

## The Sikh Sacred Space: From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh

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In the time of Guru Nanak and his successors three terms were used for the Sikh sacred space: *sangat*, *dharamsal* and the *gurdwara*. The most frequently used term was the *sangat*, followed by the *dharamsal*, and it seems that the term *gurdwara* came into currency in the time of Ranjit Singh. The institution of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh laid great emphasis on a new way of life for the Khalsa. Consequently, two new literary forms emerged, the *Rahitnamas* and the *Gurbilas*, which reflect deeper interest in the sacred space. With the vesting of Guruship in the Granth and the Panth by the tenth Guru, the sacred space became all the more important: the Guru Granth was installed in the *dharamsal* and the Guru Panth was present there. In the late eighteenth century, the number of Gurdwaras built and maintained with grants from the Sikh rulers became larger than ever before. A new class of people connected with the Gurdwaras emerged, like the *granthis*, *ragis*, *rababis*, *dhadis* and the *pujaris*. The importance of the Harmandir and its sanctity increased. Ranjit Singh renovated, beautified and gold-plated the Harmandir Sahib, and brought it international recognition. The Harmandir Sahib became the foremost Gurdwara of the Sikhs.

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In a seminal essay on the Gurdwara, Dr J.S. Grewal observes that only a few historians have paid attention to the institution of the Gurdwara and that too not very seriously.<sup>1</sup> His own essay was based on contemporary sources and covered for the first time several important aspects of the subject. This paper proposes to carry forward the discussion in a closer context of historical change.

### In the Time of the Gurus

Guru Nanak refers to the earth (*dharti*) as *dharamsal*, the place where merit can be earned for liberation. At the same time, *dharamsal* is used for the actual place where the Sikhs performed their congregational worship. Guru Nanak uses the term Gurdwara as well for the place of

congregational worship. Yet another term for congregational worship is *sangat*, which is used more frequently than the other two.<sup>2</sup> The successors of Guru Nanak follow his example in the usage of these three terms. Their literal meaning is different but they refer to the same institution.

We may cite a few examples. Guru Nanak says that God created the universe and placed the earth within it as a *dharamsal*. At another place he says that earth was created as *dharamsal* and God, the creator, remained distinct. Elsewhere, Guru Nanak says if we do not understand the *shabad* how can we adorn in the *gurduar* (Gurdwara); the Name in the *gurduar* is received with the grace of God.<sup>3</sup> For Guru Amar Das, the earth was created through the divine order as a true *dharamsal*; one may receive peace and understanding in the *gurduar* with the grace of God. Guru Amar Das says that his beloved friend would protect his honour by giving refuge in the *gurduar*.<sup>4</sup>

Guru Arjan says he has established a *dharamsal* of truth to which he brings the Sikhs so that he may wash their feet, wave the fan over them, and bow at their feet. The *dharamsal* of *sants* and *sadhs* is associated with *kirtan* and meditation on God. This is the true boat that leads to the destination that is liberation. Elsewhere, Guru Arjan emphasizes that he may purify his body by serving the Sikhs, carrying water for them, waving the fan over their heads, grinding the corn, and washing their feet; he may be given a place among those who sit in the *dharamsal*. In the well-known verse of Guru Arjan in which he addresses Mohan, the elder son of Guru Amar Das and a man of piety, Mohan's *duar* is compared to the '*sant-dharamsala*'.<sup>5</sup>

The *sangat* has a fundamental importance in the *bani* of Guru Nanak. The term '*sangat*' refers to the Sikhs sitting together for worship through *kirtan* and *katha*. It includes the activities of the individual Sikhs by way of service to others which is regarded as service of the Guru, and opens a way to liberation for the Sikh. The *dharamsal* is the locus of *sadh-sangat* for which different terms are sometimes used by the Gurus like *sant-sangat*, *sat-sangat*, *Sikh-sangat*, *Gur-sangat* and *sant-sabha*. Guru Amar Das says that the benefit of *sat-sangat* is found by God's grace; no one has found it without the true Guru. For Guru Ram Das the dust of the feet of the *sat-sangat* is more efficacious in removing the dirt than the water of all the 68 *tiraths*. By joining the *sadhu-sangat* God's Name is appropriated. Guru Arjan says that there is all peace in *sadh-sangat*; by singing the praises of God in the *sadh-sangat* illusion, fear, sorrow and pain disappear. One should meditate on the knower of all inner secrets in true association (*sat-*

*sang*). All jealousy with others has disappeared since I have found the *sadh-sangat*, he says. In *sadhu-sang* are contained all good actions, charity, and numerous other merits. Guru Arjan says that the *sant-sabha* is a beautiful sacred place; the One Name is found only in *sant-sangat*. Elsewhere, he says that God is present in every body; one may find Him by accepting His will and joining the *sadh-sang*.<sup>6</sup>

Bhai Gurdas uses all the three terms and the term *sadh-sangat* most frequently. In fact, there are variations like the *sant-sangat*, *sat-sangat*, *Sikh-sangat*, *Gursikh sangat* and *Gur-sangat*. Each has its own meaning but the institution referred to is the same. Like Guru Nanak, Bhai Gurdas refers to the earth metaphorically as *dharamsal*, and he refers literally to the *dharamsal* at Kartarpur. Guru Nanak's successors established *dharamsals* in their own time. By Bhai Gurdas's time a large number of local Sikh *sangats* existed within and outside the Punjab. It is likely that the number of *dharamsals* was equally large. Probably, the representatives of the Guru looked after the *dharamsals* established at many places away from the central institution where the Guru himself was present. According to Bhai Gurdas, blessed are the Sikhs who go to the Gurdwara, worship in congregation and attain happiness and liberation. In the *dharamsal* the grandfather and the grandson are equal to each other. Talking about the activity in the *dharamsal* he says that the Sikhs sweep the floor, wash the feet of others, draw water, wave fan, make *pothis* of the Guru's hymns, sing God's praises with musical instruments -- '*tal*, *mridang* and *rabab*', grind the flour, fetch wood for the *langar*, spread the sitting mats, bring unused pitchers, fill them with water, and serve the *maha parsad* (sacred food).<sup>7</sup>

Writing in the middle of the seventeenth century, the author of the *Dabistan-i Mazahib* uses the terms *dharamsal* and the *sangat*. The Guru's *dharamsal* is 'the place where the Sikhs sit and engage themselves in praising the Lord'. The *sangat* or 'the assembly of the Sikhs' is so important that even the Guru 'consults the *sangat*' about 'his own wishes'. The collective prayer with folded hands (*ardas*) is a common feature of the Sikh religious worship in the *dharamsal*. In fact, the Sikhs believed that the collective prayer of the *sangat* was more effective than that of any individual.<sup>8</sup>

The *hukamnamas* of Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh are addressed to the *sangats* of the east at places like Patna, Alamganj, Bina, Benares, Mungher, Mirzapur, and Dhaka, and to the Sikh *sangats* in the Punjab at places like Pakpattan, Naushehra Pannuan, Khara,

Bakala and Dasuya. The *hukamnama* was read out to the *sangat* in the *dharamsal* and it was treated with veneration and preserved as a sacred object. The Guru's letter was regarded as an 'order' (*hukam*). The Sikhs were instructed to remember God and Guru, and also to go to the *dharamsal* every day for *kirtan* and *Arati Sohila* and to celebrate Gurburabs. The offerings made by the Sikhs in cash or kind were collected in the *dharamsal* and sent to the Gurus through the *masands* before the institution of the Khalsa.<sup>9</sup>

The *Puratan Janamsakhi* highlights the importance of the *dharamsal* in the life of the Sikhs. It talks of the *dharamsals* and the Sikh *sangats*. The foundation and the activities of the *dharamsal* at Kartarpur are particularly mentioned. The Sikhs brought grain to the *dharamsal* presumably for the community kitchen (*langar*), prepared *pothis* of Guru Nanak's compositions, sang his *shabads*, performed *kirtan*, had *langar*, and recited the *Aarti Sohila* before going to sleep.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Institution of the Khalsa and its Implications**

In 1699 Guru Gobind Singh instituted the Khalsa and created warriors who were prepared to fight and rule. In fact, the idea of '*raj karega khalsa*' became current in the life time of the tenth Guru. Almost simultaneously arose two new literary forms in the eighteenth century which were closely linked with the new way of life: the *Rahitnama* and the *Gurbilas*. Both these forms showed a deeper concern with the sacred space (*dharamsal*) as the most important institution of the Sikhs.

