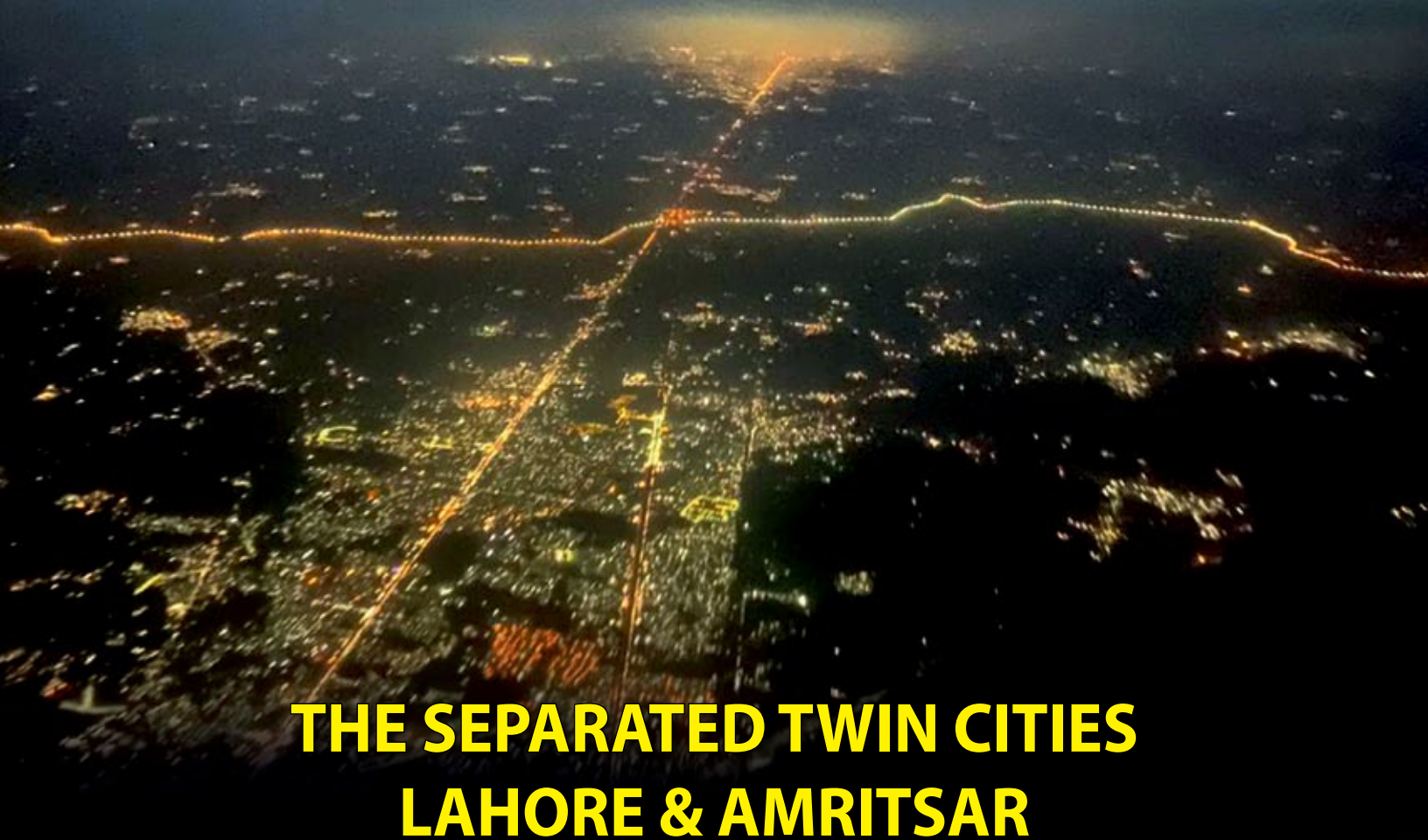


# NISHAAN

IV/2020

NAGAARA



**THE SEPARATED TWIN CITIES  
LAHORE & AMRITSAR**





*The Eighth Annual Conference on Sri Guru Granth Sahib, organised by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation, the San Jose Gurdwara Sahib and SikhNet was held on 7 September 2019 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose was founded in San Jose, California, USA in 1985 by members of the then-rapidly growing Sikh community in the Santa Clara Valley.*



**CHARDI KALAA**  
FOUNDATION





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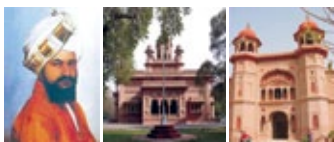
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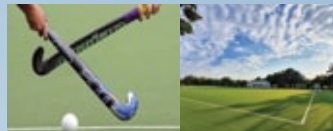
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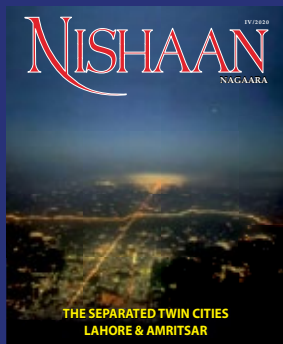
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Dramatic night view of the India-Pakistan border taken by an airline pilot flying over Lahore, with its twin-city of Amritsar seen as a glow across the border which is marked by electrified fencing

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This is a very special Issue as the *Nishaan Nagaara* journal not only marks its 21<sup>st</sup> year of publication, but is devoted to the ‘twin-cities’ of Lahore and Amritsar, tragically separated during partition of the sub-continent in 1947. In putting this together, the editors re-lived the poignancy of the recent past but were greatly buoyed by enduring excitement of the present generation for what did – and still does – bind the two cities, just a short physical distance apart, even though they remain divided by political fate, and might as well be on different planets! This nostalgia for the past but with faith in the future, is clearly manifest in the writings from amongst the host of authors who contributed articles for this Issue from both sides of the Radcliffe line.

The history of Lahore—and Amritsar—is brilliantly encapsulated by that master writer Haroon Khalid, the much acclaimed author who has been researching on and documenting much historical and cultural heritage of the land of five rivers, encapsulated in his books including *Walking with Nanak* which was inspired by his own master Iqbal Qaiser, and the more recent *Imagining Lahore* in which he paints a vivid picture of the city which was also the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s Khalsa Empire.

The twin-cities of Lahore and Amritsar certainly were the ‘jewels’ which adorned the Kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh which, after perfidy of the British colonialists aided by treacherous elements from within, was annexed by the British in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Still Lahore thereafter remained capital of the undivided Punjab till 1947 and continues today as the vibrant capital of Pakistan’s province of the Punjab.

Over that century of the British ‘Raj’, Lahore gained many resplendent monuments, some being created by Punjab’s greatest architect of the colonial period, Bhai Ram Singh, whose unique legacy is preserved by the twin-city as well: Amritsar’s Khalsa College astride the Grand Trunk Road is perhaps the most splendid of these heritage buildings. This article on Bhai Ram Singh is written by Pervaiz Vandal and Sajida Haider Vandal, the latter was earlier the Principal of National College of Arts, Lahore.

Amritsar is universally known for its Harmandir Sahib, centered within the ‘pool of nectar’, more widely called the ‘Golden Temple’ and regarded as holiest of the holy shrines in Sikhism. Less known is the Sufi inheritance of Amritsar which is recalled by Yogesh Snehi who writes that the “Sikh faith acknowledges the role of Sufi mysticism in its traditions and this intimate relationship between Sikh Gurus and Sufi saints which continues to resonate in popular memory well past the Partition”.

Salman Rashid of Lahore is sobered by this ‘Line across the Heart of a Timeless Land’ and in his evocative article, recalls his visit to lesser known but historically linked villages on both sides of the Indo-Pak border: Gandiwind in Eastern Punjab and Padana in the west are just some kilometers across ‘the other side’. The Sikh Heritage Haveli at Padana has a hoary past but is today a popular and fashionable site for young people from Lahore – and historians from overseas.

When Ammara Ahmad, also from Lahore, first visited Amritsar along with college friends, she was “bewildered, smitten and deeply saddened”. After her border crossing “everything was the same” except for some cosmetic differences and she goes on to promote the case for retaining their status as ‘twin-cities’ so that residents or select groups from each could frequently and easily travel across ‘the great divide’, opening new doors and ushering in a bright future.

A short, accompanying piece written by the Editor, recalls the halcyon days when young sportsmen from Amritsar would mount their bicycles and pedal to Lahore for a vigorous, though friendly, game of hockey and then ride back home. And vice versa. Between Aitchison College at Lahore and Khalsa College at Amritsar, there once were a near dozen players who brought home gold medals and glory from the Olympics.

