional, local or kinship identities to the religious one before the tumult of the 1980s.<sup>32</sup> This is related in some respects to Leonard's claims about cosmopolitan versus transnational identities, and suffers from the same problems of lack of a full understanding of Sikh history.<sup>33</sup> An important link between the events in Punjab and Sikhs in America (including California) that has only been partially explored is the increase in the number of Sikhs emigrating illegally from Punjab, often subsequently seeking

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<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Nayar (2004) provided a book-length study of the Sikh community in British Columbia, Canada.

<sup>32</sup> Different versions of this claim can be found in Leonard (1989), McLeod (1989a) and Dusenbery (1995).

<sup>33</sup> The best known version of such claims about the post-1984 constitution of a Sikh diaspora is the work of Axel (2001). This is not to say that Axel is ignorant of Sikh history or the evolution of the contemporary community. Nor is the argument here that there was not a significant change in identity consciousness among Sikhs – many grew their hair long and adopted turbans as a statement of solidarity with their coreligionists in Punjab after 1984. Axel is a sympathetic analyst, but it seems that his thesis is predetermined by debates in his discipline, with the Sikh case designed to fit in somehow. Leonard's treatment of the Sikhs with respect to cosmopolitans versus transnationals also has this flavor.

asylum as a result of the violence in their home state. These Sikhs may often be found working in Sikh-owned businesses, including restaurants and gas stations, as well as driving taxis.<sup>34</sup>

Besides immigration law and the diasporic implications of the conflict in Punjab, a third context for studying the Sikh community is with respect to the broader forces of globalization, including the ability to share information in quantities and at speeds never before possible. Arguably, the greater ability to stay connected to the “homeland” can reduce the need for traditional paths and pressures of assimilation (or even ‘cosmopolitanism’), as scholars have recognized.<sup>35</sup> Another force of globalization, however, is the transformation of the United States itself into a more diverse and potentially pluralistic society.<sup>36</sup> While, as current political debates illustrate, this is a process fraught with fears and anxieties, there are also possibilities for immigrant communities such as Sikhs who want to maintain what they see as important attributes and expressions of their faith, even while recognizing that it is only one dimension of their identity. It is in this respect that this paper seeks to make the case that the older work on Sikhs in California needs to be updated, with a fresh examination of what forces are shaping the Sikh community in the state, as well as how the community perceives itself and its adjustment or evolution: sophisticated theoretical work has not been brought to bear on these questions, nor has systematic empirical work been done.

Even historical processes such as the Ghadar movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which Sikhs played a significant role, could benefit from fresh analysis. The Ghadar movement was an international revolutionary movement, striving for independence of India from British rule. As new archival research has shown,<sup>37</sup> it was technically founded in Oregon, but soon moved headquarters to California. A significant proportion of its members were Sikhs, and the Stockton gurdwara served as an important meeting place, as documented by La Brack and Leonard. La Brack devotes some attention to the movement, but the best-known book-length academic study is that of Ramnath (2011), *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire*. As her title and subtitle elucidate, Ramnath’s analysis goes beyond the conventional framing in terms of an Indian nationalist movement to one which emphasizes radical anti-imperialism. In this telling, however, the role of the Sikh community in California gets overshadowed, something that has been partially corrected in Rajan Gill (2015), based on new archival research.<sup>38</sup>

Contexts of immigration, homeland and globalization, stretching back over a century, have come together in modern California. The venue for this has been the process of revising the history and social sciences curriculum for California middle and high schools. Members of the Sikh

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<sup>34</sup> In addition to Mitra (2012), the work of Chakravorty, Kapur and Singh (2016, forthcoming) touches on the issues faced by Indian immigrants in this category, including Sikhs.

<sup>35</sup> In the Sikh context, an early scholarly discussion is that of Axel (2004).

<sup>36</sup> See, in particular, Eck (2001).

<sup>37</sup> See Ogden (2012).

<sup>38</sup> In particular, Gill (2015) details the role of the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society in parallel with the Ghadar Party, including considerations of identity and assimilation.

community in the state, as well as national Sikh civil rights organizations, have actively participated in trying to ensure that the history of the Sikh community in the state receives visibility and recognition. On the other hand, some Hindu organizations in the US<sup>39</sup> have suggested ‘South Asian’ and ‘Indian’ as ways of describing the historical community in California, while Karen Leonard has argued for ‘Punjabi.’<sup>40</sup> This paper provides a case for rejecting Leonard’s claims about identity and naming. Gibson’s extensive fieldwork, and more recent examples such as the case reported in footnote 26, illustrate how the Sikh community is affected by external understandings and responses, including those of scholars. This specific issue is embedded in much broader contestations over South Asian history (not just immigrant history), which are well beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>41</sup> However, the nature of scholarship on Sikhs in California is a central concern, and this paper has sought to shine a light on some weaknesses in aspects of this scholarship, which has then been used to make claims about history and identity that are problematic.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has reviewed scholarship on the Sikh community in California, and noted some of its strengths and weaknesses. It has compared the framing of the Sikh community in California as presented in three book-length studies, and argued that a cosmopolitan-transnational dichotomy, as extrapolated subsequently from one of the three studies by its author, does not appropriately reflect key aspects of the Sikh immigrant experience in California. In particular, that framing neglects the nature of social and economic constraints faced by early Sikh migrants to California, versus the situation of later migrants. A further problem with that dichotomy is a lack of understanding of the history of the Sikh community prior to its diasporic manifestations in California and elsewhere, including the use of a discredited analysis of the evolution of the Sikh faith tradition as one of its underpinnings. Examples from several sources, including another of the three studies, further weaken the claim of lost cosmopolitanism.

The lack of recent detailed studies of the Sikh community in California, along with theoretical weaknesses in some past work, lead to a consideration of reasons for these gaps, and thence to a discussion of broader contexts of immigration, homeland and globalization. This includes questions of comparisons of past and more contemporary diasporic political activities among Sikhs in California, as well as political contestation with respect to how the community and its history in the state are represented in the school curriculum. Overall, the paper has sought to

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<sup>39</sup> Arguably, these groups are ‘Hindu nationalist,’ although they might reject that characterization.

<sup>40</sup> This was done in emails sent to all the members of California’s Instructional Quality Commission, the body soliciting public inputs and making final determinations.

<sup>41</sup> See Ahmad (2016), for example. Another contested domain has been the effort of several Hindu organizations to fund endowed chairs at various California campuses, to the dismay of many faculty members studying South Asia.

make the case for the necessity of new empirical research, both historical<sup>42</sup> and contemporary, as well as more careful theorizing. This task is made more important by the fact that California, and the United States as a whole, is an increasingly diverse society that is struggling to come to terms with that diversity and move toward greater pluralism.<sup>43</sup> The added dimension of religion as part of that diversity, along with earlier fault lines of race and ethnicity, only multiplies the societal challenges and need for new scholarship in this area.