In his *Sri Gur Sobha* Sainapat refers to the Sikh sacred space as *dharamsal*. The *sangat* meets in the *dharamsal*. The term *sangat* is used for the collective body of the local Sikhs. Though the term *dharamsal* is mentioned only thrice, references to congregational worship are quite frequent. The praises of God are sung in the true congregation (*sat-sangat*); this boon comes through good fortune. Another term used for congregational worship is *sant-sabha*. The Sikhs are enjoined to appropriate *satsang*. A Sikh should join the *sangat* with love in his heart. There is no peace without the *sangat*. Religious matters could also be discussed in a congregation of the Sikhs. One meets the *sants* in the true congregation and suffers no sorrow (*dukh*). All one's desires are fulfilled through *ardas* in the congregation. There is a reference to *ardas* being performed by an *ardasia*. It is clear that Sainapat is talking of the Khalsa *sangat* or *sangats*. The Khalsa *sangat* is now the true *sangat*. The Sikh who

does not come to the true *sangat* is not a Khalsa (true Khalsa) according to Sainapat.<sup>11</sup>

In the *Rahitnama* called the *Tankhahnama* (also called the *Nasihatinama*), associated with Bhai Nand Lal, there is hardly any doubt that the scripture is present in the place of congregation (*satsang*) for which neither the term *dharamsal* nor Gurdwara is used. The Sikh is expected to go to the congregational worship in the morning and concentrate on the praises of God being sung; he should not hesitate to seat a poor Sikh beside him; he should not talk without an understanding of the *shabad*; he should bow to the *shabad* at the end of the performance of the *kirtan*. All this detail enables us to visualise the performance of *kirtan* and *katha* in a *dharamsal*.<sup>12</sup>

There is hardly any doubt that *karhah parsad* (sacred food) was distributed towards the end of the performance of *kirtan* and *katha* in the *dharamsal*. The author of the *Rahitnama* emphasizes that the Sikh who prepared the *karha parsad* was expected to be meticulous. All its three ingredients (wheat flour, *ghee* and sugar) were to be used in equal quantities. The spot where the *parsad* was to be prepared was swept and plastered; the utensils to be used were scrubbed and washed; the person to prepare the *parsad* was expected to bathe and recite 'Vaheguru, Vaheguru' all the time; a new pitcher was to be used for fresh water. When the *parsad* was ready it was to be placed on a four-legged low table and praises of God were to be sung. Prepared in this manner the *karha parsad* became the source of grace. A Sikh who distributes *parsad* must cover his head. It is stated further in the *Tankhahnama* that if he distributes *karah parsad* unequally among the Sikhs with the idea of saving it for himself he remains in sorrow for ever. A Sikh is instructed not to eat the *parsad* bareheaded.<sup>13</sup>

Another eighteenth century work, the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama*, prescribes daily visits to the *dharamsal*. After his morning prayers at home, a Sikh should go to the *dharamsal* and join the *sadh-sangat*. He should take some offering with him according to his means: flowers, fruit, grain or cash. Similarly, in the evening he should go to the *dharamsal* to sit in the congregation. He should perform *kirtan-katha* or listen to it. When a Sikh of the Guru returns after business in the country or abroad, he should first go to the *dharamsal* and then go home. Sitting among the Sikhs in the presence of the *Granth Sahib* in the *dharamsal*, a Sikh of the Guru should not feel proud of his merit, wealth or youth. To build a *dharamsal* was the foremost duty of the Sikhs. 'Wherever there are five, seven, ten or a

hundred Sikh homes, the Sikhs must build a place of the Guru, a *dharamsal*', says the *Rahitnama*.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, a Sikh in charge of the *dharamsal*, called *dharamsalia*, should be kind in disposition, and not irritable or greedy. He should remain celibate so that he has no greed and no pride. He should overlook the faults of others. He should be mentally alert and physically clean. He should ensure that anything belonging to a visitor from outside was not stolen or misplaced. The local Sikhs should be considerate and attentive to such a *dharamsalia*. *Ardas* should be performed on all occasions of some importance. There should be no women's quarters in the *dharamsal*. The Guru's house is meant for the poor Sikhs of the Guru who are in need of help, and who are devout and who observe the *rahit*. He should not misappropriate or misuse any part of the offerings that come in the name of the Guru. A Sikh of the Guru should not allow himself to be called 'Bhai' or 'Mahant'.<sup>15</sup>

Turning to Koer Singh's *Gurbilas*, it emphasizes that the Khalsa should go to the *dharamsal* every day in the morning and evening to have the Guru's *darshan*; and they should regard the Guru as ever present in the Granth. Koer Singh mentions the *rababis* and *dhadhhis* performing *kirtan* in the Sikh *sangat*. All prayers should be made through the *sangat*, the form of the Guru. Passing through Agra, Gwalior, Ujjain, Burhanpur and Aurangabad, Daya Singh (the Sikh who carried the *Zafarnama* to Aurangzeb) reached Ahmadabad (Ahmad Nagar). He went to the local *dharamsals* and showed the Guru's order to the *sangat*. They received the *hukamnama* of Guru Gobind Singh with reverence and served Daya Singh with devotion. Elsewhere, Koer Singh says that Guru Gobind Singh met Bhai Rupa and called Batha Ram of Pattan Farid and instructed him to build a *dharamsal* and dig a well.<sup>16</sup>

### Doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth

In Sainapat's *Sri Gur Sobha* it is stated that a day before his passing away, the Khalsa asked Guru Gobind Singh about his successor. They were told that the eternal *shabad-bani* shall be the true Guru. Sainapat says that the tenth Guru was concerned with the Khalsa too, and bestowed his robe (*jama*) on the Khalsa: 'The Khalsa is my form and I am close to the Khalsa. In the Khalsa I abide from the beginning till the end.'<sup>17</sup>

The doctrine of Guru Granth enhanced the prestige of the Sikh sacred space was enhanced by the presence of the *Granth Sahib*. From the very

beginning there was a great regard and reverence for the Gurbani and it formed the core of Sikh worship. As Sainapat says, by sacrificing his life Guru Tegh Bahadur saved the *dharamsal* which was symbolic of the Sikh faith.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the spot where this worship was performed was regarded as sanctified. The Guru Granth was so important for the Sikhs that they could not tolerate any kind of disrespect towards it.

There is a recorded instance of a *dharamsal* being destroyed by the Mughal authorities. In the *Ahkam-i Alamgiri* there is an order of Aurangzeb addressed to Wazir Khan, the Mughal *faujdar* of Sarhind. It is stated that the Sikh 'Temple' in Buria (in the *sarkar* of Sarhind) was destroyed, a mosque was built in its place, and a *darvesh* was appointed as a caretaker. The Sikhs of Buria killed the *darvesh* and they admitted having killed him. The *qazi* and the *muhtasib* of Buria had been dismissed. However, some Sikhs of Buria represented to the emperor that the said officials did nothing wrong. Aurangzeb ordered Wazir Khan to make a thorough enquiry to find exactly what happened and no appointment should be made before the enquiry was completed.<sup>19</sup> It is relevant here to note that the local Sikhs not only showed their resentment and risked their lives but also fearlessly owned their action.