This Issue is actually a dream come real for Ganeev Kaur Dhillon, whose passion for connecting both the Punjabs remains unmatched – on either side of the Attari-Wagah border! Most of the articles in this Issue have come about because of her energy and enthusiasm, but she has also written several pieces including translating an ode to the Lahore Fort (*Wah! Wah!*) which was recited by a guide there. Ganeev now joins the *Nishaan’s* Editorial team so readers will be much enriched by her inimitable style of research



and writing: professionally a lawyer, she has also been senior curator at the Partition Museum in Amritsar.

And then, there is that unabashed letter of love and longing 'To Lahore from Chandigarh' by Amy Singh whose initiative is now followed on *Instagram* by countless persons from well beyond the subcontinent.

Placing another resplendent feather in *Nishaan's* *dastaar* is Artika Aurora Bakshi, born and brought up in Amritsar, now living with her husband and family in Sri Lanka and the author of several well-acclaimed books including stories on pre-partition Amritsar. Artika's first contribution to the *Nishaan* is, literally, 'Mouth Watering!' In her article, Artika explores the culinary delights of Amritsar which are world famous.

In his virtual mirror-image article, Sheharyar Rizwan who is with the *Dawn* newspaper, writes on the delectable fare of Lahore, many of the *dhabas* there retaining their roots, many naming their shops as 'Amritsar'. Happily too in their attempt to merge the cuisines, some entrepreneurs have established a restaurant midway between Amritsar and Lahore, on the GT Road which "synthesizes culinary ties between the twin-cities".

Although it is regarded as the undisputed food capital of north India today, but once upon a time, Amritsar was a major textile trading centre too, as recalls Jasvinder Kaur, who has worked as a consultant with *Music d'Art et d'Histoire*, Geneva and is also author of the book 'Attire and Textiles of Punjab - Influences of the British Raj'. As she writes, "around 200 years ago, even as Maharaja Ranjit Singh, aided by his legendary French generals, was consolidating his kingdom, the latter were introducing rich northern Indian textiles to Europe... at the heart of which trade was Amritsar".

From across the 'border', Fatma Shah writes on the 'Interwoven History of Lahore' which is a brief overview of the history of key textiles and textile related-goods once produced at or traded in Lahore including carpets, fabrics, embroideries and Indigo—an essential ingredient for the global textile industry. She prophesises that "Phulkari in times to come could end up as the common thread that re-connects the soul of the two Punjabs!" Amen!

Not to be underplayed is the geo-economic import of this region and the imperatives of resuming economic links not only between the two neighbours but well beyond and revive the centuries-old trade routes from

the Punjab to the north west frontiers and beyond the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan and onwards, to Central Asia. The writer, Tridivesh Singh Maini hopes that the *Kartarpur Religious Corridor* inaugurated in November 2019 would pave the way for closer links, economic and people-to-people, between both the Punjabs.

Opening of the Kartarpur Corridor – the *Kartarpur Langha* – has sent a frisson of excitement through Punjab with the Kartarpur Corridor agreement between India and Pakistan, allowing visa-free access for Indians to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib situated just 4 kilometers inside Pakistan, for which Panjabis have been yearning since 1947. This article by Ganeev Kaur Dhillon is illustrated with images taken by her during her pilgrimage to Kartarpur Sahib.

Another feisty and festive piece by Ganeev describes the joyous atmosphere at a wedding in Lahore when her childhood friend Sakina Abbas Zaidi was to be married but was keen on Sikh turbans to be worn by her male family members at her *Sangeet*. And so they did, the *safas* being tied at the venue after being brought from across the border by her 'Indian family'. Who then that evening could tell Indians from the Pakistanis?!

Last but not in the least, is the article written by the re-doubtable author Ajeet Cour who asks (and answers) that very clichéd question on *Punjabiyyat*. Well beyond the geographical boundaries of the two Punjabs and now spread worldwide, is this completely unique Punjabi way of life which can best be described as "a feeling of full-blooded living, of embracing entire humanity in loving and compassionate embrace, of brotherhood and unabated courage". Included in the article are some paintings by her wonderfully talented daughter Arpana Caur.

Finally, the earliest memories of this Journal's Managing Editor go back to the months just after partition when his father, as Brigade Commander in Amritsar, was charged with the historical and strategic responsibility to establish and secure the new 'international' frontier between Amritsar and Lahore, twin-cities of the Punjab. This was even more poignant as his family came from old Amritsar and his wife's, from old Lahore.

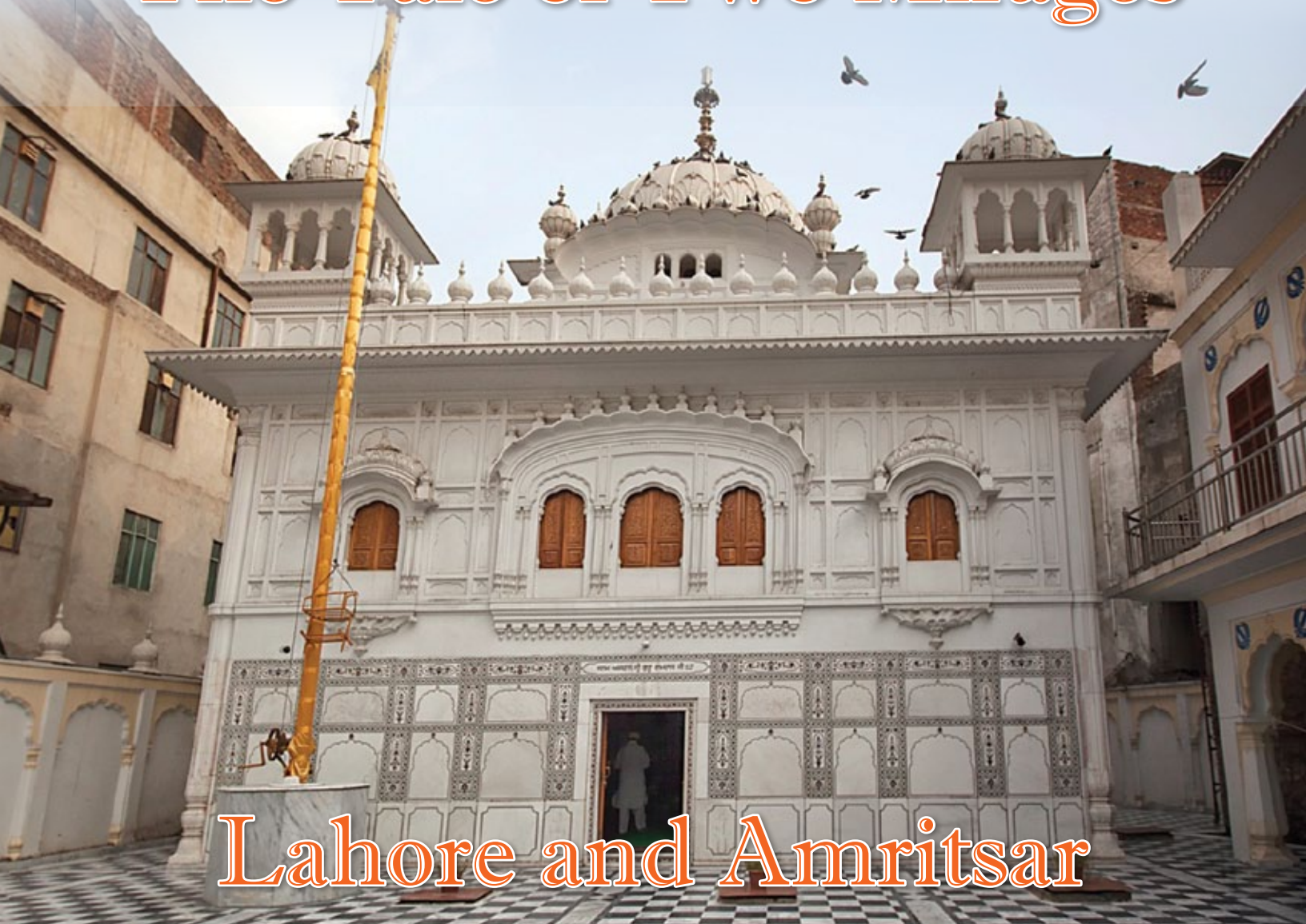
But then, that is yet another story!

**Pushpindar Singh**



The much acclaimed author Haroon Khalid reflects on

# The Tale of Two Mirages



## Lahore and Amritsar

*“Amritsar was born in Lahore”: Janamstan of Guru Ram Das: Gurdwara Sahib at Chuna Mandi in Lahore (Image by Amardeep Singh)*

Amritsar was born in Lahore. It was born inside the walled city, in a small house, in its narrow winding streets. It was the month of *Assu*, a month that corresponds with the months of September and October in the Gregorian calendar. It was a month when the monsoon rains, having unleashed their fury had finally taken mercy and receded. The demons of the summer had been defeated, while the tyrant winter was still imprisoned.

It was time of the year of perfect harmony, when nights were balanced by the day, the heat by the cold. It was a time of the year so uncharacteristic of the extremities of Punjab that it seemed out of sync, an anomaly, to its vagaries.