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<sup>42</sup> The example of the Ghadar movement illustrates the proposition that further historical analysis of the Sikh community in California is still needed. That case also illustrates the idea that comparisons across different times (Ghadar versus the post-1984 situation) can be illuminating: while the two contexts and responses seem very different, the active responses of the Sikh community in both cases, motivated by ideas of social and political justice rooted in their belief system, have not been fully explored.

<sup>43</sup> Diana Eck explains the relationship between diversity and pluralism as follows: "First, pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettos with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies." Accessed on August 18, 2016 at <http://pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism/>. See also Eck (2001).

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## **Guru Gobind Singh: A Humanitarian of Medieval Times**

### **(In the context of Islam and Muslims)**

**Dr.Mohd. Habib\***

During 1666 AD the ninth Guru , Guru Teg Bahdur was travelling east of Patna to the regions of Bihar, Assam after leaving his wife, family members and Sikh Sangat at Patna, Bihar. In fact, he was on the mission to spread the words of Guru Nanak to the whole of India. Therefore, he took his family and other Sikhs along with him including his wife Mata Gujri who was expecting a baby. It was difficult for Mata Gujri to continue or due to some other reasons she was halted at Patna with some other Sikhs and Guru Teg Bahdur moves on his journey as per his schedule. In this period of her stay in 1666 AD, Mata Gujri ji became the mother of a prince named as Gobind Rai. Thus, Gobind Rai who was anointed later on as Guru Gobind Singh the tenth master of Sikh Panth was born in the city of Patna in Bihar. The city now known as Patna Sahib in the memory of the strong Humanitarian Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh ji.

The history shows that before Guru Teg Bahadur, Guru Nanak, the first Guru visited this place on his way to the holy land Gaya, the place where Buddha was enlightened. Guru Nanak was aware of the importance of Pataliputra. At that time he was spreading the message of unity of God and unity of mankind to create the unity and equality among the people of various sects and casts. In this period he met Salis Rai Johri, a great devotee of him. He was so influenced by Guru Nanak's teachings that he changed his huge house into a Dharamsala. It is said that Guru Tegh Bahadur also stayed here during his visit to Patna.

If one traces the beginning of 'Sikh Religion', which also known as a 'Gurmat Tradition', 'Sehaj Marag' and 'Khalsa Panth', in the context of Islam and Muslims without any bias. One thing is very much clear that neither the torch bearers of this new faith nor the followers of the faith put forth any kind of antidote to Islam and any kind of challenge to the contemporary Muslims in particular and Muslim society in general. However, it somehow had developed severe differences with the contemporary Government of Mogul dynasty after the rule of Emperor Akbar. Of course, they were also Muslims but the ruler's primary purpose was ruling as per their own designs. There is also a misconception among the people that the contemporary

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Muslims, being Muslims, were in tune with the contemporary government and were supportive to every policy of the government. Moreover, to consider the government as a Muslim Government which was guided by Islam is also erroneous. It was purely a feudal and dynastic government established by their own mighty military power. The history shows that Islam was disassociated from the governing place after the death of fourth Caliph H. Ali(R) in 660 AD.

However, it was known as caliphate but it is doomed to be dynastic and lost Islamic spirit of governance. Moreover, the change of governance set the process of feudalization of Islam itself. From that point of time Muslim Society in general was ruled by autocratic rulers of various dynasties in various geographical areas of the world. First it was known as caliphate of various dynasties. Later on it divided in different sultanates and kingdoms. The history also witnessed that there were various movements which emerges among Muslims against these autocratic rules to revive the lost spirit of Islamic governance of equality and liberty. In the context of governance and Islamic spirit the same thing had happened time and again on the Indian soil also. The movement or religious faith which was initiated by Baba Nanak might be correlated with them in Muslim context. Therefore, when Guru Gobind Singh announced as mentioned in his writings known as 'Bachitar Natak' 'hum eh kaaj jagat mo aye...' <sup>1</sup> that means I have a mission to bring back the justice in society. In the same anthology he mentions that he is the inspired by the divine force being the foremost disciple of the almighty when he states 'Mein hon param purakh ko dasa'. The Muslim Society, particularly of Punjab expresses to it an accepting nod as they sense it as the answer of their inner voice to go back to the Islamic way of governance of equality and liberty. When the mission creates mass awareness in Punjab and the contemporary government get alerted considering it a challenge. The Muslim Society not looks towards the movement on communal and religious grounds. Rather they support Guru Gobind Singh wherever and whenever they find a chance. As a matter of fact, he was also representing Punjab and peasantry resentments against the rulers. Never the less, Guru Gobind Singh himself have a non-sectarian approach as he said ' Hindu Turak kou Rafzi Imam Saafi Manas ki jaat sabhe aike Pehchanbo' <sup>2</sup> which vividly states that mankind is a single family and we ought to take care of each other as the member of a family.

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<sup>1</sup> Randhir Singh (ed.), Dasam Granth (Shabadarth), Pothi pehli, Bachitar Natak, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1995, P.71

<sup>2</sup> ibid, P.28

Moreover, the whole Sikh tradition and history as such from the very beginning had an amicable approach towards the Muslim Society and its heritage. In this context the few generally discussed examples of the tradition seems appropriate to be mentioned here. Right from the very beginning the tradition mentioned that Guru Nanak was first identified out of his family as a Godly person by the king Bular known as Raye Bular Bhatti. He was a Muslim ruler of the region presently known as Nankana Sahib in Pakistan.<sup>3</sup> That is the region in which Baba Nanak born and brought up. In later period, Baba Nanak in his travels known as 'Udasis' took Mardana Rabbabi a Muslim musician as his companion who spends at least fifty four years of his life in the company of Baba Nanak. During his travels Baba Nanak meets Peer Buddan Shah in the Jungles of district Ropar in Punjab, now popular as Kiratpur Sahib, who preserve miraculously milk to him for long time up to his new incarnation known as 'Chhevan Jama' or 6<sup>th</sup> Patshahi means when his spiritual consciousness transformed into 6<sup>th</sup> Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib.<sup>4</sup> It is also an accepted fact among Sikh Sangat or the followers that whenever Baba Nanak feels mystical intensity to express his spiritual and moral teachings in his own ways of expression known as 'Bani', he was used to say that Mardana play Rabab, Bani is about to flow.<sup>5</sup> Besides his own Bani Baba Nanak collects and gives due respect to the similar kinds of expressions of other Saints and Sufis of India. Among these Baba Farid was a renowned Sufi who's 'Kalam'-expression of mystic experience become an integral part of the Sikh Scripture- Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Not only Baba Farid but the Kalam of Sant Kabir, Bhagat Sadhana, Bhagat Bhikhan, Satta and Balwand also belong to the Muslim lineage. Therefore, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is repository of Islamic ethos along with other mystic ideas. It is such a unique scripture which preserve various languages of India along with some other aspects of Muslim Heritage of language and culture. When the movement which begins with the hymens of Baba Nanak and his teachings reached on the point of its crystallization and institutionalization known as 'Panthic developments', its character still remains composite and Muslim heritage was incorporated so much so that even the foundation stone of the central temple known as Golden temple of the growing community was laid down by Sai Miyan Meer- the famous Qadri Sufi.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gian Singh, Giani Twarikh Guru Khalsa, vol. 1, P.72 ; Jaggi Rattan Singh, Sikh Panth Vishavkosh, vol2, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2002, P.1495