The episode of Massa Ranghar, a Rajput Muslim *chaudhari* of Mandiali is better known. In Zakariya Khan's time he was given charge of the Harmandir Sahib in Ramdasapur. He used the precincts of the Harmandir Sahib for entertainment by professional dancers. The news of this desecration was given by a Sikh to Mehtab Singh (grandfather of Ratan Singh Bhangu). Mehtab Singh decided to kill Massa Ranghar. Mehtab Singh was joined in this by Sukha Singh. Both of them reached the Harmandir Sahib in the disguise of peasants, ostensibly to pay land-revenue to the *chaudhari*, and killed Massa Ranghar.<sup>20</sup>

During the invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali (1752-65), Harmandir Sahib (Darbar Sahib) remained the nerve centre of the Sikhs. According to the eye witness accounts of Qazi Nur Muhammad when Ahmad Shah Abdali arrived at Ramdasapur in 1764 to destroy the Darbar Sahib, he found that some Sikhs had stayed back to defend the place. Only thirty in number, they fearlessly fought with the Afghans and fell fighting.<sup>21</sup> Ratan Singh Bhangu tells us that their leader was Gurbakhsh Singh Nihang who used to lead the Khalsa standards. Each one of them died as a martyr. Bhangu recalls that they had deliberately taken the decision to die fighting in defence of the Darbar Sahib. Their bodies were cremated together at a spot near the Akal Bunga and a martyrs' memorial (*shahidganj*) was

constructed over the place. Significantly, Bhangu refers to it as 'the door of the Guru' (*gurdwara*): 'It was sacred, like the land of Kurukshetra; by dying at this Gurdwara as a true Sikh one acquired the merit of a thousand lives'.<sup>22</sup>

There was no difference between the Guru and the Khalsa *sangat*. The local Khalsa *sangats* had the authority to take decisions with regard to the defaulters. Sainapat makes the telling statement that the true Guru and the *sangat* are one. Like the Guru, the *sangat* can forgive or punish. The Singhs meet as a true *sangat* to resolve issues faced by the Sikhs.<sup>23</sup> From the equation of the *sangat* with the Guru, the vesting of Guruship in the Khalsa was only a small step.

It is relevant to note that there was a change in the perspective of Guru Gobind Singh on the Khalsa towards the end of his life. It is probable that the tenth Guru was thinking of vesting Guruship in the Panth much before he actually passed away in October 1708. In a *hukamnama* of 2 October 1707 addressed to the *sangat* of Khara, he refers to the *sarbat sangat* as 'my (*mera*) Khalsa'. But in his *hukamnama* of 3 February 1708 addressed to the *sangat* of Benares, the *sangat* is referred to as '*Vaheguru ji da Khalsa*'. Significantly, in the *hukamnamas* of Banda Singh, Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devi the term used for the Khalsa is '*Vaheguru ji da Khalsa*'.<sup>24</sup>

By the late 1750s, if not earlier, the doctrine of the Guru Panth had become operative in the practical affairs of the Khalsa. In a *hukamnama* issued (from the Akal Takht) by the 'Guru Khalsa', the *sangat* of Pattan is asked for contribution towards the fund being collected for rebuilding the Harmandir Sahib (which had been destroyed by Ahmad Shah Abdali).<sup>25</sup>

The doctrine of Guru Panth was operative also in the political struggle of the Khalsa. In the Persian News Reports of the early 1760s there are references to Gurmata passed by the collective body of the Khalsa at Ramdaspur. The term Gurmata was used because it was purported to be the decision of the Khalsa Panth as representative of the Guru. As a resolution (*mata*) adopted by the 'entire body of the Khalsa' it was called Gurmata because of the presence of the Guru in the Khalsa. The reports leave no doubt that the meetings of the Sarbat Khalsa were held frequently at Amritsar and important Gurnatas were adopted.<sup>26</sup>

Bhangu underscores the sanctity of the Gurmata. He says that the territories were occupied on the basis of the criterion adopted through a Gurmata at the Akal Bunga: the Singh who occupied a place first should not be dislodged. Accordingly, the less powerful ones occupied small places and the eminent Sardars occupied cities, towns and *parganas*. Those



who were considerate towards their subjects remained in position but those who alienated their subjects were soon dislodged. If anyone was ousted later, the 'Misal' intervened on his behalf.<sup>27</sup> This carries the implication that the chiefs of the Misals (fighting units) adhered to the Gurmata. Before the end of the eighteenth century, the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth had become fundamental doctrines of the Sikhs.

### **Under the Sikh Rulers**

The Khalsa had waged a long struggle against the Afghans from about the middle of the eighteenth century to 1765 when they declared their sovereign rule by striking a coin at Lahore. A large number of Sikh leaders exercised political power over different parts of the Punjab. A common feature of their rule was the state patronage given to religious institutions and individuals of all faiths, especially those of the Sikhs.<sup>28</sup>

The most striking feature of the late eighteenth century was the construction of the largest number of Gurdwaras. This was made possible by the grants given to the *dharamsals* by the Sikh rulers.<sup>29</sup> The archival records contain the *sanads* (dated orders) of a large number of Sikh rulers which provide detail about the time and place of the grants and the grantees. In terms of the caste background, the grantees were reported to be mostly Brahmans, Khattris, Aroras and Ramgarhias, followed by the Jats in a few cases, and some others. The Nirmalas and the Udasis are also mentioned among the recipients. The terms generally used for religious grants are *dharmarth* and *bhet*.

In the archival records figure the grants given mostly to the *dharamsals* associated with Guru Nanak, Guru Amardas, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan, Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>30</sup> The foremost among the recipient institution was the Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar. Practically, every Sikh ruler made revenue-free grants to the Harmandir, and separate officials (*mutasaddis*) had to be appointed for collecting revenues from the lands thus granted. In the late 1750s, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia gave 100 *ghumaons* of land in village Loharke, *pargana* Tam Taran for a *pakka* Gurdwara associated with Guru Nanak. A *pakka* Gurdwara at Mandiali, associated with Guru Hargobind, received land from Sahib Singh in the early 1750s. The Kotha Guru Ka in village Valla, associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur, received 25 *ghumaons* of land from Hakikat Singh Kanhiya. This place was held in much esteem by the people of the villages around, and an annual fair was held there. The Manji Sahib

Guru Nanak, an impressive building in *pargana* Sheikhpura, had received five wells and twenty *ghumaons* of land from Sher Singh in the late 1760s; this place was of 'local importance', and a fair was held there. In the late 1770s, a *zamindar* named Raja gave 30 *ghumaons* of land with a well to the Manji Sahib. In the early 1780s, the place of Guru Hargobind in Guru ki Wadali in *pargana* Amritsar received a village worth Rs. 300 a year, from Dharam Singh Kadarabadia; this was for the services of a *rababi* named Sahib Ditta attached to the Gurdwara. The records separately mention the grant of a well with 20 *ghumaons* of land in Kadarabad to Sahib Ditta *rababi* by Dharam Singh. A Gurdwara associated with Guru Nanak in Gurdaspur received 83 acres of land from Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Natha Singh Shahid gave *bhet* to Gurdwara Babe ki Ber associated with Guru Nanak at Sialkot in the early 1790s. In the late 1790s, a rare example of a non-Sikh ruler giving grant to a Gurdwara was that of Raja Devi Chand of Bilaspur who gave one-third of a village to the Gurdwara of Guru Tegh Bahadur in *pargana* Una. In 1796 the Gurdwara dedicated to Guru Tegh Bahadur in a village received a *bhet* (offering) from Anokh Singh for *pacca chabootra*. In 1800 the Manji Sahib dedicated to Guru Arjan received 25 *ghumaons* with a well from Mehtab Singh Ramgarhia. In 1800, the Dera Sahib of Guru Ram Das at Lahore received half a village for the maintenance of an open kitchen (*langar*). The 'Dera of Guru Arjan' at village Thatta in *pargana* Amritsar was said to have been built by an attendant of the Guru. Baghel Singh Karora Singhia, Mit Singh and Charhat Singh Dallewalia gave *dharamarth* grants to Keshgarh Sahib in the late eighteenth century. Gurdwara Sisganj and Gurdwara Manji Sahib at Anandpur also received *bhet* from them.<sup>31</sup> Also mentioned in the list of recipients are the Gurdwara Rori Sahib, Eminabad, Darbar Sahib at Tam Taran, and the Gurdwaras at Kiratpur and Muktsar.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes separate grants were given for the maintenance of open kitchen (*langar*) at the Gurdwaras. Fairs attracting people from the locality and the region were held at several of these places. Travellers received accommodation in some of the Gurdwaras.<sup>33</sup>