Amritsar was born in the family of Sodhi Khatri, a family of ancient kings, a family that was destined to rule, not just the kingdom of this world, but also the higher realm, *miri* and *piri*, as it is articulated by



the sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind. They were not destined to be ordinary rulers, but true rulers, *Sacha Padshah*, whose reign was to overshadow the reign of the mighty Mughal Empire. This new kingdom that was their destiny was born along with Amritsar, in Lahore, in the year 1534.

Amritsar lived in Lahore, till it was seven years old, till the time that its parents, Hari Das and Mata Daya were alive. They died in the same year, leaving their child orphaned. The child, initially named Jetha, was raised by his grandmother, in a small village, near present-day Amritsar, where the child first interacted with Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru and became his lifelong devotee. Bhai Jetha eventually became part of the Guru's family, marrying his daughter, Bibi Bhani. Such was his devotion to the Guru that he was chosen his successor. Bhai Jetha became Guru Ram Das, the founder of Ramdaspur, the name by which Amritsar was once known.



Courtyard of Gurdwara Dera Sahib in Lahore  
(Image: Amardeep Singh)

Inside the walled city of Lahore, in an area known as Chuna Mandi, close to the Kashmiri Gate, there is a gurdwara that marks the spot where Guru Ram Das was born. It was lying in shambles till a few years ago, much like several other gurdwaras across the country, before it was renovated and opened for Sikh pilgrims, as part of the series of gurdwaras that have been revamped by the Pakistani state.

Lahore was born in Amritsar. Actually, about eleven kilometers west of the city. It was born as a twin child, its fate permanently sealed with the city of Kasur that was born along with it. It is, however, not possible to pinpoint the exact day, the season or even the year of Lahore's birth. It first came to existence at a time when time did not exist. There was no history or chronology, but the circular trajectory of mythology. This wasn't a time of people, but rather of characters, caricatures, and archetypes. This was the time of the perfect man, the just king, his perfectly devoted wife, and his perfectly loyal brother. This was the time of the greatest villain, a character so powerful that it was as strong as the power of ten. This was a time when gods and demons lived as men and women, a time when there was either good or evil, nothing in the middle.

It was at that time, when history was yet to be conceived that Lahore was born in the *ashram* of Bhagwan Valmiki. The greatest sage of his time, for that was a time when nothing existed in ordinariness, Bhagwan Valmiki was composing the greatest book ever, when the cries of Lahore and Kasur first resonated in the *ashram*. It was the story of their father, of Lord Ram that Bhagwan Valmiki, the *Adi Kavi*, the first poet, was composing when he heard these cries. Sita, their mother, had found refuge in this *ashram*, when she had been banished from Ayodhya, after her return from Ravana's Lanka. It was her story, of her marriage with Ram, of her exile from Ayodhya, of her capture by Ravana, of her rescue by Ram and her trial in Ayodhya that the *Adi Kavi* had decided to write about, in the process composing the first verses of poetry humans had ever realised. Lahore was born along with the Ramayana.

Her twin sons were named Lava and Kusha. Lava founded the city of Lavapur, the city of Lahore as it came to be known, while Kusha founded Kasur.



Today, about eleven kilometers from Amritsar, Bhagwan Valmiki Tirath Sthal, marks the spot where the *ashram* was located and Lava and Kusha were born. The three cities, at their birth, were tied together in a triangle, a relationship that is now testified by their cartography. In contemporary Lahore, at that highest point of the city, next to the river, where the first signs of civilization developed, where lie the earliest traces of Lavapur, there is a small temple dedicated to the founder of the city. Inside the Lahore Fort, next to the Alamgiri Gate, are the remains of the temple of Lava.

How is one to imagine the cities of Lahore and Amritsar, whose origins are so deeply intertwined with each other but separated today by boundaries that do not just divide geographies and people, but also mythologies, legends, religions, cultures, heroes and villains? It is a border that lies in the middle of these two cities, fabling stories about itself, about its previous incarnations in different forms, telling tales about its inevitability, its naturalness. Chanting mysterious mantras, the border blows in the direction of these cities, transforming their appearances through its prayers.

Lahore today is the ultimate symbol of Pakistani nationalism: a Muslim majority city, the site of the Lahore Resolution, where the Muslim League first demanded a separate homeland for the Muslims,



Remains of the Bhagwan Valmiki Tirath Sthal (Image By Harvinder Singh)

home to Minar-e-Pakistan and host to proud Mughal architecture, the Lahore Fort and Badshahi Masjid, a tradition that marks the zenith of Muslim civilization in an undivided subcontinent. Besides a few, inconvenient, remnants of traditions scattered sparsely around the city, all traces of a pre-Pakistan Lahore have been suffocated and left to die. It is easy, in fact encouraged, to forget about that lost city, that lost geography which connected Lahore with Amritsar and Delhi, a Lahore that emerged as an important economic, political and cultural hub, because of its strategic location on that ancient route that flowed from Bengal to Kabul, a river dammed up by the border.

Lahore today is still an important city, perhaps even more important than it has ever been, but it is not the Lahore of the past. Its contemporary geography and location is an awkward testimony to its changed status. A city that once looked in both directions, has today its back towards the east, and looks desperately towards the west, towards Islamabad, Kabul and beyond, in search of a new identity, in search of a new incarnation.

The story of Amritsar is not much different. It was wedded to Lahore at its birth, tied in a knot with the hem of the city that spanned over several centuries. It was a marriage that was sanctified by Valmiki as Ramayana his witness, by the *shabd* of the Gurus,



Entrance to the Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Lahore Fort (Image: Sondeep Shankar)





A panoramic view of Lahore's most iconic architecture: Naulakha in the Lahore Fort, the Badshahi Mosque, the Samadh of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Gurdwara Dera Sahib (Image: Sondeep Shankar)

and the blessings of Sufi saints, like Mian Mir. It was a marriage of interdependence, of convenience and even complementary traits. It was a marriage in which Lahore took on certain roles and Amritsar, others.



The entrance to Jemadar Khushal Singh's haveli is now the Government Fatima Jinnah College for Women at Chuna Mandi, Lahore (Image: Amardeep Singh)

Thus in 1799, when a young Ranjit Singh took over Lahore, he effectively became the ruler of Punjab, with Lahore the political symbol in his control. But, without the blessings of Amritsar, the spiritual symbol, he could not yet call himself Maharaja, the capture of one, incomplete without control over the other. Lahore held the past, while Amritsar was the future. Lahore was regale, while Amritsar sacred. If Lahore was *miri* then Amritsar was *piri*. The two were not two distinct entities, but one. They were an extension of each other, incomplete without the other. Like an archetypal marriage, they were two bodies and one soul.

The divorce was sudden, as abrupt as the gradual dependence that had developed over (almost) four hundred years of marriage. It was an immediate severing of all relationship, a violent rupture of all connections. Memories of Lahore, however, continue to haunt Amritsar. It is a relationship the city today searches for, sometimes with Delhi and at other times with Chandigarh. It is that primary relationship





*A track off the Bedian Road*

that impacts all of its subsequent relationships. The memory of the divorce lurks within its subconscious, hampering it from fully realizing itself, from fully expressing itself.

The road leads nowhere, meandering on non-committedly. It is not meant to be traveled on, to be explored. It is not meant to connect one part with another. It is meant to provide a semblance of connectivity, meant to fill up vast space of empty tracts of land. It is aimless, pointless, stranded, like a branch of a family tree that has no progeny, that has no purpose.

One after another, villages and hamlets, emerge on both sides of the road. They are the children of distantly related family members with no children of their own. They are no longer part of the immediate family, no longer invited to its events. They are confined within their own circles, isolated in their periphery from the economic structures of the core. Their names represent their marginalised positions – Dera Chahal, Jhaman, Hair and Bedian, terms that have no resonance in contemporary Lahore, the Lahore of Islampura, Rehman Park, Model Town and Defence (DHA), a Lahore of postcolonial sensibilities, tinged with the flavor of Islamic nationalism.

I am traveling on the Bedian road, a road named after the village Bedian, which in turn was named after the Bedi descendants of Guru Nanak who were allotted land in this village. It is only the name that survives, a name that once resonated with significance, a name that today represents nothing but the outskirts of Lahore, of vast agricultural fields, the

downtrodden villages, a dilapidated road, and a few luxury farmhouses. Beyond these is the border, casting its spell, chanting its mantra. The road collides with the wizard and dies unceremoniously. It is a battle that it is destined to lose.