<sup>4</sup> Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, P. 881

<sup>5</sup> Gurdas, Bhai, Vaar Pehli, Paodi 35,(Baghdad Gaman)

<sup>6</sup> Gian Singh, Giani, Panth Parkash(edit.) Giani Kirpal Singh, P.641

As per Sikh tradition when Guru Gobind Singh born at Patna in Bihar, he was acknowledged as an auspicious child at his birth and declared as a great spiritual, temporal and none sectarian humanistic leader of future in the very cradle and infancy by Peer Bhikam Shah of Distt. Kurukshetra, Haryana through the sense of his mystical vision. It is said that he himself took trouble along with his disciples to visit the city Patna Sahib in Bihar just only to have a glimpse of the newly born future guide and spiritual leader.<sup>7</sup> In later period Bhikam Shah was the instrumental to bring close Peer Buddhu Shah to Guru Gobind Singh. He was the renowned Sufi Peer of Sadhoura residing in Shivalik hills. Sadhoura was a Jagir of that time which belongs to the family of the Peer. Now it is a part of Ambala district in Haryana. The place is very close to Paonta Sahib in Himachal Pardesh. Paonta become a famous place and takes a historic importance because of Guru Gobind Singh who selects it as a centre of his activities. Peer Buddhu Shah develops affinity with Guru Gobind Singh apparently because of common spiritual and humanistic ideas of Sufism and Gurmat. He admired the young Guru to his humanistic values and becomes his ally in the war against the enemies of the Guru. To him the struggle of the Guru was justified in the prevailing situations and circumstances. The moment, he comes to know that five hundred Pathan soldiers had betrayed the Guru. Those were the Pathans who were employed by the Guru to protect Paonta Sahib as per peer's recommendation; he immediately decided to fight with the side of the Guru along with his sons and disciples. Eventually Peer Buddhu Shah lost his sons and many disciples in the war but the support of the Peer ultimately resulted in the victory of the Guru. It was the first full fledge battle of Gurus' life which known as battle of Bhangani. The battle proved decisive to the Sikh Panth which changed the destiny of the Panth forever and cleared the future course of action to the Guru. Never the less, the Guru expressed his deepest gratitude to the Peer. When the Peer comes to meet the Guru after the battle he was preparing to receive Sangat- the followers. At that moment the Guru gifts him as a sign of Gratitude whatever was in his hand, which was a turban and a comb with hairs. Peer Bhudhu Shah regarded the gift as a most precious thing throughout his life; the gift was preserved in his lineage generation after generation.<sup>8</sup>

In the early periods of 18th century the Sikh movement or Khalsa Panth in the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh come into direct conflict with the Mogul ruling establishment. Therefore,

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<sup>7</sup> Santokh Singh, Bhai, Sri Gur Partap Suraj Grantha(edit.) Bhai Veer Singh, Raas 12,Ansu 14, PP.4275-76; Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, P.177

<sup>8</sup> Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, P.882 ; Gian Singh, Giani, Tawarikh Guru Khalsa, vol1, P. 837

after the war of Anandpur Sahib and Chamkor Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh takes refuge in Machiwara near Samrala in Ludhiana distt. of Punjab. The area was confined by the imperial forces in search of Guru Gobind Singh. At this critical moment the two Muslim brothers of Pathan clan known as Nabi Khan and Gani Khan come forward to rescue the Guru from the confinement in the disguise of 'Uch da Peer'. The Uch city of Bahawalpur province of Punjab now in Pakistan was famous at that time for Sufi Peers and holy men.<sup>9</sup> The Guru in the disguise of a Peer was carried forward in a palanquin on the shoulders of Nabi Khan and Gani Khan with the help of two others. The palanquin was deducted and suspected by one of the army commanders. To make it sure, that the person in palanquin is really a Peer of Uch, one Qazi known as Peer Muhammad was called upon to do the witness of authenticity of the Peer. Though the concerning Qazi recognized the real identity of the Guru but knowingly to save the Guru and to give him the safe passage he said let him go, he is the real Peer who is devoted in Allah's praise.<sup>10</sup> This was the sacrifice of Nabi Khan, Gani Khan and Qazi Peer Muhammad which proved a second breather to Guru Gobind Singh after the battle of Bhangani in which Peer Budhu Shah appears as a savior of the growing Panth. After the escape in disguise of Uch da Peer Guru Gobind Singh stay at Raikot in district Ludhiana of Punjab in the house of his another Muslim devotee, Rai Kalha or Kalha Rai- A wealthy landlord or Jagirdar. Here the Guru gathers together the information about his family through Noora Mahi who was deputed by Ray Kalha to do intelligent services to the persecuted Guru. The feedback of the intelligence services of Ray Kalha makes the Guru able to plan judiciously his next course of action. Here the Guru also expresses his grief and complaint of the local establishment to the centre government by writing 'Zafarnama'. As per tradition Zafarnama was delivered to Aurangzeb at Ahmednagar in the South of India.<sup>11</sup> The Study of the events reflects that the supporter and devotees of the Guru were not only among Muslim masses but there were many among the elite and governing classes also. In this context the change of Muslim mind of Punjab towards Guru Gobind Singh is quite apparent in the incident of dissention of Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan of Malerkotla from the Subedar of Sirhind-the Spear head of the government action against the Guru. Though Sher Khan was a bitter enemy of the Guru in earlier battles and wants to take revenge on the Guru for the killing of his brother by him in a battle. Nevertheless, when the Subedar of Sirhind announced the