Next to the Gurus were the places associated with the *shahids* (martyrs) mentioned in the archival records. The Shahidganj at Lahore received villages from Lehna Singh Bhangi; the place was in the charge of a *granthi*. The *Gurdwara* at Sarhind where Guru Gobind Singh's younger sons were bricked alive also received grants from the Sikh rulers. It may be of interest to know that in the archival records the Shahid Bunga, one of the principal places of Sikh worship, was attached to the Darbar Sahib

Amritsar; it was dedicated to the memory of Baba Deep Singh and his followers who were killed in a fight with Muslims (Afghans) and came to be designated as *shahids*.<sup>34</sup>

There is some evidence of the grants given for the construction of new Gurdwaras in the late eighteenth century. Half a village was given by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia in 1773 for the support of a *pakka* Gurdwara in *pargana* Amritsar. In Chamiani proper, there was a *pakka dharamsal* for which Nar Singh Chamariwala gave a well with sixty-seven *bighas* of land by way of *dharmarth*; the record also mentions that it had a Sikh *granthi*, and the *Granth Sahib* was read every day. Built in 1773 or earlier, it provided accommodation to travellers. Similarly, the *Granth Sahib* was read and travellers were entertained in a '*dharamsala*' at Harappa near Pakpattan for which the Nakkai chiefs gave a village called Mirdan by way of *dharmarth* in 1773; this grant was confirmed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In 1776 Ram Singh gave grant for the support of a *pakka* Gurdwara in village Lehoke, *pargana* Gujranwala. In the early 1780s, Sada Kaur Kanhiya gave a grant in support of a *pakka dharamsal* at Batala. In 1796 Bhai Lal Singh of Kaithal gave grant for the construction of a Gurdwara at Kaithal.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, grants were given to certain *birs* (recensions of the *Granth Sahib*) which were treated exceptionally important, like Bhai *Banno Bir* in the village called Khara Mangat and the *Bir* at the Kartarpur (Jalandhar). Gurdwaras associated with the eminent Sikhs of the Gurus also received grants. In the early 1780s, Gurdwara Bir Baba Budha Sahib in village Thatta, *pargana* Amritsar received grants from the Sikh rulers.<sup>36</sup> The archival documents provide some information about the keepers of Gurdwaras or the *dharmsalias* as the recipients of grants. In one case a woman called Mai Sahjo is mentioned as managing a Gurdwara.<sup>37</sup> In fact, a whole new class of persons connected with the *dharamsals* emerged: *granthis*, *ragis*, *rababis*, *ardasias*, *dhadis*, *khazanchis*, *pujaris*, painters, and *shama ufroz* (lighters of lamp).

The sanctity of the *Granth Sahib* was on the increase. Khushal Singh gave *dharmarth* grant to the Granthi Bhanga Singh in Jalandhar in 1763 who was succeeded by his son Jhanda Singh. Desa Singh gave two-thirds of a village to Sarup Singh of Gurdaspur in the 1780s for reading the *Granth Sahib*; this grant was enjoyed by three generations. Among the recipients of *dharmarth* grants from numerous rulers were two head *granthis* of the Darbar Sahib who received a large number of grants from the Sikh rulers: Bhai Chanchal Singh and his grandson Bhai Jassa Singh.<sup>38</sup>

It may be of interest to know that grants were given in cash also. We find Mahan Singh, the father of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, granting cash allowance of Rs 363 from the salt mines of Pind Dadan Khan. Four recipients are mentioned: Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Akal Bunga, Shahid Bunga and the Jhanda Bunga.<sup>39</sup>

The information about of the Akal Bunga given separately in the archival record is important. The Akal Bunga, as stated, was one of the principal institutions in the grand Sikh temple complex at Amritsar. It was dedicated to the memory of Guru Hargobind. The *pahul* was administered at this institution. The establishment attached to this institution consisted of a number of Akalis and Nihangs. It is important to note that the Hukamnamia Sikhs (whose ancestors received *hukamnamas* from Guru Gobind Singh who asked his Sikhs to extend patronage to the holders of these documents) were attached to the Akal Bunga. The proceeds of the grants after deducting the expenses of the institution were added to offerings (*charhut*) made by visitors to the temple and the whole was annually divided into eight hundred shares which were distributed among the different individuals and families who were recognized share-holders in the income of the Akal Bunga. The necessary expenses of the Akal Bunga were estimated at Rs 3,800 a year by the managers and Rs 2,000 by the *pujaris* of the institution.<sup>40</sup>

It may be relevant to point out that out of the three recent works on Sikh Gurdwaras in Pakistan, Iqbal Qaiser's *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan* is the most relevant.<sup>41</sup> It is not a historical study, strictly speaking, but it does take notice of the sites and structures of the Gurdwaras left in Pakistan after Partition. In several cases, Qaiser indicates the time when any Gurdwara was built. The dominant impression that we get from Qaiser's book is that the largest number of Gurdwaras were built during the period of Sikh rule, especially during the late eighteenth century. This book supplements the archival records and gives useful information about the Gurdwaras visited by Qaiser.<sup>42</sup>

Some of the Gurdwaras are identified with places mentioned in the *Janamsakhis* as visited by Guru Nanak. Gurdwara Chakki Sahib at Eminabad (district Gujrawala) is supposed to be the place where Guru Nanak was obliged to use millstone for grinding corn and, eventually, he was freed along with thousands of other captives. Similarly, Gurdwara Holan Sahib, in district Kasur is associated with a cattleherd who was blessed with rulership for serving parched gram to Guru Nanak and Mardana. The kind people of the village, which has Gurdwara Manji

Sahib, were blessed with ruin on the assumption that they would spread goodness wherever they went. This idea is found in one of the *sakhis* of the *Sakhi Babe Nanak Ji Ki*.<sup>43</sup> Gurdwara Tibba Nanaksar, Pakpattan, was associated with the meeting of Guru Nanak with Shaikh Ibrahim, called the second Farid. He is said to have given the works of Shaikh Farid to Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak's visit to Gorakh-hatri near Peshawar is mentioned by Qaiser in connection with Gurdwara Gurhatri.<sup>44</sup>

However, as regards the grantors, Qaiser mentions only two rulers by name. One of them is Ranjit Singh and the other is Natha Singh 'Shahid' who had conquered a part of Sialkot and constructed a Gurdwara at Babe Ki Ber, with a grant of 8,000 rupees a year. This Gurdwara also possessed 250 acres of land in district Lyallpur (Faisalabad). A few other Gurdwaras are stated to have received grants in the time of 'Sikh Raj'. This is true of Gurdwara Patshahi Chhevin, Hafizabad, and Gurdwara Shahidganj, Bhai Taru Singh, Naulakha Bazaar, Lahore. In a few other cases, only the grant is mentioned.<sup>45</sup>

The Sikh sources of the period complement the early British records and Iqbal Qaiser's field work. With the increasing number of Gurdwaras it is likely that the Sikhs would show a keen interest in their functioning. Bhai Desa Singh recommends in his *Rahitnama* composed in the period of Sikh rule that a Singh should never think of appropriating anything from the *dharamsal*. Even as a *pujari*, he should never take much from the offerings. He should take only what he needs for subsistence. He should never use the offerings for his wife or son; he should use them for the open kitchen (*langar*). The *Rahitnama* lays great emphasis on the way in which food for the *langar* was to be prepared. Apart from the detail of procedure and items required, it is emphasized that no article of leather should be brought into the kitchen, nor should a dog enter it. A *rahitwan* Singh is expected to know how to prepare the *langar* and its equal distribution (*sam-vartara*). No meat was to be cooked in the *langar*, and no alcoholic drink was to be used. They who cut their hair or who were outcastes were not to be allowed to cook food; nor were they who used *bhang* or tobacco. Before disbursing the *langar*, *ardas* should be performed. Every item of the food should be placed in a clean utensil and offered to the Gurus as *bhog* with their form lodged in the heart, or it should be offered to the *Granth* as the Guru. The food should be distributed among men, women, and children. Bhai Desa Singh recommends that while preparing *karha parsad* one should recite the *Japuji* and the *Jaap*.<sup>46</sup> The *Rahitnama* of Bhai Daya