The road once connected Lahore with Amritsar, one of the many that connected these two cities. Here the peripheries of the two centres, interacted, creating villages and hamlets through this intercourse, these villages and hamlets bearing children of that relationship. Standing on a vacant ground, facing the historical village of Hair, now reduced to poverty and insignificance, are the remains of this unwanted child, the remains of a shrine that was constructed here by Prithi Chand, the eldest son of Guru Ram Das, a shrine that was intended to rival Harminder Sahib, at Ramdaspur. It is a worn-down structure, stripped off all its ornaments, the paints, the frescoes. Its sacred pool, created as an alternative to the pool of Amritsar, is now lost, completely covered, its broken bricks scattered all over this ground.

The present condition of the structure however, is misleading. For a brief period, the shrine, named *Dukh Nivaran*, was important. For a brief period it attracted several Sikh pilgrims, who believed Prithi Chand's lies that he was the rightful spiritual successor of his father, that he was the fifth Sikh Guru and not his younger brother. In this endeavour, he was supported by many Mughal officials and corrupt *Masands*, Sikh deputies appointed by Guru Ram Das, as his representatives, in different parts of Punjab. The strategic location of the village of Hair, made it





The once imposing entrance to Naunihal Singh's haveli in Lahore is now the Government Victoria Girls Higher Secondary School, Lahore (Image: Amardeep Singh)

easier for Prithi Chand and his followers to intercept Sikh devotees, on their way to meet the Guru, and to expand their network. With the Sikh pilgrims also came their offerings. The exchequer of Prithi Chand swelled, while that of Guru Arjan, dwindled, who was at that time in Ramdasapur. For that brief moment, it was Hair and this shrine that began to overshadow Harminder Sahib.

After Prithi Chand's death his *smadh* was constructed at Hair, while his movement was continued by his son, Meherban. This movement in Sikh history is referred to as *Minas*, the scoundrels. It was one of the most potent challenges to all the subsequent Gurus after Guru Arjan. After the formation of the *Khalsa*, they were referred to as one of the *Panj Mel* – one of the five dissenting groups with whom the *Khalsa* were forbidden to engage. The *Minas* finally lost this battle for legitimacy, the

struggle for spiritual inheritance of the Gurus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they split into several parts and got incorporated into the formal Sikh community. With disintegration of the community, the village of Hair too lost its political importance, as the memory of Prithi Chand, of the *Minas* and *Dukh Nivaran* began to disintegrate and crumble.

Before there was Partition, before there were riots and mass exodus; before there was religious nationalism, the division of Punjabis into multiple airtight traditions; before there were contemporary incarnations of Mughal armies and the Guru's forces, fighting a perennial battle, correcting historical injustices; before Lahore became a Muslim city, the



Gurdwara Rori Sahib on the Jhaman - Bedian road (Image: Haroon Khalid)

city of Sufi saints, and Amritsar, the city of Gurus, there was Mian Mir and Guru Arjan.

Their friendship first began, at the same house in Chuna Mandi, where Guru Ram Das was born. Here a young Mian Mir, years away from becoming the Sufi saint that he did, would attend the religio-philosophical discourse of Guru Ram Das, whenever the Guru came to Lahore, from Ramdasapur. This was



a time before the communalisation of identities, the partitioning of religious traditions, a time when it was the norm, and not an exception, to have Hindu, Sikh and Muslim devotees of the Guru. It was at these gatherings that a young Mian Mir, met the young future Guru. They formed a connection that was to become representative of the symbiotic relationship between Sikhism and Islam.

Upon becoming the Guru, despite the opposition of his elder brother, Guru Arjan continued the construction work at Ramdaspur, whose foundation had been laid by his father. He began the construction of Harmandir Sahib, the future Golden Temple, which was in time, to become the most important Sikh gurdwara anywhere in the world. Before however construction began for Harmandir Sahib, a message

and a delegation traveled from Ramdaspur for Lahore (according to oral narratives of the descendants of Mian Mir, residing in Lahore), sent by Guru Arjan, to bring his friend Mian Mir to the city, to lay the first brick of the foundation of what was to become the identity of the city. Mian Mir traveled in a palanquin, sent by the Guru and laid the foundation of Harmandir Sahib, tying together the cities of Lahore and Amritsar in a lifelong relation.

Years later, when on the orders of Emperor Jahangir, Guru Arjan was being tortured in Lahore, on the banks of the Ravi, before his execution, Mian Mir reached out to him, and asked for his permission to destroy the city of Lahore, to stop this torture. He was willing to sacrifice his home, to sacrifice the entire city, for his love of the Guru, but the Guru refrained him from doing so. After Guru Arjan's execution, Mian Mir maintained a cordial relationship with his son, the sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind. It is a relationship that continues to be remembered and celebrated by certain groups and communities.

I met Bhai Ghulam Muhammad at his home, in Lahore, in February 2014. He passed away in April. His home was located close to Data Darbar, shrine of the patron saint of the city. A thousand years old, the shrine is as old as the known history of Lahore. Its existence and continued significance represents a continuation of a cultural and spiritual life of the city.

Residents of Lahore take much pride in the city's historicity, its recent and ancient past. But, is Lahore, in its contemporary incarnation, the same city that it was, that it has been for a thousand years? Lahore was never Bhai Ghulam Hussain's city. His home was Amritsar. But the city changed in 1947. Just like Ghulam Muhammad's family, the city too migrated to Lahore, leaving in its shadow, a distant memory, of what the city once had been. The city, where Ghulam Muhammad was traveling to, was also not Lahore anymore, the glorious pride of Punjab, the multicultural jewel of the crown, of undivided British India. This was a new Lahore, a new city which only shared its name with that glorious past.

Bhai Ghulam Muhammad came from the family of Bhai Sadha and Madha, the Muslim *rubabis* appointed by Guru Tegh Bahadur to perform *kirtan* at the Harmandir Sahib. The performance of *kirtan*



Dargah of Sufi Saint Mian Mir of Lahore who laid the foundation stone of the Golden Temple. The Maharaja made special endowments for the Dargah (Image by Sondeep Shankar)



at Sikh gurdwaras by Muslim *rubabis* was a tradition that started with Bhai Mardana and Guru Nanak, maintained by the subsequent Sikh Gurus. His was one of the most respected families of the city of Amritsar, the family that formed a connection between the Guru's *shabd* and thousands of their devotees. His family, one example out of several that highlighted the complex, complicated relationship between different religious communities and hybrid identities. "We knew the *Granth Sahib* by heart...nothing about being Muslim," he told me.

Once guardians of the Gurus' words, they were reduced to odd jobs in Lahore. Only recently with a growing interest in Sikh heritage in Pakistan, the family began performing *kirtan* again, however this rediscovery of the profession is a far cry from what the situation had been prior to Partition. The odd jobs continued. In 2008, Bhai Ghulam Muhammad was barred from performing *kirtan* at Harmandir Sahib, for he was not an *Amritdhari* Sikh. His family had performed *kirtan* for generations at the Harmandir Sahib, without ever being *Amritdhari*, but that was a different city, a different Amritsar too.



Ghulam Muhammad Rababi (Image: <https://www.dawn.com/>)

In the story of Ghulam Muhammad is the story of Lahore and Amritsar. It is the story of what the cities were, the story of their relationship, the story of their intermarriage. It is the story of what the cities are, of their antagonism towards fluid identities, of their newly discovered loyalties. The death of Ghulam Muhammad is the death of these two cities, of what they had been, of what they could have been.



Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar (image from <https://sacredsites.com>)



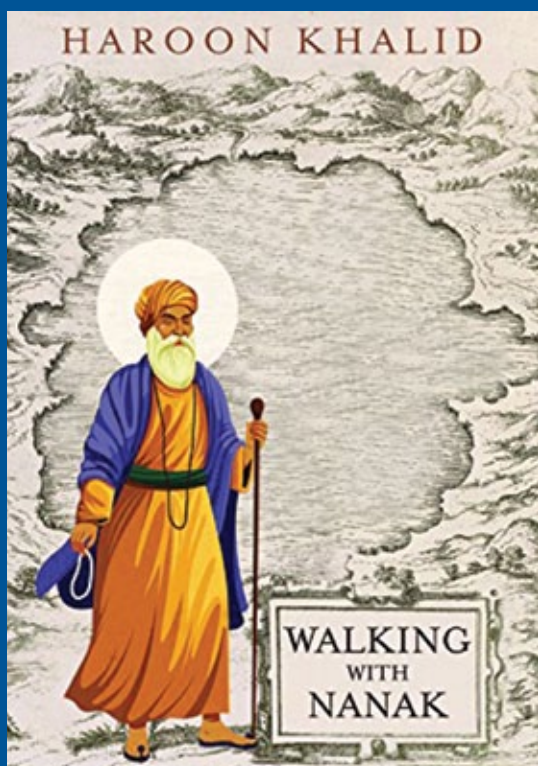
## Some books by Haroon Khalid



**Haroon** Khalid has an academic background in Anthropology and has been a travel writer and freelance journalist since 2008, traveling extensively around Pakistan, documenting historical and cultural heritage. His first book *A White Trail: a Journey into the Heart of Pakistan's Religious Minorities* was published in 2013. His second book *In Search of Shiva: a Study of Folk Religious Practices* in Pakistan was released in December 2015, and his third book *Walking with Nanak* was released in December 2016.