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<sup>9</sup> Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, P. 03

<sup>10</sup> ibid, P. 837

<sup>11</sup> Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, P. 1037

capital punishment to the very young age children of Guru Gobind Singh known as 'Sahibzadas' of the Guru, he openly denounced the order of the Subedar as an unlawful and irreligious act which is popular as '*Ha da Nahra*' in Sikh tradition and Punjabi folk. Moreover, the Nawab goes to such extent that he write letters of complaint of this incident to the emperor, Aurangzeb.<sup>12</sup>

The tradition of the Sikh Panth is full of such kinds of examples which show the harmonious relations of Gurus and the Panth with the contemporary Muslim Society of Punjab. The *Janam Sakhis* of Baba Nanak are also the best example of these kinds of close relations of Sikh tradition with indo Islamic tradition from the very beginning, which resulted in social intermixing, composite culture and mutual cooperation. Beside the above examples there were many other Muslims also who made their remarkable contribution in the development of Sikh tradition. Among them the Name of Malu Shekh, Ubare Khan, Wazir Khan, Bhai Abdullah, Sunder Shah, Babak Rababi, Khwaja Abdullah, Memoon Khan, Saida Beg, Said Khan, Nihang Khan, Bibi Mumtaz, Alam Khan and Mian Jamal are become the unforgettable part of the Sikh memory.<sup>13</sup>

Despite losing his children, Guru Gobind Singh remains surrendered to the will of the Almighty. He said that his children had come to him from the Creator. And that he understood that it was the time to sacrifice them for cause of Almighty. When a few of his Sikhs attempted to gather the bodies of his two eldest sons on the battlefield, Guru Gobind Singh asked them what they were doing. They replied that they wanted to give his sons a proper funeral. Guru Gobind Singh told them that they should then stop and pick up all of the bodies – for all of the boys and men lying dead on the battlefield were equally his sons.

Guru Gobind Singh's life was full of struggle, he sacrificed everything for the cause of almighty, and even the Adi Granth which was compiled by his great-grandfather Guru Arjan was lost in crisis period when struggling for life in bloody wars with royal armies. It is said that to retrace the Granth, Guru Gobind Singh set up his camp and dictated the entire Adi Granth from

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<sup>12</sup> Ganda Singh, Patiala and East Panjab States union-Historical Background, P. 79

<sup>13</sup> Mohd. Habib ( Dr.), Sikh Dharam naal sambhandit satkarit Muslim Shakshiatan, SLM Publishers, Patiala, 2016, PP. 162-174

his memory to compile it again. In this form of the Granth he also included the hymns of his father, Guru Teg Bahadur.

One of Guru Gobind Singh's contributions to the world was the message of unity and equality among all sections of society. The Guru strongly feels his responsibility to create the unity among the people of Punjab in particular. Therefore, he stresses on the message of the universal brotherhood to the whole mankind. The Hindus, Muslim, Sikhs and others felt that they were treated fairly and equally within the domain of the Guru. In early period of the struggle the Guru's activities were centered in the area of Anandpur Sahib, which became an example of development and social change in his period. The process of reformation was spearheaded in this region by Guru Tegh Bahadur which was part of the kingdom of various Hindu kings and chiefs, where the Brahmanic brand of caste distinction was rigidly observed. Fellow human beings were confined in various casts and suffering of untouchability. Hindu kingdoms were often at war with one another and were subjugated by the Mogul rulers. To get freedom from cast rigidity people were accepting Islam, particularly from the lower castes who were not even allowed to enter the temples of the religion that they were a part of. By joining Islam they could rapidly rise to the class of rulers and able to rule those who had called them untouchable only days before. Wars and skirmishes were a common occurrence in those days. However, by the efforts of the Guru's slowly and steadily this mood of agitation changed with the introduction of principals of self respect, equality and the unity of man. Thus, they provide discipline similar to Islam with in the tradition.

To conclude the above discussion it seems quite appropriate to say that the Gurmat Movement, Sikh faith and tradition which was initiated from the teachings of Baba Nanak was always considered by the Muslim Society as their own but with its distinct features. Later on the movement comes in conflicts with the Mogul establishment due to some administrative reasons but instead of its distinctive features it remains in emotional and ideological association with Islam and the contemporary Muslim Society. To the contemporary Muslim folk of Punjab Guru Gobind Singh was understood as a liberator of the people and of the oppressed.

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## THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SIKH CALENDAR ART

By Dr. Kavita Singh

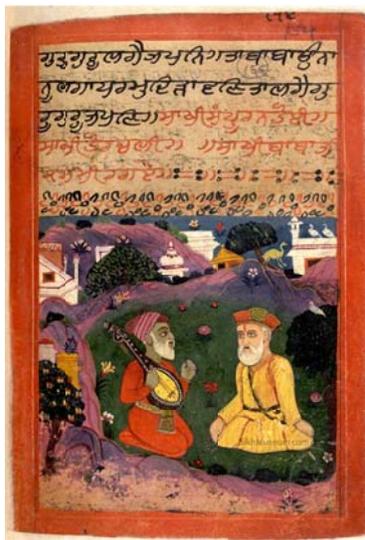
### **Abstract:**

This research paper traces the genesis and development of *Sikh Calendar art/Sikh Popular art* which has systematically evolved into a full-fledged genre of *Sikh art* over the last three centuries as it draws inspiration from the Sikh religion, ethos, philosophical perspectives and glorious history of the Sikhs. The fountainhead of *Sikh Calendar art* is the pictorial narratives based on *Janam Sakhis* drawn by the artists engaged by the earlier preachers of Sikhism and it culminated into the formation of hand-painted *pothis*/manuscripts which had text as well as illustrations. This tradition further blossomed as more and more artists were engaged by devout followers of Sikhism to paint walls of shrines, *thakurdwaras*, *deras*, *sarais*, *dharamshalas*, *akharas* and *havelis* in the form of frescoes and murals to spread the message of Sikhism. With the arrival of art of miniature painting by the Rajasthani artists in Kangra, Guler, Chamba, Basohli, Nurpur and Kotla, the *Sikh art* got further impetus as these artists started adopting Sikh themes to seek greater patronage from the Sikh rulers as Maharaja Ranjit Singh, his courtiers and Sikh aristocrats showed keen interest and appreciation for this classical form of painting which had great aesthetic and artistic merit. The court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh had great splendour and grandeur which attracted hordes of European travelers, artists, generals and historians. The famous European artists brought with them new techniques of painting like oil on canvas, water-colour, pastels, chalk, crayon, woodcut, lithography and zinc etching. These painters profusely painted the Lahore *Durbar* and portraits of the royalties, generals and aristocrats with photo-realistic technique giving emphasis on proper perspective, three-dimensional aspects, flora and fauna, architecture, weaponry and costumes. As they had brought with them the printing presses, prints of the fabulous paintings started flooding the markets in Lahore and Amritsar. Brilliant Sikh artists who were acting as their helpers whole-heartedly picked up their painting techniques. After attaining proficiency in western painting techniques, they started painting Sikh themes and thus *Sikh art* developed rapidly with newer and enchanting explorations and innovations. To make their art available to the masses, prints based on paintings of Sikh themes and philosophy were produced in great numbers and sold in bazaars, fairs, festivals in front of the Gurdwaras, temples and shrines. Walls of nearly every Punjabi home and establishment were adorned with these magnificent and colourful *Sikh calendars* as people adored their thematic content which preached divine and spiritual messages of Sikh Gurus. Generation after generation of artists pursued this genre of art with diligence and deep dedication and today we have a