Singh underscores that if equal quantities of sugar, flour and *ghee* (*tribhag*) are not used for preparing *karha parsad*, it would not reach the Guru.<sup>47</sup>

According to Koer Singh's *Gurbilas*, Guru Gobind Singh declared the pool (*dhab*) of Muktsar where forty Singhs had become martyrs (*mukte*) to be a great place of pilgrimage equal in fact to Amritsar. In *Sakhi* 17 of the *Mahima Prakash* Sarup Das Bhalla refers to the *dehuras* of Mata Sundari, Mata Jito ji, Mata Sahib Devi and Mata Gujri, erected at different places by the Khalsa.<sup>48</sup> According to Bhangu, the Sikhs identified the spot where the younger Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh had been martyred. A Gurdwara was constructed in memorium and an adequate *jagir* was assigned for its upkeep and daily *kirtan* and *langar*. Bhangu highlights Sardar Baghel Singh's commendable work of raising Gurdwaras in Delhi at places which were associated with Guru Harkrishan, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Mata Sundari, and Mata Sahib Devi.<sup>49</sup>

The sanctity of the three most important places associated with Guru Gobind Singh – Patna, Anandpur, and Nander – is underlined by Sukha Singh in his *Gurbilas*. The most important of all was Sri Kesgarh. Sukha Singh highlights the importance of 'Abchalnagar' (the city eternal) where the tenth Guru could be seen in the *sangat*. According to Sukha Singh, the Darbar at Abchalnagar was constructed at the spot where Guru Gobind Singh had gone to the other world. By visiting this place, a Sikh became pure like a base metal touched by the philosopher's stone. The praises of God were sung day and night and *arati* was performed. He makes it a point to mention that he had visited the *darbar* at Patna before coming to Anandpur. Sukha Singh recommends pilgrimage to Abchalnagar (Nander). He also says that there can be no *sikhi* without having the sight of Sri Kesgarh and Sri Anandpur Sahib.<sup>50</sup>

The Khalsa *sardars* took interest in the development of Amritsar in the late 1760s, and many of them built *bungas* around the Harmandir Sahib. In the 1770s, they jointly reconstructed the tank, the Harmandir, the connecting bridge, and the entrance (*darshani darwaza*). The construction of other shrines around the tank was completed during the decades following. Much of the construction work was supervised by Bhai Des Raj under the overall direction of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Significantly, Gopal Das, an Udasi, was replaced by a Khalsa named Chanchal Singh as the *granthi* of the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar.<sup>51</sup>

The increasing importance of the Harmandir and its sanctity during the late eighteenth century is evident from the observations of the contemporary Sikh writers. Writing in 1769, Kesar Singh Chhibber refers

to 'sri amritsar' as the supreme place of Sikh worship.<sup>52</sup> Writing in 1776, Sarup Das Bhalla praises 'sri amritsar' as the Guru's place which is the door to liberation. Thousands of Gursikhs are stated to bathe in the *sarovar*, reciting *Gurbani*; 'sri amritsar' is unique in the three worlds.<sup>53</sup> Bhalla's example is followed by several poets. Around 1777, Kavi Sant Das asserts that there is no place comparable to *amritsar* in the Kaliyuga; it is the supreme *tirath* of all the four cosmic ages (*yugas*). Kavi Kankan praises the town of Ramdaspur and its rulers. The people in Ramdaspur live in peace; there is no poverty; there is no fear of the *raja*; it is supreme among all the places of pilgrimage. Writing towards the end of the eighteenth century, Kavi Saundha says that no other pool of water in all the three worlds is like *amritsar*; in the midst of the pool is the beautiful Harmandir, the house of Ram. The Pathan who showed disrespect to it received a mark on his face as the symbol of ignominy (the reference obviously is to the cancer of the nose suffered by Ahmad Shah Abdali), and the power of the Afghans began to decline. The Khalsa attained rulership by bathing in the *sarovar*. Thus, a new kind of literature began to be produced with the emergence of Amritsar as the spiritual and political centre of the Khalsa.<sup>54</sup>

Ram Sukh Rao, the court historian of the Ahluwalias, suggests that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia controlled and managed the affairs of the Darbar Sahib, presumably on behalf of the Sarbat Khalsa. Rao talks of a *diwan* (meeting) held in front of the Akal Takht by Jassa Singh's successor Bhag Singh Ahluwalia in 1795. Present in the *diwan* were the Kanhiya, Bhangi, and probably the Gheba chiefs. Bhai Chanchal Singh, the well-known *granthi* of the Harmandir Sahib, and Akali Darbara Singh praised Jassa Singh for his valour and his services for the Panth, particularly in Ramdaspur. Among other things, he had built two *katras* (quarters in the town) and appointed the *mutasaddis*, *ardasias*, *granthis*, and *pujaris* of the Darbar Sahib at 'amritsar ji'.<sup>55</sup> In due course, Ranjit Singh would take over the town and the management of this premier institution of the Sikhs.

### **Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his 'Service' to the Guru and the Panth**

Ranjit Singh succeeded his father Mahan Singh in 1790. In numerous cases in the archival records Ranjit Singh confirmed grants given to the *dharamsals* by the early Sikh rulers. He gave fresh grants to several Gurdwaras associated with the Sikh Gurus and to the recensions of the *Granth Sahib*.<sup>56</sup> Iqbal Qaiser informs us that Gurdwara Janam Asthan at the Nankana Sahib received nearly 16,000 acres of land. The Maharaja

gave grant to the Gurdwara associated with Guru Hargobind at Buzurgwal (district Gujrat). For Bhai Banno recension of the *Granth Sahib* Ranjit Singh built a Gurdwara, constructed a tank and gave a large 'jagir'. The Maharaja gave a large 'jagir' to Gurdwara Rori Sahib near Eminabad (district Gujranwala). This Gurdwara possessed 225 acres of land. To a Gurdwara associated with Guru Nanak at Mandi Bahauddin built in Ranjit Singh's time, was granted 5,000 rupees a year as 'jagir' and 1,000 acres of land. (The term 'jagir', it seems, is used by Qaiser for a *dharmarth* grant or *bhet*).<sup>57</sup>

Ranjit Singh's interest in the *dharamsals* is well reflected in the offerings he made from time to time. His court chronicler and author of the *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Sohan Lal Suri, gives numerous instances of various kinds of offerings. The Maharaja gave a substantial amount for the construction of the stairs of the sacred tank (*sarovar*) at Tarn Taran, besides Rs 5,000 for making the floor, along with several articles for the Gurdwara. Five gold pitchers were given to the Ber Sahib Gurdwara. He gave whitewash materials for the Gurdwaras at Khadur, Goindval, Tarn Taran and the Thamb Sahib. The Maharaja sent certain sums of money to the Gurdwaras as *ardas*: Rs 1,500 each to Darbar Sahib, Amritsar and Anandpur; Rs 1000 to the Gurdwara at Kartarpur; Rs 500 each to Khadur Sahib, Baoli Sahib, Goindval, Tarn Taran and Thamb Sahib; Rs 300 each to Damdama Sahib, Fatehgarh and Muktsar Sahib; and on another occasion he sent Rs 125 as offering for *ardas* at Gurdwara Manji Sahib. In 1839, the Maharaja sent several articles to Sri Anandpur, Tarn Taran, Khadur Sahib, Baoli Sahib, Nankana Sahib, Kartarpur, Thamb Sahib, Muktsar, Manji Sahib, Dera Guru Arjan and, above all, to Sri Amritsar.<sup>58</sup> According to Suri, Ranjit Singh had victoriously entered Amritsar in 1804 and ousted Mai Sukhan (the widow of Gulab Singh Bhangi), and her young son Gurdit Singh from the Bhangi fort in Amritsar. Ranjit Singh then went to the Darbar Sahib for thanksgiving. He also gave costly gifts to the eminent residents of the city according to their status.<sup>59</sup> The court chronicler does not say so but his statement suggests that Ranjit Singh declared his authority over the affairs of the Harmandir in his own way.