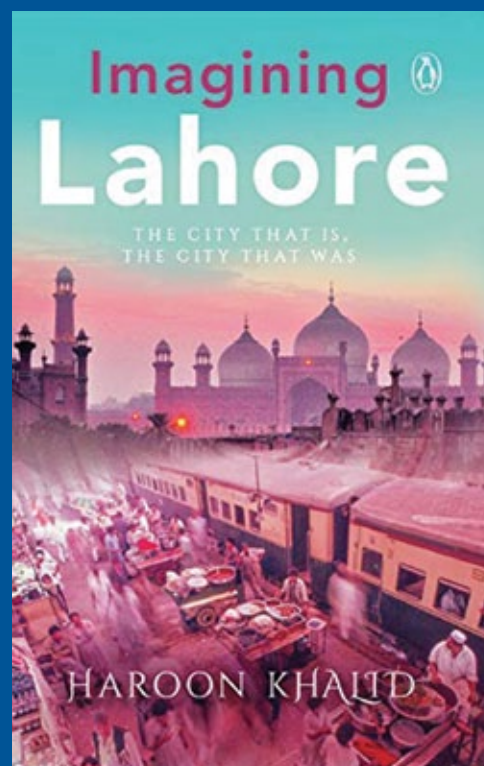
*Imagining Lahore: The City That Is, The City That Was*, published by Penguin Random House in August 2018, is his latest book.

### Walking with Nanak



This book was written by Haroon Khalid following his lifelong fascination with Guru Nanak, which was reignited when he came upon *Babur Bani*, written by the saint at the time the Mughal marauder had invaded the Punjab destroying the cities of Eminabad and Lahore. This, and the knowledge that Guru Nanak spent a large part of his life in the areas which now constitute Pakistan, inspired Khalid to undertake a journey that he hoped would help him learn more about the revered founder of Sikhism, guided along by his own mentor Iqbal Qaiser.

### Imagining Lahore

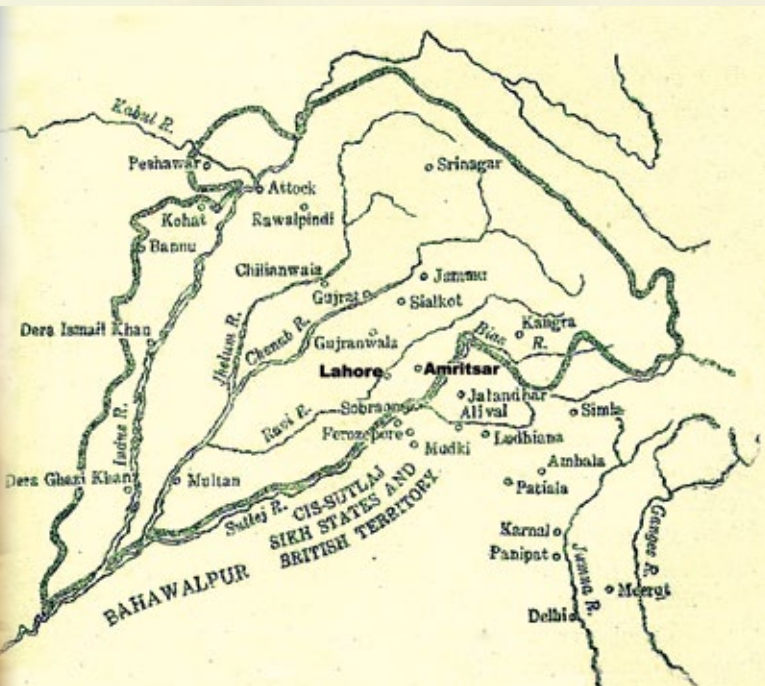


Haroon Khalid begins in the present and travels through time to the mythological origins of this fabled city, attributed to the Hindu god Ram's son Lav. Contemporary Lahore – its people, communities, monuments, parks and institutions – becomes a lens for Haroon Khalid, a resident of the city, to paint a vivid picture from its emergence under Mahmud Ghaznavi through the Mughal centuries and recasting as the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Khalsa Empire.

# The twin cities of Lahore and Amritsar as part of The Kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh



Maharaja Ranjit Singh's portrait, painted by Alfred de Dreux



The Kingdom of Ranjit Singh (<https://www.brownpundits.com>)

During the mid to late-18<sup>th</sup> Century, repeated invasions of the Punjab from Afghanistan and further west, from Persia, had resulted in terror and chaos in the land. The tyranny of Ahmad Shah Abdali of the Durrani Empire was particularly devastating for peoples of the land of five rivers. Thereafter for the next 30 years following the final

departure of Abdali, the Sikhs became virtual 'rulers' of the land and increased their strength, numbers and wealth. They gradually divided themselves into independent *misls*, under the command of hereditary chieftains, having a common place of meeting at Amritsar.

Lahore, meanwhile, was portioned out amongst a triumvirate of Sikh chieftains of the Bhangi Misl—Gujjar Singh, Lehna Singh Majithia and Suba Singh, who are spoken of till this day as the *Three Hakims*. The three chieftains split the city's revenue and for almost thirty long years, they ruled supreme and kept the Durrani at bay.

The Lahore Fort and the Walled City with its formidable gates went to Lehna Singh, who became for all intents and purposes, the Governor of Lahore and was so recognised. To Suba Singh went the area south of the Walled City and he resided in the garden of Zubaida Begum in Nawankot, where he built a small fort for himself. The area between Amritsar and Lahore, or more correctly between the Shalimar Gardens and



Vintage photograph of entrance to Lahore fort in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century



Lahore, went to Gujjar Singh who erected that part of the city, which was then a jungle and invited people to settle there. He also dug wells to supply water and a mosque built for the Muslims of the area. He also built himself a small fort called Qila Gujar Singh, a few walls of that old fort still seen today in a street between Nicholson Road and Empress Road. The area is still called *Qila Gujjar Singh*.

### The Master of Lahore

Enter Ranjit Singh. The Bhangi *misl* was engaged in numerous power struggles with the Sukerchakia *misl* until they were severely weakened at the Battle of Basin when young Ranjit Singh besieged the Lahore Fort in 1799. The three chieftains soon fled the city and on 7 July 1799, Ranjit Singh became the master of Lahore. Earlier Ranjit Singh had worsted Zaman Shah, the son of Abdali, in a fierce battle fought in the area between Lahore and Amritsar and it is romantic to assume that this could well have been around the Wagah-Attari area which now marks the international border between India and Pakistan.



Remnants of the fort at Attari

However, back to 1799. In his epic *A History of the Sikhs*, the venerable Khushwant Singh devoted a chapter to the Maharajah of the Punjab and his Road to Lahore. Following are some excerpts from Volume I of his book as also some references to JS Grewal's *The Sikh Empire 1799-1849* and archives of the *Sikh Cyber Museum*:

The peoples of India had by now heard of the new star which had risen in the Punjab's firmament. Collins, who was the British Resident at the Mughal court, wrote: "At present this chief is regarded throughout Hindustan as the protector of the Sikh Nation, it being generally believed that were it not for the fortitude and excellent conduct of Ranjit Singh the whole of the Punjab would ere this have become a desert waste since it is the boast of these northern savages [the Afghans] that the grass never grows where their horses have once trodden."

As written earlier, while Ranjit Singh was pursuing the Afghans, expelling them from the Punjab, the city of Lahore had been re-occupied by the three Sardars who had taken it over but leading citizens sent a coded invitation to Ranjit Singh to come and take over their city.

Ranjit Singh accepted the challenge! His forces and those of his mother-in-law, Sada Kaur, soon encircled Lahore during the night when the citizens were engaged in the Shia observance of Muharram. The siege operations began the next morning before the three Sardars could prepare their defences. On 7 July 1799 the massive gates of Lahore fort were swung open and an eighteen-year-old Ranjit Singh



Vintage photograph of Badshahi Mosque in Lahore

entered the citadel to the sound of guns firing a royal salute. Ranjit Singh's first public act on entering the capital was to pay homage at the Badshahi mosque and then at the mosque of Wazir Khan, which was the most frequented one in the city.

The capture of Lahore soon brought about an alliance of the Bhangi, Ramgarhia and other chiefs who envied Ranjit Singh's success and became hostile to him. They met at Amritsar and, egged on by Nizamuddin Khan, advanced with their armies towards Lahore. Ranjit Singh's forces however forestalled them at the village of Bhasin, ten miles east of the capital. The armies faced each other for two months until the leader of the confederate army, Gulab Singh Bhangi, died of the ill effects of liquor; the others then quietly returned to their homes.