full-fledged flourishing and ever-evolving genre of *Sikh Calendar art* which has typical characteristics and style and it has even reached the shores of many foreign lands where the Sikh and Punjabi Diaspora is settled.

### THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SIKH CALENDAR ART

Broadly speaking, the term *Popular art* is used to refer to all those art forms of India that have a mass audience and use mechanical reproduction in their creation and distribution.<sup>1</sup> *Calendar art* is a generic name for a style of *Popular Print art*.<sup>2</sup> In basic terms, the concise definition of *Calendar art* is visual narration through images describing the theological and mythical themes highlighting the apparent as well as inner essence, philosophy and ethos pertaining to large number of iconic figures belonging to various religious groups, sects and creeds emphasizing on their charismatic deeds, teachings and spiritual messages. The fountainhead of *Sikh Calendar art* springs from the early illustrations of *Janam Sakhis* done in line drawings with occasional touch of bright colours and are mainly contained in the painted *pothis* (manuscripts). (Plate No.1) *Janam Sakhis* which are as popular and sacred in the Sikh tradition as are *Puranas* in Brahmanical and *Jatakas* in Buddhist. In *Gurumukhi*, the literal meaning of ‘*Sakhi*’ is supposed to be a ‘story’ but generally speaking *Janam Sakhis* are the episodes from the life of Guru Nanak Dev.<sup>3</sup>



(Plate No.1)

*Janam Sakhis* are hagiographic accounts of the life of Guru Nanak, popular narratives that have enjoyed a considerable popularity throughout the history of the Sikh religion. The *Janam Sakhis* are

characterised into two basic traditions as Puratan *Janam Sakhi* and Bhai Bala *Janam Sakhi*.<sup>4</sup> These were created by the *Pracharaks* (preachers) with the help of local artists and had a distinctive yet simple stylization which stands on the cusp of line drawings of Rajasthani and Pahari paintings. The pioneers who endeavoured in this direction were chiefly *Udasi*, *Ramraiya* and *Sodhi Deras* (monasteries) all offshoots of the mainstream of Sikhism.<sup>5</sup> However, it is evidenced from one of the *varan* (ballads) written by Bhai Gurdas, a disciple of Guru Arjan and the scribe of the Adi-Granth (Sikh scripture) that there was a well-developed *Janam Sakhi* tradition in vogue during the tenure of Guru Arjan Dev- the fifth Sikh Guru.<sup>6</sup> In the *Janam Sakhi* paintings, the initial emphasis was on the portrayal of anecdotes from Guru Nanak's childhood to his youth and undertaking of four *Udasis* (long spiritual travels) during which Baba Nanak met and interacted with all sorts of people- priests, saints, kings, *Yogis*, *Mullahs*, monks, *Pirs*, demons, cannibals and even sorceresses. These illustrations usually carried suitable labeling of the characters and a brief description of the episode or the story behind the scene depicted in a particular painting. Initially there was less stress on ornamentation of the *hashias* (margins) and the backgrounds were rarely crowded with elements of nature. With the spread of Guru Nanak's message of humanism and universal brotherhood, interesting and engaging works on the subject were produced in great numbers. Slowly yet steadily, there was a marked adoption of symbols and elements of high aesthetic value from the paintings of Rajasthani, Mughal and Persian styles.

The decorative murals and frescoes appeared simultaneously on the walls of shrines, *thakurdwaras* (temples), *deras*, *sarais* (Inns), *dharamshalas*, *akharas* and landmark *havelis* owned by devout followers and preachers of Sikhism. The prominent specimens of this genre of art are mostly in the *thakurdwaras* of *Bairagis* (ascetics) such as the one built by Sant Jagveen Das *Bairagi*, near the Wagah Border at Attari in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> The landmark source in the development of wall painting in Punjab pertains to *samadhi* (structure build on a grave of a religious person or saint) of Bhai Dalla, a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh at Talwandi Sabo, now Damdama Sahib.

The drawings and paintings on Sikh themes flourished as a number of renowned painters from Rajasthan migrated to Punjab hills during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as there was greater patronage and protection for these painters who had fled the kingdoms of Rajasthan due to perennial turmoil and wars between the Mughals and Rajput rulers.

Another vital dimension which was responsible for the extension of Pahari art was the Sikh patronage at the very end of the eighteenth century, when Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra, the chief patron of painting in the Kangra valley was forced to seek the aid of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of

the Punjab plains, to put an end to the perennial attacks and disturbances by Gurkhas in 1809. With the result, peace and tranquillity was established after the annexation of Guler in 1813 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and dominance of Sikh rulers was achieved over the hill states. During the years 1810 to 1830, the Pahari artists themselves came forward and approached the Sikh patrons, which envisaged a keen interest in the minds of patrons at Lahore court.<sup>8</sup> The result being cementing of the bond of Pahari painting with *Sikh art* and enriching it with novel, instinctive, artistic and aesthetical enhancements. Thus *Sikh art* became the direct successor of the Kangra School of painting.<sup>9</sup>

During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Kotla, Guler, Kangra, Basohli, Nurpur, Chamba and other hill states of the region one after the other passed under the Sikh sway. This led to close contacts between the plains and the hills and in consequence the artists of the Kangra valley turned to Sikh themes.<sup>10</sup> A large number of them even left the hills and settled in Amritsar and Lahore and they enjoyed rich patronage of the Sikh rulers.<sup>11</sup> **(Plate No.2)**



(Plate No.2)

The prominent artists like Nikka, Gokal, Harkhu, Chhajju and Damodar, all of the Rajol family of artists have established connections with the Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Sher Singh and the family of the powerful Sandhanwalia Sardars.<sup>12</sup>