A few contemporary news-letters throw some light on how Ranjit Singh handled some issues related to the management of the Harmandir. On 15 April 1812, it was verbally submitted to the Maharaja that 'great injustice' prevailed in the Darbar Sahib. Out of eleven hundred rupees which formed the contribution on the occasion of Baisakhi, Akali Phula Singh was claiming Rs 1,000. The Maharaja said that he would send for



him. Later, it was reported that Akali Phula Singh arrived in Amritsar with his 'troops', started fighting with the Akalis of the Darbar Sahib with arrows and guns, and two or three men were killed and wounded on both sides. The Maharaja despatched his special horsemen to suppress the disturbance.<sup>60</sup> On 14 January 1814, the Maharaja called the Akalis and men of Phula Singh in his presence and listened to their dispute and claims about their shares of income. He ordered the men of Phula Singh that they should take only that portion as their share which had been fixed since long, and should not claim anything from the share of other Akalis. Ranjit Singh also added that if Phula Singh and his men claimed more in the future and the Akalis complained again, he and his men would be turned out of Amritsar altogether. The discussion went on until noon, and they agreed in the end to act according to the order of the Maharaja and went away.<sup>61</sup>

In 1826 the Maharaja learnt that the sum of charity of the Harmandir did not go to the needy but was appropriated by the rich. The Maharaja appointed Bhai Ram Singh and Bhai Gobind Ram who were honest, sincere and reliable to take charge of all the offerings made at the Darbar Sahib, which were distributed by Sant Singh. The Bhai's were also given charge of the distribution of charity and alms sent by the Maharaja and the settlement of all affairs of that place and its income.<sup>62</sup>

A later order of Maharaja Ranjit Singh makes it clear that as the *nazim* of Amritsar, Desa Singh Majithia, and after him his son Lehna Singh, was given charge of the Darbar Sahib. The Maharaja instructs Lehna Singh that the following established rule was not to be infringed:

The offerings (*ardas*) and the proceeds (*jama'*) of the *jagir* should be deposited in the same chest, and Sant Singh and both the Gurmukh Singhs should, on the first Baisakh and at the *dipmala*, open the said chest and dole out the collections as used to be done in the time of Desa Singh (Majithia) in the manner following: when there are hundred or fifty persons they ought to have their money allowances distributed to them personally and individually, at which time four *mutasaddis* are to attend from Magh 1894 (1837 AD) who are to keep the accounts of the receipts and disbursement.<sup>63</sup>

Ranjit Singh took exceptional interest in what is regarded as his 'services' to the Guru and the Panth. For gold-plating, he sent gold in

successive instalments. He himself inspected the work of gold-plating from time to time. The Darbar Sahib came to be known as the 'Golden Temple', but his other services got overshadowed. Ranjit Singh had sent his entire staff in charge of floorings to the Harmandir Sahib and ordered for the preparation of a marbled floor for the Darbar Sahib and its *parikarma* (circumambulatory path). Bhai Gurmukh Singh was asked to send some reliable persons to the suburbs of Jaipur to fetch marble and get the floor prepared. About three months later, the Maharaja again gave Rs 11,000 to prepare the floor in 'perfect beauty and grace'. In addition, several precious articles were offered as *bhet* to the Harmandir, including the bejewelled gold umbrella, pearl necklace, carpets, *rumalas* and other fine articles.<sup>64</sup>

Ranjit Singh visited the Harmandir in a variety of situations largely as an act of piety. Several of his visits are recorded in the *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*. His homage on the Diwali, Dussehra, Baisakhi, and *sankranti* (first day of the month) are frequently mentioned. Illuminations were done specially on Diwali in which he took personal interest. Ranjit Singh visited the Darbar Sahib for *isnan*. He went there to make offerings on the occasion of the marriage of Prince Kharak Singh and later of Prince Naunihal Singh. Ranjit Singh celebrated the Maghi (first of the month of Magh) festival and gave away one elephant, one horse with silver saddlery, silver and gold, and *doshalas* (shawls) on that day. On another occasion, he distributed among the poor several utensils of gold and silver, some shawls and other fine things. He often went for thanksgiving after an important conquest as of Kashmir, and after recovery from illness both his own or that of his grandson, Naunihal Singh.<sup>65</sup> Sometimes the Maharaja issued orders to his family members, members of the ruling class, the chieftains and others to make offerings of certain stipulated sums to the Harmandir Sahib.<sup>66</sup> The Harmandir Sahib received the maximum number of grants spread over a large area which necessitated the appointment of separate accountants for collecting the revenues granted.<sup>67</sup>

Ranjit Singh's offerings ranged from Rs 500 to 12,000, besides valuable articles as noted earlier. In the course of one of his visits to the Darbar Sahib on the first day of Baisakh, 1838, he offered Rs 25 to the *sarovar*, performed the *parikarma*, listened to the *Granth Sahib*, enquired about the construction of the floor, and gold-plating of the Darbar Sahib. It is also mentioned that by way of *sankalap* he gave Rs 5,000, one elephant with a silver seat, one horse with a gold saddle, and 11 gold pitchers; he

made an *ardas* of Rs 1,100 and gave Rs 100 to the *rababis*. On 12 March 1839 Ranjit Singh paid his last visit to the Darbar Sahib. He made an *ardas* of Rs 1,100 at the Darbar Sahib and other places and after that came into his tent and performed a *sankalap* of large sums of money in cash, one elephant, one horse, several suits of clothes and cows.<sup>68</sup> In April 1839 when Ranjit Singh was too unwell to go personally, he asked Bhai Gurmukh Singh to go to the Darbar Sahib to offer *ardases* of large sums of money and to request the officiants to pray for the good health of the Maharaja. Money was also to be distributed among all the staff at the Darbar Sahib.<sup>69</sup>

It is important to note that Europeans began to visit the Darbar Sahib in Ranjit Singh's time. Captain Mathews of the Bengal Army visited the temple in 1808. He underlined that the Darbar Sahib was neatly decorated and Ranjit Singh was getting additional ornamental work done at his own expense. *Kirtan* went on from 3:00 am till late at night with several instruments like *rabab*, *dotara*, *sarinda* and *tabla*. The *ragis* worked in shifts. The atmosphere in the temple was serene and spiritual. Mathews suggested that even when he did not understand the language, he felt the music touched him deeply.<sup>70</sup> However, in 1831, Victor Jacquement, was not allowed to enter the premises of the Harmandir Sahib by the Akalis. His comments, therefore, are confined to the expanding city of Amritsar which was as important in the eyes of the Sikhs as Benares for the Hindus and Rome for the Christians.<sup>71</sup> Thereafter, Ranjit Singh ensured that adequate arrangements were made for the Europeans who visited the Darbar Sahib.<sup>72</sup>

Baron Charles Hugel observed in 1836 that the Harmandir was particularly mysterious and romantic. It was surmounted by a golden roof very beautifully and skillfully contrived, and inlaid with marble, a large door of gold opening into the temple, which was surrounded with little vestibules, the ceilings being supported by richly ornamented pillars. The wall of the building was ornamented with a handsome carpet worked in gold. The *sarovar* struck Hugel with surprise. There were several stone steps by which the bathers descended into the water, which was as clear as a mirror, a rare occurrence in such places in India. Hugel went round the *sarovar*. In the midst of the *sarovar* stood the Harmandir, built on an island, and reached by a bridge on the west side. On the sacred bathing place was a small vestibule in which the workmen were employed in ornamenting the floor with *pietra dura*. The marble doors were smeared with bright colours representing flowers. When Hugel entered the temple,

he noted that a large circle of devotees and followers had formed around a venerable old man reading the Granth, leaving an open space which was never encroached upon.<sup>73</sup>