The "victory" at Bhasin confirmed Ranjit Singh's position as premier chieftain of the Punjab and people now swore allegiance to him. Shortly thereafter, Ranjit Singh installed himself in the fort and began holding his regular court in the Musamman Burj (Octagonal Tower), as had been the practice of the Mughals and their governors. He recruited new talent for the services and soon reorganised the revenue

and judicial administration of the territory under his control. Among the first to take employment with him were three Bokhari brothers of whom the eldest, Azizuddin, became the Maharajah's closest friend and adviser and later Minister of Foreign Affairs. Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, became his chief adviser on military affairs.

Fakir Azizuddin, born in 1780, was the son of Hakim Ghulam Mohiuddin. His two brothers also in the employ of Ranjit Singh were Imamuddin and Nuruddin. Azizuddin had first met Ranjit Singh in 1799 when he was summoned to treat the Maharajah for some eye trouble. He was to serve Ranjit Singh for forty years, staying on in court even after the Maharaja's passing as adviser to Kharak Singh, Nau Nihal Singh and Sher Singh.

After settling the affairs of Lahore, Ranjit Singh led an expedition against the Raja of Jammu, who had promised assistance to the Afghans. On his way to the Jammu hills, he captured Vairawal, Narowal and Jassowal and with rapid marches came to a halt within four miles of the city. The Raja shortly submitted and paid a tribute. After Jammu, Ranjit Singh turned his attention south westwards to Gujrat



*Hailing from a respected Muslim family, Fakir Azizuddin was Maharajah Ranjit Singh's Foreign Minister.*



*An old fort in the Jammu Hills*

(Punjab), however he was constrained to raise the siege on the intervention of Sahib Singh Bedi, but he later attached the estate of the chief of Akalgarh, who had been helping the Bhangi chief of Gujrat. On his return to Lahore, Ranjit Singh found Shah Zaman's messengers waiting for him and learnt that a number of Punjab chiefs, including the Bhangis, who remained hostile to him, had entered into a conspiracy with Zaman and promised him support.



Ranjit Singh was quite shrewd about such tactics, so he accepted Zaman's gifts and compliments but dismissed the envoys with even richer gifts and more flattering compliments. The result was exactly as Ranjit Singh had anticipated! The news of his not-too-secret alliance with Zaman caused dismay among his enemies, who had looked forward to an Afghan invasion as a means of overthrowing Ranjit Singh but this now caused grave concern even to the British. In April 1800 the British Governor General decided to counteract the influence of Shah Zaman with Ranjit Singh and sent Mir Yusuf Ali to warn the Sikhs against Afghan perfidy and not to yield to the insidious proposals of Zaman Shah.

Ranjit Singh soon consolidated his rule and after his coronation, had the walls around Lahore, and its gates which had suffered many sieges, strongly reinforced with armed pickets at all strategic points to check crime, which had increased enormously under Bhangi misrule. The city was divided into wards under a *chaudhri* (headman), who was responsible for maintenance of law and order in the district under his jurisdiction and could get police assistance whenever required. He also re-organised the administration of justice in the city. Since the majority of the population

were Muslims, he set up separate courts for them under *qadis* who administered the Shariat Law. But for those Muslims who, like the Hindus and the Sikhs, preferred to be governed by the customary law of their caste or district, there were other courts under judicial officers appointed by the state.

Ranjit Singh had a chain of dispensaries opened in different parts of the city where *Yunani* (Greek) medicine was dispensed free of charge. Hakim Nuruddin, the younger brother of Fakir Azizuddin, was appointed as chief medical officer.

Very soon, Ranjit Singh convinced the people of Lahore – and the Punjab – that he did not intend to set up a Sikh kingdom but a Punjabi state in which Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs would all be equal before the law and have the same rights and duties. He paid assiduous respect to the institutions of other communities and participated in their religious festivities. At Dussehra he went through the ritual of the worship of arms as practised by Hindu Rajputs and arranged mock fights between his troops to commemorate the battle of Rama against Ravana. At Diwali, all public buildings, including the palace, were illuminated. On Holi, he went among the throngs squirting coloured water and powder and making



The court of Ranjit Singh at the Fort of Lahore, by Bishan Singh (Circa 1860 © Toor Collection)





*Vintage image of Gurdwara Tarn Taran*

merry. On Basant he paid homage at the tombs of the Sufi divines, Madho Lal and Hussain. On Amavas and Vaisakhi he joined his co-religionists in bathing at the Gurdwara in Amritsar or Tarn Taran.

In fact, the Maharajah was more considerate in dealing with Muslim chiefs than he was with the Sikhs or Hindus. His treatment of Nizamuddin, whom he defeated more than once, gives ample proof of his generosity. His treatment of the family of the Nawab of Multan was yet another. Multan had been a district of the Punjab until it was annexed by Abdali. It had been recaptured by the Bhangis, but their indifference towards the welfare of the people had created a certain amount of animosity towards the Sikhs and a desire to keep aloof from the Punjabi state which was coming into being under Sikh leadership. Despite the recalcitrance of the Multanis and the fact that he was ill-equipped to take so powerful a fort or face a combination of hostile Muslim tribes in the region, Ranjit Singh proclaimed his intention of bringing Multan back into the Punjab.

Ranjit Singh's troops dispersed the peasant mob enlisted by Nawab Muzaffar Khan and quickly

captured the city, with the exception of the enormous fort which stood at the centre. Muzaffar Khan soon made his submission by giving an indemnity and agreeing to pay the quota of revenues due to the state of Lahore instead of Kabul.

### **Incorporation of Amritsar into the Kingdom**

After Multan, Ranjit Singh looked eastwards, at Amritsar which was not the Punjab's largest city but commercially, the most important in the province. Historically, Amritsar was also the prime trading centre of northern India to which caravans brought goods from Afghanistan and Central Asia and exchanged them for the products of Hindustan. In its narrow, winding streets were business houses trading in all conceivable goods: silks, muslins, spices, tea, coffee, hides, matchlocks and various armament. Because of the wealthy merchants, subsidiary trades such as those of gold-and silver-smiths had proliferated.

Apart from its riches, Amritsar of course had great sanctity for the Sikhs. Anyone who aspired to be the leader of the Khalsa and Maharajah of the Punjab, had to include Amritsar to make good his position. Amritsar then was divided between some dozen families owning different parts of the city. These families had built fortresses in their localities and maintained retinues of armed tax collectors who pressurised the traders and shop-keepers as often as they could.

Amritsar's leading citizens had earlier approached Ranjit Singh (who needed little persuasion) to take over the city. The only family of importance which was likely to put up resistance was that of the widow of the Bhangi Sardar, who had support of the Ramgarhias and occupied the fort of Gobindgarh. Ranjit Singh took the city piecemeal, overwhelming the Sardars one after another. The Ramgarhias did not come to the help of the Bhangi widow and she soon surrendered the fort in lieu of a pension for herself and her son.

Gobindgarh was a valuable acquisition. With this, Ranjit Singh also acquired five big cannon, including the massive, legendary *Zam Zama*. At the same time, he also took on in employment the remarkable soldier Phoola Singh, who happened to be in Amritsar and helped him to capture the city.





Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century photograph of Amritsar with the Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) at the centre

The Maharajah received a tumultuous welcome in Amritsar. He rode through the streets on his elephant, showering coins on the milling crowds. He bathed in the pool at Harimandir Sahib and made a grant for the Gurdwara to be rebuilt in marble and covered with gold leaf and hereafter universally known as the *Golden Temple*.