To seek greater patronage from the Sikh ruler- Maharaja Ranjit Singh, these pahari painters started working on themes related to Sikh religion, the Sikh nobility and aristocracy and they infused the fundamental parameters of aesthetic richness as well as visual stylization akin to the classical style of miniature painting richly decorative, sprayed with elements of nature- flora and fauna, landscape and architecture. They glorified the valiant Sikh warriors and generals of Sikh army and created impressive portraits and elaborately descriptive compositions underlining the essence of Sikh religion, art and culture. Usually the rich elite class and aristocrats engaged these master artists to create works of

exquisite beauty either to record and highlight their personal accomplishments or to chroniclise the historic events around them. While this was going on the open-minded Sikh rulers and aristocrats never imposed any hindrance in letting the pahari artists of those Sikh governed areas to divert their creative energies and attentions from the creative work they were pursuing earlier. There were new additions in the themes and artists gladly adopted the subject matter which was to the preference of the Sikh patrons.

The Lahore *Durbar* which had great splendour and grandeur attracted hordes of European artists, travellers, historians and generals to the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as the stories of his fabulous wealth and empirical power transcended the boundaries of the Punjab. The well-known among these are August Schoefft, Emily Eden, W.G. Osborne, Baron Hugel, Captain Goldingham, William Carpenter, C.S. Hardingne, the German painter Van Orlich, G.T. Vigne and Russian prince Alexis Soltykoff.

Among the pioneer European painters, a Hungarian painter named August Theodore Schoefft who visited India in 1838 laid the foundations of western style of painting in *Sikh art*. He was renowned for his competence in oil paintings and painted vast canvasses depicting the scenes of Ranjit Singh's court. **(Plate No.3)** Sher Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a great admirer of western art and was immensely impressed by Schoefft's style of illustrative work. The Sikh rulers as well as the painters of the Punjab were for the first time introduced to western style of painting through Schoefft's works. His huge canvases painted in oils were the first step towards the journey of development of *Sikh art*, which imbibed western styles, techniques, mannerisms and composition.<sup>13</sup>



(Plate No.3)

The other European artists harboured a burning desire to visit this exotic empire which offered rich patronage to their art and simultaneously improving their economic strata. They brought with them new techniques and technologies which were welcomed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Thus the Sikh painting underwent a sea-change and saw the introduction of various western styles and painting techniques. These painters of extraordinary artistic caliber produced magnificent paintings in charcoal,

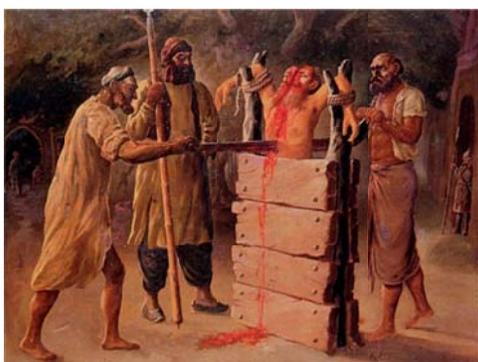
chalk, crayon, water-colours, tempura, gouache, oil colours and even initiated the technique of wood-cut, lithography and zinc etching. Seeing the potential of their works being acquired by rich natives at fabulous rates, they saw it as a great commercial proposition and introduced the printing presses to India. From now onwards, they shifted their attention to the painting of the splendour of the Lahore *Durbar* and produced numerous portraits of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his family members, courtiers, generals, ministers, aristocrats and other prominent personalities. Large mural-like paintings in oil on canvas technique generated incredible interest due to the realism, fascinating depiction of backgrounds and visible mastery over the presentation of colour and linear perspectives. The three-dimensional aspect of these paintings complete with scenic landscapes and architectural marvels like forts and palaces captured in photographic realism enthralled the viewers. This was the trendsetting artistic accomplishment of these great western painters. As the commissions poured in great numbers, the European artists sometimes employed local art assistants and craftsmen to help them in their studios for menial jobs like for the job of a *pankha* man, a water carrier or a carpenter. Interestingly, the enterprising Sikh artists and craftsmen were quick to learn their techniques by merely observing these western artists. Their painting techniques were exposed from one local artist to another- from Lahore to Amritsar. Kehar Singh, Kapur Singh, Kishan Singh, Bishan Singh, Sardul Singh, Bawa, Puran Singh, Amir Singh, Aroor Singh, Ganesha Singh, Azim, Jeevan Lal, Lahora Singh, Malla Ram, Sri Ram Lal, Hussain Buxe and Allah Buxe were amongst the few who made their mark.<sup>14</sup> **(Plate No.4)**



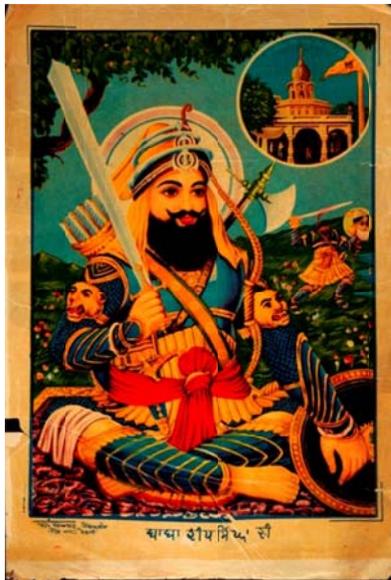
(Plate No.4)

After attaining considerable expertise and skill in handling of western painting styles and techniques, the most poignant and landmark endeavour which revolutionised the *Sikh Calendar art* was the initiation of painting portraits of Sikh Gurus, episodes from Sikh historical perspective,

narration of Sikh ideology, ethos and culture in western styles and mannerisms by the Sikh artists. The manuscript-like drawings and paintings which were being painted earlier by hand in limited numbers were being produced now in large numbers by using the wood-cut and lithography printing techniques. This facilitated availability of reproduction of the original specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* in large quantities and thus it propelled mass production of *Calendar art* works amply serving the purpose of propagation of *Sikh Calendar art* which is aptly referred to as ‘*Bazaar*’ or ‘*Popular art*’. The introduction of Printing presses especially Lithographic printing processes in the 1850s wholly revolutionalised the propagation of *Sikh Bazaar art*. The technique of Lithographic printing was used extensively for printing books some with occasional illustrations and elaborate title covers of the publications. For example the ‘*Tulsi Ramayan*’ in *Gurmukhi* was published in 1871 at Lahore and ‘*Qissa Puran Bhagat Jati da*’ in 1872 with a number of impressive Lithographic images of *Puran Bhagat Janam Sakhis* and important Punjabi love-legends like *Heer Ranjha* were also published by Lithography technique spreading their wider circulation, which became an element of *Popular Sikh art/Sikh Calendar art*. Also available were the much appreciated *dasti*, hand held or portable prints some of which satirize the rapid shifts in Punjab society.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, it brought these calendars within the reach of common man at nominal rates. The popularity of these calendars/prints primarily was due to the religious content which highlighted Sikh religion. These calendars expressively depicted scenes from the lives of Sikh Gurus and martyrs. **(Plate No.5)** The mushrooming of small printing presses in the lanes of Amritsar and Lahore aptly justify the popularity of these colourful prints. The business establishments and traders freely utilized them for their emotive mass appeal in promoting their respective trades by advertising their products and services underneath the fascinating paintings of these calendars. These calendars were made available for sale in crowded fairs and festivals on the roadside stalls and in front of the shrines. **(Plate No.6)**