Suri says that the British officer Mackeson was greatly pleased to see the gold-plating at the Darbar Sahib. Macnaughten showed his keenness to 'have the honour of enjoying the sacred sight' of the Darbar Sahib. Among the British the most memorable visit was that of Lord Auckland, the Governor General. Elaborate arrangements were made during his visit in December 1838. The custodians of the Akal Bunga and Bhai Gurmukh Singh was ordered to arrange illuminations and fireworks and *saropa* for the visitors. Lehna Singh Majithia was ordered to ride with the Governor General to the Ram Bagh Gate. Then Ranjit Singh would take him through the *bazaar*. The Maharaja and the Governor General made their obeisance at the Darbar Sahib. The Maharaja offered Rs 700 and Lord Auckland offered Rs 11,250. The Governor General offered a prayer with folded hands that the friendship between the exalted governments should last for ever. Thereafter, both the Maharaja and the Governor General, went to the Maharaja's *bunga* and made a public appearance and watched the illuminations and fireworks. The visit of the Governor General to the Darbar Sahib was 'indeed unique in the world', says Suri.<sup>74</sup> It may be added that on the day following, Emily Eden, the Governor General's sister, went inside the Darbar Sahib and examined the gold-plating. She said in a very eloquent manner that she would write to the Queen regarding this visit to the Darbar Sahib.<sup>75</sup>

The love and veneration for this premier sacred place of the Sikhs was reflected in the works of contemporary poets. Gulab Singh refers to the golden doors and silken canopies of the Darbar Sahib. Ram Parkash Udasi praises the *sarovar* as the source of liberation. The building of Harmandir is decorated with paintings and studded with gems and diamonds. *Shabads* are sung by the *ragis* and musical instruments are played. Puran Singh talks of the unique importance of the Darbar Sahib as a *tirath*.<sup>76</sup>

Writing in 1849, Ganesh Das notes that around the *sarovar* had come up the *bungas* of the Akalis and the Sardars. Many men of consequence had built their own *katras* in Ramdaspur. The town of Ramdaspur had become a large city for which He uses the term *baldah*, generally meant the largest of the cities. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had brought a canal to Ramdaspur for supplying fresh water to the *sarovar*, and built a wall around the *katras* which made Amritsar a single city. Ganesh Das says,

'today there is no city larger than Amritsar in the whole of the Punjab'. What is more important to us is the statement made by Ganesh Das that 'Sri Amritsar is the most important centre of pilgrimage for the Sikhs of Guru Nanak'.<sup>77</sup>

### **In Retrospect**

It may be in order to recapitulate the history of the Sikh sacred space since the time of the Gurus. In the time of Guru Nanak and his successors, three terms were used for the sacred space: *sangat*, *dharamsal*, and Gurdwara. These terms represented three perspectives on the sacred space. The *sangat* referred specifically to the congregational worship of the Sikhs. The *dharamsal* referred to the place for earning merit and the *gurdwara* meant that the Guru was present in the congregational worship. The most frequently used term was the *sangat*, followed by the *dharamsal*. With the passage of time, the *dharamsal* came to be used more frequently in Sikh literature. It seems that the term Gurdwara came into currency in the time of Ranjit Singh.

The institution of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 had important implications for the sacred space. The great emphasis laid on a new way of life for the Khalsa resulted in the emergence of new literary forms. The *Rahitnamas*, which began to appear in the life-time of Guru Gobind Singh, underlined the importance of the sacred space in the life of the Khalsa. Thus, the institution of the Khalsa and the Sikh sacred space reinforced each other. The *Gurbilas* literature attributed to Guru Gobind Singh attaches great importance to the sacred space in the Khalsa way of life. There is enough evidence of this mutuality in the *Rahitnamas* and the *Gurbilas* literature of the eighteenth century.

The vesting of Guruship in the Granth and the Panth by Guru Gobind Singh just before his passing away was even more important. The *Granth Sahib* was equated with the Guru and its presence in the *dharamsal* increased the *dharamsal's* sanctity and importance in the eyes of the Sikhs. The examples of deliberate martyrdom for the protection of the sacred space reflect the strong feelings of the Khalsa about their places of worship. The martyrs were next in importance to the Gurus. The Shahidganj was actually a Gurdwara at the spot of martyrdom.

The doctrine of Guru Panth had its own importance. An organization called Guru Khalsa was created at Amritsar which issued 'orders' (*hukamnamas*) to the local Sikh *sangats* as decided by the Khalsa

collectively. These resolutions were called Gurmatas. Evidently, the Guru Khalsa was supposed to represent the Guru. Incidentally, most of the Gurmatas related to the political struggle of the Khalsa against the Afghans. A few Gurmatas are known to relate to matters other than the political. Rattan Singh Bhangu's observation that the Gurmatas issued from the Akal Takht carried sanctity is supported by a few of these 'orders'. There is hardly any doubt that the doctrine of Guru Panth became the fundamental doctrine before the end of the eighteenth century.

The period of Sikh rule had a significant bearing on the Sikh sacred space. The documentary evidence gives the impression that the number of Gurdwaras built in the late eighteenth century was larger than ever before. They were built and maintained with grants from the Sikh rulers. The heightened feelings of the Sikhs and the availability of materials enabled them to construct Gurdwaras associated with the Gurus, their wives, the martyrs and a few eminent Sikhs. A new class of *granthis*, *ragis*, *rababis*, *ardasias* came into existence. The increased importance of the Harmandir and its sanctity is reflected in the observations of contemporary writers.

Under Maharaja Ranjit Singh the town of Ramdaspur became the 'city' of Amritsar. His services made the Harmandir Sahib 'golden' for the world to see and the Darbar Sahib became the foremost Gurdwara of the Sikhs.

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## Notes

1. J.S. Grewal, 'The Gurdwara', in *Religious Movements and Institutions in Medieval India* (History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization, vol.VII), ed. J.S. Grewal, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 533-47.
2. *Shabadarth Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1991, 4 vols. (cited hereafter as *Shabadarth*), pp.7, 19, 350, 351, 353, 412, 415, 919, 933, 938, 1015, 1030, 1198 and passim.
3. *Shabadarth*, pp. 7, 19, 919, 933, 1015, 1033.
4. *Shabadarth*, pp. 33, 785, 919, 1234, 1249.
5. *Shabadarth*, pp. 73-74, 248, 518.
6. *Shabadarth*, pp. 44, 72, 318, 1263, 1265, 1269, 1271, 1276, 1278, 1299, 1300.

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29. National Archives of India, New Delhi (NAI), Foreign/Political Consultation, 12 March 1852, No. 98; 1 May 1856, Nos. 392-94; 22 April 1859, No. 45. Foreign/Political Proceedings, 22 March 1850, No. 104; 23 August 1850, No. 35C; 14 November 1851, No.49; 16 April 1852, No. 49; 7 January 1853, No. 222; 14 January 1853, Nos. 226, 235, 238, 241; 10 June 1853, No. 218; 23 June 1854, No. 205; 4 July 1856, No. 151; 29 August 1856, No. 250; 28 November 1856, Nos. 112 & 152; 9 January 1857, Nos. 221, 235 & 298; 13 February 1857, No. 288; 31 December 1858, Nos. 1113 & 3315.
30. It may be of some interest to know that the temple dedicated to Baba Handal of Jandiala Guru is erroneously called 'Darbar Sahib' in the British records. The land attached to it was gifted to Baba Handal by the local *zamindars* before the establishment of British rule. NAI, Foreign/ Political Proceedings, 28 November 1856, no. 212, pp. 730-1.
31. NAI, Foreign/ Political Proceedings, 16 April 1852, No. 49, pp. 56-7; 10 June 1853, Nos. 217-18, pp. 280-1,398-9, 400-1; 4 July 1856, No. 154, S. No. 18; 28 November 1856, No. 112, pp. 756-7; No. 113, pp. 782-3; No. 128, pp. 954-7; 9 January 1857, Part I, No. 216, pp. 736-7.
32. NAI, Foreign/Political Proceedings, 22 March 1850, No. 104; 23 August 1850, No. 35C; 14 November 1851, No.49; 16 April 1852, No. 49.
33. NAI, Foreign/ Political Proceedings, 16 April 1852, No. 49; 7 January 1853, No. 222; 28 November 1856, No. 112, 128; 5-11 December, 1856, No.217.
34. Shahid Bunga received several grants from Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Mahan Singh Sukarchakia, Bhag Singh Hallowalia, Natha Singh Shahid, Mohar Singh Shahid, Ram Singh Kahlonwala and Nahar Singh Daskewala. NAI, Foreign/Political Proceedings, 14 January 1850, no. 229; 10 June 1853, no. 219, pp. 334-5; 5-11 December 1856, No. 210 (86).
35. NAI, Foreign/Political Proceedings, 1 May 1856, Nos. 392-4; 28 November 1856, No.112; 5-11 December, 1856, No.217.
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38. NAI, Foreign/Political Proceedings, 10 June 1853, Nos. 218-19; 23 June 1854, No. 205; 28 November 1856, Nos. 112,128; 19 November 1858, No.36.
39. NAI, Foreign/Political Proceedings, 31 December 1847, No. 2192, pp. 263-4; 5 September 1856, No. 110; 19 November 1858, No.36, pp.82-7.
40. NAI, Foreign/Political Proceedings, 16 April 1852, No. 49; 10 June 1853, Nos. 218-19.
41. Iqbal Qaiser, *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*, Lahore: Punjabi History Board, 1998. The recent publication by Dalvir S. Pannu, entitled *The Sikh Heritage Beyond Borders* (California: Pannu Dental Group, 2019) covers the districts of