The capture of Amritsar brought additional lustre to the Maharajah's name, and men from all over Hindustan began to flock to his standard. Among them also were deserters from the regiments of the East India Company. The Maharajah had fully realised the importance of artillery in modern warfare. His batteries were manned by Muslim gunners, of whom



Gobindgarh fort, Amritsar (image from Wikipedia)

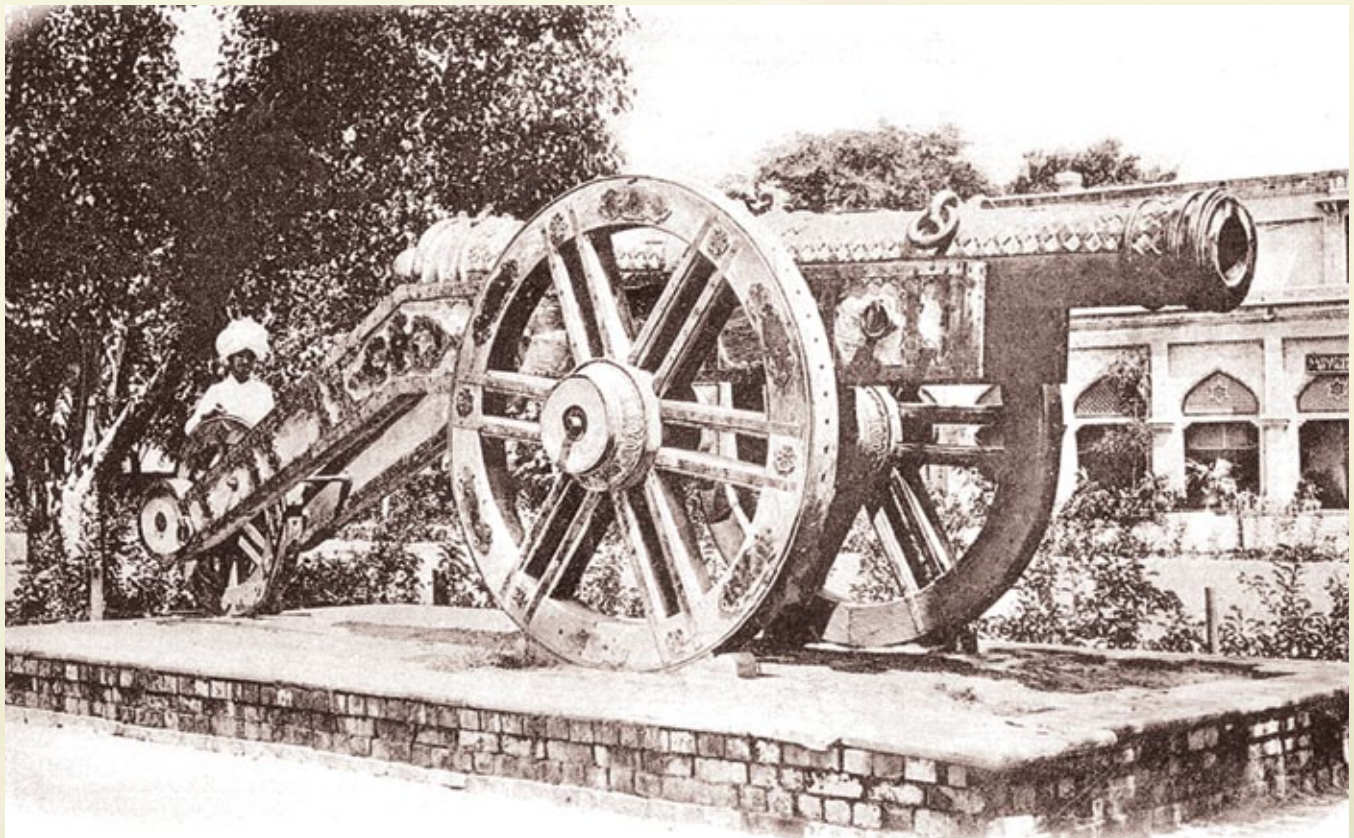


Gateway of Rambagh at Amritsar

Ghaus Mohammed Khan (Mian Ghaus) and later Shaikh Elahi Baksh rose to the highest ranks in this branch of the service. The Sikhs had no inhibitions about joining the artillery and soon learned to cast guns and cannon ball and to mix gun-powder; they rapidly became the most proficient gunners in India.

The Sikh artillery also included the famed cannon *Zam Zama*. This massive cannon was made of copper and brass and was cast on the orders of Ahmed Shah Abdali, causing havoc in the ranks of the Marathas during the battle of Panipat. It passed from Afghan hands to the Sukerchakias and from the Sukerchakias through various hands to the Bhangis and came to be known as the *Bhangion-ki-Tope*. The cannon was thereafter used in many of Ranjit Singh's campaigns,





*Old photograph of the fabled Zam Zama cannon on a plinth in the heart of Lahore*

and after his death was employed against the British in the Anglo-Sikh wars. Eventually it was taken as a trophy and placed in a prominent position on Lahore's main road (the Mall) where it still has pride of place. The *Zam Zama* was later to be immortalised in prose by the acclaimed writer Kipling as *Kim's Gun*.

The experience of the campaign in the northwest was now reflected upon and reviewed at Amritsar. At a Durbar in Gobindgarh fort, the Maharajah announced his decision on the reorganisation of his army which was to be divided into three groups. The first, consisting of thirteen thousand men, was placed directly under the Maharajah's command and was always to be ready for action. It had cavalry, infantry, and artillery divisions.

The cavalry was almost entirely Sikh and commanded by his best generals such as Hari Singh Nalwa, Hukma Singh Chimni, and Desa Singh Majithia. The infantry was a mixture of Muslims, Hindus, including Gorkhas, with some Sikhs as special forces. His heavy artillery, which was still largely Muslim, was put under the command of Mian Ghaus.

The second group, consisting of ten thousand men, was made up of forces of the chiefs liable for military service in lieu of their *jagirs*. They were obliged to furnish fully-equipped troops at short notice. The third group consisted of forces of the *misl*s which, like the Kanhayas, the Nakkais and some



*Sikh horseman in Ranjit Singh's Army*





General Hari Singh Nalwa (1791-1831) on an elephant with his retinue. [circa 1825-35 © Toor Collection.] He was Maharaja Ranjit Singh's most able native commander and scourge of the Afghans. So feared was he among them, some Afghan mothers would take his name to scare unruly children.

others, were allies of the Durbar. The total fighting force which the Durbar could put into the field at this time was about thirty-one thousand men.

After consolidation and reconciliation, some two years later, on the Vaisakhi of 12 April 1801 Ranjit Singh was anointed as leader of the Sikh Empire. From the chaos of Afghani and Sikh battles had emerged the victorious Sikhs and Ranjit Singh then formally made Lahore his capital (shifting from Gujranwala, the former capital). In the years ahead, Ranjit Singh was to expand his kingdom to the Khyber Pass and also included Jammu and Kashmir, while keeping the British from expanding across the River Sutlej for more than 40 years.

Over half a century, from 1799 to 1849, Lahore received the patronage of Ranjit Singh and his successors. He consolidated the Sikh *misldars* (commanders) who had ruled more or less independently during the eighteenth century under a unified command. In 1799, Ranjit Singh had established Lahore as the administrative capital of a new Sikh kingdom while

the twin city of Amritsar became the spiritual and commercial centre of the kingdom in 1802.

While much of Lahore's Mughal era fabric lay in ruins of the eighteenth century, rebuilding efforts under the Sikhs basically followed the Mughal pattern. Ranjit Singh moved into the Mughal palace in Lahore's citadel and by 1812 had mostly refurbished the city's defenses by adding a second circuit of outer walls that followed the outline of Akbar's original walls and were separated from them by a moat. Maharaja Ranjit Singh also partially restored Shah Jahan's decaying gardens at the Shalimar and many maps of the area surrounding Lahore dating from the mid-nineteenth century show that walled private gardens – many of them bearing the names of prominent Sikh nobles - continued in the Mughal style under Sikh rule.

The Sikh court continued to promote religious architecture in the city, including a number of Sikh Gurdwaras, Hindu temples and Muslim mosques. The decaying structures and architecture of Lahore were splendidly restored by the emperor.





*Old photograph of the sacred Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar*

### **The British enter Lahore**

After the first Anglo-Sikh war of 1845-46, the British occupied Lahore in a protracted but concerted manner. Capitalising on the disarray surrounding the succession struggles after Ranjit Singh's demise and only partially diminished by a war fought against the

Sikhs on their eastern frontier, British troops soon rode into Lahore in February 1846 and garrisoned their soldiers in the citadel. Two unstable years later, was the Second, equally ferocious Anglo-Sikh War of 1848-49 which started in the southern city of Multan when that city's governor, Diwan Mulraj Singh, rebelled. After a series of closely fought battles, the Sikh army was finally overwhelmed in the Battle of Gujrat, sixty miles north of Lahore. Following the British victory, Duleep Singh, Ranjit Singh's infant son and heir to the throne, was formally deposed in Lahore. The remaining Sikh regiments in the city were abruptly decommissioned and within a year, the Punjab was formally annexed to the British Empire and military sappers began leveling Lahore's city wall.



*Painting of Lahore as seen from the parade ground depicting the child Maharajah of Lahore Duleep Singh entering his Palace accompanied by an escort of British troops*

Lahore was to remain the capital of undivided Punjab till 1947 and is today the capital of Pakistan's province of the Punjab.

**Nishaan Editorial Team**



# The Magnificent Legacy of Bhai Ram Singh



Portrait of Ram Singh  
By Rudolf Svoboda, 1892



Aitchison College Lahore  
Main Building, designed in 1882-83



Khalsa College, Amritsar: Entrance to the  
Boarding House, designed in 1896

## In Lahore and Amritsar

Both Khalsa College at Amritsar and the Aitchison College at Lahore, with their magnificent edifices, are a creation of the Punjab's greatest architect of the colonial period, Bhai Ram Singh. They are remarkable designs, but what is more amazing is that these were brought forth in a period when local talent, initiative, creativity was considered a poor second to the inimitable qualities of the alien colonial rulers, who painted India and Indians in very unflattering terms.