(Plate No. 5)



(Plate No.6)

J. Lockwood Kipling, Principal of the Mayo School of Art, Lahore (1875-93) and also Curator of the Central Museum, Lahore, chanced upon seeing these unusually exotic Sikh calendars being sold on the footpaths of Lahore and evinced a keen interest in these calendars so much so he started collecting each available specimen of this art form for his own personal collection which was later on donated to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London by his son Rudyard Kipling in 1917.<sup>16</sup> This stylized art form passing through the creative hands of Sikh artists saw many phases of transformation from elaborately decorative to photo-realistic versions. Subsequently the touch of individual artistic approach and mannerism exalted expression of divinity and spiritualism, a deep exploration of conceptual essence and visualization marked resonance of the emphasis on visually powerful narration, was witnessed in the works of Sobha Singh, S.G. Thakur Singh, G.S. Sohan Singh (**Plate No.7**), Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh, Master Gurdit Singh, Trilok Singh Chitrakar, Amolak Singh, Bodhraj, Mehar Singh, Devender Singh and Jarnail Singh. These artists emerged as torch-bearers of the genre of *Sikh Calendar art*.



(Plate No. 7)

The most significant and stalwart artist who is also referred to as ‘Saint Painter’- Sardar Sobha Singh whose creative, spiritual and philosophical works helped in crystallizing the iconic portrait paintings of Sikh Gurus specially those of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh besides the portraits of Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Baba Sheikh Farid, Bhagat Ravidas and he freely expressed and preached the true essence of Sikhism through other works where love for all mankind, peace and universal brotherhood, equality of genders were narrated in powerful and magnetizing manner.

The iconographic images of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh we see today in Sobha Singh’s work have characteristic elements and features which have been aptly adopted from the earlier line drawings depicted in the *pothis* (manuscripts) of *Janam Sakhis* except the *Rumi Topi* or cap which was commonly depicted in many miniature paintings. In the *Janam Sakhi* paintings of Pre-Partition era, Guru Nanak Dev is presented in many variations and the basic features associated with him were *Saili*, *Topi*, *Rosary*, long *Jama* (shirt), *Tilaka*, *Nimbus*, *Simarini*, a benign smile and the face turned slightly to right or to left. From his *Topi* seems to radiate a circle of light, something like a divine aura symbolising his enlightened state. In *Janam Sakhi* illustrations, a cap worn by Guru Nanak is an essentiality painted vividly, as conical, close fitting and sometimes his best-known *Qalandari*. A shawl or *Chaddar* on his shoulder was depicted to enhance dignity of his bearing. It is sometimes replaced by a *Gudari* symbolical of Kabir’s all assimilating bearing, humility, all embracing, all pervading expanses of his life and mission.<sup>17</sup> Guru Nanak Dev is also shown with his two true devout followers Bala and Mardana.(Plate No.8)



(Plate No.8)

Another broad change which appeared in *Sikh Calendar art* was the portrayal of individual portraits of Guru Nanak and in this context excellent works were produced by legendary painters of *Sikh art* as Sobha Singh, Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh, G.S.Sohan Singh and Mohinder Singh marking the

direct emergence of *Sikh Calendar art* wherein the typical features which travelled with the time, were more poignantly painted and preserved. Guru Nanak's portraits especially by Sobha Singh have no reference to any historical situation and are prominently concerned with bringing out such spiritual qualities of the Master as the poise of self-realisation, ecstasy of meditation, glow of contemplation and intensity of divine love. **(Plate No.9 to10)** Kirpal Singh's portraits on the other hand are usually related to some historical situation or another. They depict Guru Nanak as a tireless world teacher, overtowering in stature with well-defined limbs having the play of a spiritual radiance, missionary zeal and mental poise on his face. Jaswant Singh's work is an attempt to portray the sub-conscious and thus bears the mark of surrealism. **(Plate No.11)** Detail, natural backgrounds, landscape and perspective with ascent on decorative elements set G.S. Sohan Singh apart as an artist of distinguished standing. **(Plate No.12)**



(Plate No.9)



(Plate No. 10)

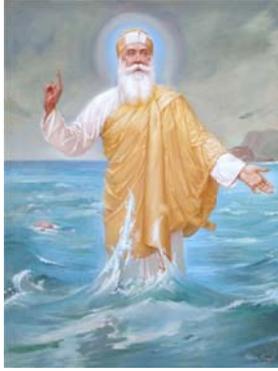


(Plate No.11)



(Plate No.12)

Passing through the process of reformatory filtration freezing new perceptions and religious manifestations the *Sikh Calendar art* chose to portray Guru Nanak Dev in a style which was far from the earlier conceptual version depicted in the *Janam Sakhi* illustrations and the features which were admired and adopted in this genre were complete replacement of the Guru's cap by a straight turban showing no angle in front; disappearance of *Tilak* mark and *Bairagan*; full view face in most of the cases; continued presence of the Halo, *Saili* and the *Mala* and longer and constantly white beard depicting old age as a sign of spiritual wisdom bringing Guru Nanak in to closer accord with the Khalsa ideal of uncut hair while the whiteness strengthens the image of a venerable sage.<sup>18</sup> **(Plate No.13)**



(Plate No.13)

Close on heels a major feature attained is the remarkable proficiency in painting techniques achieved by the artists where elements of art and aesthetics are abundantly visible and there is a sea change in the colour palette which emphasized a soothing and subtle impact on the audience of *Sikh Calendar art* raising these paintings to the ethereal level with profound presence of spirituality, calm and poise.