Nankana Sahib, Sheikhpura, Sialkot, Kasur, Lahore and Narowal for the Sikh Gurdwaras and other monuments. This work contains some information like the architectural design of the Gurdwara at Rori Sahib. Yet another book is by Amardeep Singh, entitled *Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan* (New Delhi, Himalayan Books, 2022) which is a record of personal visits to the places depicted pictorially. There is information here and there from later sources but it does not illumine the historical situation.

42. For example, Iqbal Qaiser talks of the land of Gurdwara Baba Buddha Da Awa used for the Sikh National Collage in the 1940s. Mata Sahib Kaur is said to have belonged to the village which has Gurdwara Chhevin Patshahi. Talking of Gurdwara Shahidganj Singhan Singhniyan, Qaiser refers to what was said about Mir Mannu by the contemporary Sikhs. Gurdwara Janam Asthan Bebe Nanki at Bera Chahal was actually meant to commemorate her. There were *samadhs* of Udasis in Gurdwara Pehli Patshahi at Manak. The Gurdwara at Kartarpur was re-built by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala. *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*, pp. 68, 78, 190, 220, 230, 346.
43. Qaiser, *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*, pp. 56, 86, 94.
44. Qaiser, *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*, pp. 102, 168.
45. Qaiser, *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*, pp.152, 242, 344.
46. *Rahitnama Bhai Desa Singh*, in *Rahitname*, ed. Piara Singh Padam, Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1995 (rpt.), pp.133-4, 135.
47. *Rahitnama Bhai Daya Singh*, in *Rahitname*, ed. Padam, pp. 68-72.
48. Koer Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, pp.130-1. Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash*, eds. Gobind Singh Lamba and Khazan Singh, Patiala: Languages Department, 1971, part II, pp. 801, 820-40, 876, 882.
49. Bhangu, *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, pp. 379-82, 417-19.
50. Bhai Sukha Singh, *Gurbilas Patsahi 10*, ed. Gursharan Kaur Jaggi, Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1989, pp. 3, 444-51.
51. Ram Sukh Rao's *Sri Fateh Singh Partap Prabhakar: A History of Early Nineteenth Century Punjab*, ed. Joginder Kaur, Patiala: Published by the Editor, 1980, pp. 66-9. See also, Madanjit Kaur, *The Golden Temple: Past and Present*, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1983, pp. 49-52, 142-4, 178-82.
52. Kesar Singh Chhibber, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka*, ed. Ratan Singh Jaggi, text published in *Parkh*, vol. II, Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1972, p.198.
53. Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash*, pp. 293, 320-24.
54. For Kavi Sant Das Chhibber (*Ustat Sri Amritsar Ji Ki*), Kankan Kavi (*Das Gur Katha*), and Kavi Saundha (*Ustat Sri Amritsar Ji Ki*), see Sarwan Singh, 'Amritsar in Medieval Punjabi Literature: An Historical Analysis', Ph.D. Thesis, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1994, pp. 173-219.
55. Ram Sukh Rao's, *Sri Fateh Singh Partap Prabhakar*, pp. 67-8.
56. NAI, Foreign/Political Proceedings, 14 March 1852, Nos. 113 E & F.
57. Qaiser, *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*, pp. 34, 54, 182, 234, 334.

58. Sohal Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut- Tawarikh: Chronicle of the Reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, 1831-1839 A.D.*, Daftar III, tr. V.S. Suri, Delhi: S. Chand & Co. 1961, pp. 24, 68-70, 187, 397, 620, 647.
59. Sohal Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar II, tr. V.S. Suri, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2002, pp.47-8.
60. *Events at the Court of Ranjit Singh (1810-17)*, eds. H.L.O. Garrett and G.L. Chopra, Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1988 [1935], pp.50-3.
61. *Events at the Court of Ranjit Singh (1810-17)*, pp.169-70.
62. Suri, *Umdat-ut- Tawarikh*, Daftar II, p.454.
63. Quoted in Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs: Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century*, New Delhi: Manohar Classics, 2019 [1978], p.159, n 56.
64. Suri, *Umdat-ut- Tawarikh*, Daftar III, pp. 201, 242, 243, 247, 248, 252, 397, 419. Cf. Madanjit Kaur, 'In the "Service" of the Harmandir', in *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: The State and Society*, eds. Indu Banga and J.S. Grewal, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2001, p. 132.
65. Suri, *Umdat-ut- Tawarikh*, Daftar II, pp. 118, 152,169,173, 182, 201, 236, 306-7, 310.
66. For example, in May 1836, the Maharaja himself gave Rs 5,100. Rs 1,100 were given by the highest ranking persons: Kanwar Kharak Singh, Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh, Kanwar Sher Singh, Mai Nakain, Raja Hira Singh, Jamadar Khushal Singh, Sardar Tej Singh and Raja Kalan Dhian Singh. Raja Suchet Singh and Raja Gulab Singh gave Rs 750 each. Sardars Dhanna Singh Malwai and Kashmir Singh gave Rs 500 each. Bhai Ram Singh, Gobind Ram and Gurmukh Singh offered Rs 250 each and others according to their ranks. Suri, *Umdat-ut- Tawarikh*, Daftar III, p. 289.
67. For the *dharmarth* grants of the Harmandir Sahib, NAI, Foreign/Political Proceedings, 10 June 1853, Nos. 217, 218 & 219. See also, Banga, *Agrarian System*, p. 159 & nn. 55-58.
68. Suri, *Umdat-ut- Tawarikh*, Daftar III, pp. 310-11, 419, 637.
69. Suri, *Umdat-ut- Tawarikh*, Daftar III, pp.587, 647.
70. [Captain Matthews], 'A Tour to Lahore (in 1808) by an Officer of Bengal Army', reprinted in *The Panjab Past and Present*, vol. I, pt. 1-2 (1967), pp. 125-7.
71. H.L.O. Garrett, tr. and ed., *The Punjab A Hundred Years Ago as described by V. Jacquemont (1831) and A Soltykoff (1842)*, Patiala: Languages Department Punjab, 1971, pp. 26-8.
72. Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar III, pp. 72, 269, 593.
73. Baron Charles Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab*, tr. and ed. T.B. Jervis, Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1970 [1845], pp. 391, 393, 395-6.
74. Suri, *Umdat-ut- Tawarikh*, Daftar III, pp.589-91.
75. Suri, *Umdat-ut- Tawarikh*, Daftar III, p. 592.
76. For a discussion of these works on Amritsar, see Sarwan Singh, 'Amritsar in Medieval Punjabi Literature: An Historical Analysis', pp. 617-41, 664-724.

77. *Early Nineteenth Century Panjab: From Ganesh Das's Char Bagh-i Panjab*, trs. and eds. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, Routledge: First South Asia Edition, 2016 [1975], pp. 120-21.