The common use of the *Abhaya mudra* (do not fear gesture), symbol widely used in *Popular art* throughout India further strengthened the newly acquired projected image of Guru Nanak in these works and a flowing white beard and hand raised in blessing propagated a general expression of benevolence presenting a distinct impression of the first Guru. Here he emerges as Baba Nanak the Teacher, the Guru; who supremely bestows peace of mind and spiritual enlightenment.

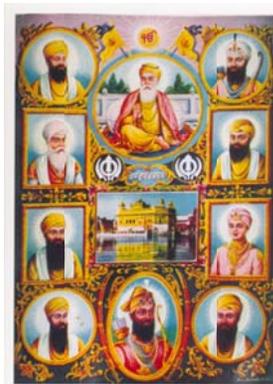
The image of Guru Gobind Singh which at present is profusely painted in the Sikh calendars may have its source in traditions but the modern day projection is distinctive in the lushness and luxuriance of visual presentation of portraying him as royal and majestic personality coupled with an aura of spiritual strength on his face to prescribe to his much loved images as 'Saint Soldier'. A deeper inspection would reveal that sword and daggers are not mere pieces of steel but they are intricately carved and decorated with finely embossed hilts and richly embroidered scabbards. The hilts had symbolic images of lions and tigers sculpted in jade and precious metals signifying the fact that these were the ornaments of a royal king and a mighty warrior. A thought provoking feature which leads us to Guru Gobind Singh's colourful attire with ostentatiously magnificent embroidery work seems to be worn only by a royal personality and accessories such as belts (*Kamarband*), armllets, bracelets and grand pieces of jewellery lay stress on his royal stature. The horse which he rides is usually white or blue and is adorned with a richness matching its Master's array. He is also referred as '*Kalgidhar*

*Padsah*’ literally meaning He is the king with the plume (*Kalgi*) bedecked in his turban decorated with bands of pearls and precious stones. **(Plate No.14)**

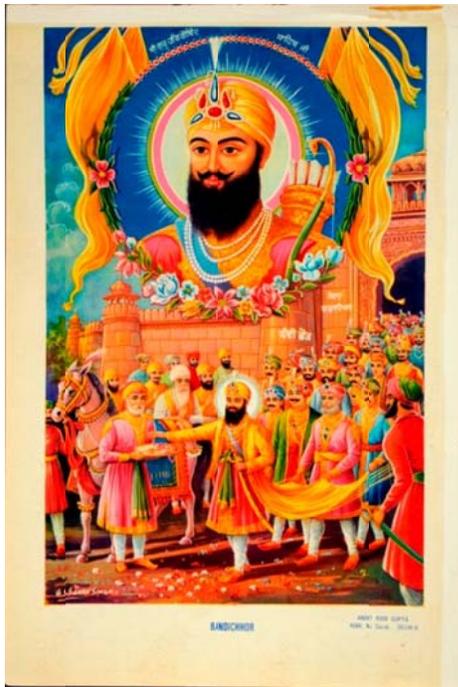


(Plate No.14)

The printed or reproduced versions of Sikh calendars have some essential features and elements which make them unique. Ten Sikh Gurus are shown in oval frames intricately decorated with floral patterns alongwith the Sikh insignia *Khanda-Kirpan*, two flags on the sides showing ‘Miri-Piri’ representing ‘Temporal’ and ‘Spiritual Power’. The images of Sri Harmandar Sahib or Golden Temple are shown in the centre of the Sikh Calendars. Names of the Ten Sikh Gurus are inscribed in *Gurmukhi* script. **(Plate No.15)** Some calendars offer calligraphic designs of *Satnam Waheguru*, *Sarbat Da Bhala*, *Ek Omkar*, *Degh Tegh Fateh Panth Ki Jeet* and *Waheguru ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*. The depiction of various historical Gurdwaras and slices from Sikh history and *Janam Sakhis* are also elaborately painted in miniature format. All these Sikh Calendars have ornamental *hashias* (margins) with floral and geometrical patterns taking a cue from Persian manuscripts. **(Plate No.16)**



(Plate No.15)



(Plate No. 16)

During the last five decades, the prominent patrons and promoters of *Sikh Calendar art* whose contribution is significant and astounding are: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, Dharam Parchar Committee: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi, Bank of Punjab, New Delhi, MARKFED, PNB Finance, other Sikh institutions like Sikh Foundation, Miri Piri Foundation and museums established in the premises of historical Gurdwaras. However earlier the process of production of Sikh calendars was prevalent at such centres which are famous for printing and publishing business, namely Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press (1894), Calcutta Art Studio, bow bazaar street, Calcutta; Chitrashala Steam Press, Poona near Bombay (1878); Hem Chand Bhargava, Chandni chowk, Delhi (1900); S.S.Brijbasi (1927-28); Sivakasi National Litho Press, Tamil Nadu (1954); Chor Bagan Art Studio, Calcutta; Lakshmibilas Press, Cawnpore; Kununyalal Lachoomal, Delhi; Anant Shivaji Desai, Bombay; Anandeshwar Press; Arya-Bhushan Press; P.S.Joshi Kalbadevi, Bombay; Rising Art Cottage, Calcutta; Battala Press, Calcutta and Harnarayan & Sons. The popularity of these calendars provided a flourishing and lucrative business to the printing houses as a large number of Sikh calendars were being produced and sold every year not only in Punjab but whole of North India. These were basically copies of the earlier calendars being produced at Amritsar and Lahore. The calendars which truly stand out as authentic specimens due to greater focus on correct historical perceptions, objectives and religious perspectives, duly display the individualistic

stylization and religious content based on Sikh ideology, Sikh identity, Sikh *maryada*, Sikh history and philosophy, thereby establishing a true Sikh image, were brought out with a missionary zeal by prominent Sikh patrons responsible for the promotion of Sikh religion and Sikh way of life. These did not look like the cheap commercial versions of the earlier works being printed by printing presses. Primarily due to the fact that artists engaged in this genre had acquired magnificent control over painting techniques. They used new methods and technologies to improve the quality of artistic and aesthetically sound paintings. The creative elements used by these artists further enhanced the appearance and quality of these *Sikh Calendar art* prints. This genre of *Popular Sikh art* or *Calendar art* has reached the shores of every continent due to digitalization of the works being produced in India and these have become collector's items for second and third generation Punjabi settlers.

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Plate No. 1- [www.sikhmuseum.com](http://www.sikhmuseum.com)

Plate No. 2- Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

Plate No. 3- [www.sikhmuseum.com](http://www.sikhmuseum.com)

Plate No. 4- Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

Plate No. 5- Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar

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Plate No. 11- Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

Plate No. 12- Artist G.S. Sohan Singh

Plate No. 13- Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

Plate No. 14- Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

Plate No. 15- Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

Plate No. 16- Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh

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