This article traces Bhai Ram Singh's early formative period in some detail, quickly mentions his works in other parts of the Punjab, mostly Lahore, and then discusses his greatest achievement: the Khalsa College at Amritsar.

**T**he Ramgarhia Misl of the Sikhs, to whom Ram Singh belonged, has a long-standing tradition of being master craftsmen, specialising in carpentry. In all probability Assa Singh, Ram Singh's father, shifted to Amritsar, locating himself in or near the timber market, Cheel Mandi, where carpenter shops were also situated. It is not clear whether young Ram Singh had any early formal schooling, however, he might have picked up some smattering

of the English language in his interaction with British missionaries and officials and soon came to the notice of the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab.

Ram Singh was a student of the Lahore School of Carpentry established in 1874 through private subscription, with classes held in the verandah of the Director of Public Instruction's office. It had a somewhat short history and was amalgamated with the newly established Mayo School of Arts, with John



Lockwood Kipling (father of Rudyard Kipling) as Founder Principal, in a house in Anarkali behind the Bengal Bank. At the School of Arts, in addition to drawing classes, the students were given elementary instruction in reading and writing the vernacular and in arithmetic. Ram Singh, already an accomplished and acknowledged carpenter, began to develop his conceptual and intellectual capacities and outgrew his crafts-training to achieve a deeper understanding of other arts and architecture. Ram Singh, from his student days, had opportunities to participate in practical work and to study the theoretical basis of design. Several of the projects carried out by the School were later acknowledged to have been his work. This integration of theory and practice, study of extant Indian heritage and participation in practical work, was the cornerstone of Kipling's philosophy of art education as imbibed and elaborated by Bhai Ram Singh in his works.

In this context it is significant that Ram Singh, throughout his stay at the Mayo School, never turned his back on his traditions. He continued to maintain strong links with his family and *bradri* in Amritsar, and drew upon them for cultural sustenance and support, and often involved them in the work executed by the Mayo School.

### The Mayo School of Arts Building



Designed by Bhai Ram Singh in 1882-83, the Mayo School of Arts building at Lahore was his first architectural project

Ram Singh, by 1881, had been under Kipling's tutelage for 6 years, when an opportunity arose for him to work on an important architectural project, the building for the Mayo School of Arts at Lahore.

Kipling in his report for 1876-77 wrote that the funds for the building will not "allow of any lavish expenditure in decoration nor indeed is it desirable..." The School of Arts building is, thus, a brick-faced, imposing structure, fronting and set back from the Mall, opposite the Punjab University and next to the Museum. The famous Zam Zama cannon of the Sikhs, immortalised by Kipling's son Rudyard, today sits on a traffic island of the Mall opposite the building.

Ram Singh used his skills and knowledge of details of brickwork to humanise the scale of the exposed brick surfaces. He judiciously used moulded ornamental bricks, terracotta jalliwork (fenestration) in the arched verandah openings. The building façade were subdivided into panels and the plinth, cornice, lintel and cill levels accentuated through intricate brick detailing using varying-sized bricks. The corners of the north wing, the main façade of the School, facing the Mall, was emphasised with turrets and chatris, while ornamental embellishments such as the stucco work under the eaves, lent the building grace and texture. A marble drinking fountain was specially designed for the centre of the courtyard.

Ram Singh was now well recognised by the British and soon commissioned by the Duke of Connaught to design the interior of the palace at Bagshot Park in Surrey, England. The work at Osborne House earned laurels for Ram Singh and the press reported him in glowing terms in newspapers of the time, variously referring to him as 'Professor of Art' and 'a formidable rival' for English artists. The Queen commissioned her court artist, the Austrian Rudolph Svoboda to paint Ram Singh's portrait which now hangs at the entrance to the Durbar Room at Osborne House.

Meantime in Lahore, Kipling seized every opportunity to proudly introduce Ram Singh to the local gentry, referring to him as "our most accomplished architect". One such occasion was when James Wilson, the Assistant Commissioner, Shahpur and the Administrator of the Kalra Estate, wrote to Kipling for a design for a house for Malik Umar Hayat Khan on the estate. Kipling suggested that the commission should be given to Bhai Ram Singh who was, at the time, expected back from England in two months after completing the Durbar Room for the Queen at Osborne.





*The National College of Arts, earlier Mayo School of Arts, in Lahore today*

This was also the period when Ram Singh came into contact with Rai Bahadur Ganga Ram, the Executive Engineer, Lahore, meeting him frequently over projects where he was the architect and construction was being carried out under supervision of the Punjab Works Department. They struck a good professional relationship and Ganga Ram, throughout his tenure, associated him in several designs of buildings that the PWD implemented. The works that he carried out with Rai Bahadur Ganga Ram were later mentioned in the MVO Memorandum under, 'the works carried out for the Executive Engineer'.

### **Punjab Chief's College: Aitchison College**

Bhai Ram Singh's involvement, in 1886, with the project of the Punjab Chiefs' College, later Aitchison College, was the result of an India-wide competition



*Aitchison College, Lahore: the Main Building, southern façade*

announced in leading newspapers of the time, for the design of the main building of the College. The Mayo School of Arts decided to send an entry in response to the advertisement. The decision to pit the limited experience with the best architectural talent available in India showed courage and Kipling's confidence in the young, 28-year-old, Ram Singh. A sub-committee narrowed down the selection to two proposals. They liked the layout plans submitted by Col. Samuel Swinton Jacobs, Executive Engineer of Jeypore State, and the elevations, details, the picturesque grouping of domes, Moorish arches and decoration conceived by Bhai Ram Singh.

After much deliberation it was resolved that the Colonel should be asked to adapt his plans to accommodate the elevations and

architectural features prepared by Bhai Ram Singh. This was indeed a singular achievement for Ram Singh, for Col. Jacobs was a highly regarded architect. Kipling, reporting on this in his annual report for 1885-1886, wrote that the Mayo School design "being adjudged to share the prize with a design by Colonel Jacob of Jeypore, a result which those who are acquainted with Colonel Jacob's work must regard as highly satisfactory for the School of Art."

The Main College building comprised classrooms, play room, Hall, a library and reading room, science laboratory and office rooms. The focus of the layout plan was the Hall, 70 feet by 30 feet running along the east west axis. The composition appeared as a three-tiered building with the centralised hall, like a church nave with high clearstory windows, being the tallest part and the rows of classrooms forming the second tier, while the verandahs completed the composition. Octagonal turrets surmounted by domes marked the corners of the central block which had the hall, while chatris, cupolas, domes and finials were used to accentuate the corners of the building. Chatris were also delineated in ornamental brickwork, reflective of the finesse of woodcarving, which was Ram Singh's forte. Eave brackets in red sandstone throughout the building, the use of red/pink marble cladding for the column and the arches



with the occasional use of elaborate jhorakas finished in white marble details and some intricately detailed entrances bespeak of the mastery of details by the architect and the intelligent use of colours to highlight features of the building.

The verandahs are screened with elaborate interlacing Moorish arches and red marble jallis. The interior of the Hall itself was embellished with stucco tracery details, frescos and an imposing balcony resting on sandstone brackets. Unafraid to learn from both the Indian tradition and the new European influence, Ram Singh created a unique composition and highly textured façades, which continue to be lively and charming. This vocabulary he used to great effect in his subsequent buildings, the most prominent among them being the Khalsa College at Amritsar.

### Khalsa College : His unique legacy



*Khalsa College: the main building at Amritsar*

On Ram Singh's return to the School on 1 April 1893, other commissions followed. The most significant of these was design of the Khalsa College at Amritsar.

The Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar had adopted a resolution on 17 June 1883, for establishment of the Khalsa College. Recognising the nexus between religious reform and education, the Sikhs wanted to “restore Sikhism to its pristine purity” and through publication of religious and historical books to spread “current knowledge using Punjabi as a medium”. Upon achieving official sanction, the Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, set up the Khalsa College Establishment Committee in February 1890. The newly constituted Committee appointed a sub-committee in its first meeting of 22 February 1890 with Col. Holroyd, the Director of Public Instruction as President, Sir Sardar Attar Singh as Vice president and Dr. W. Bell, the Principal, Government College, Lahore, as Secretary, along with five Sikh members. Both Col. Holroyd and Dr W. Bell were already familiar with the creative work of Ram Singh at the School of Arts, as well as the various commissions that he had so well executed including the Government College boarding house, and therefore it was no surprise that Ram Singh was chosen as the architect.

The Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, Sir James Lyall decided that the Khalsa College should be located in Amritsar in view of the “fact that this is without doubt the wish of the great majority of the Sikh people”. He concluded that amongst five options, the most suitable site for the College was the one located on the Grand Trunk Road, in the village of Said Mahmood, at a distance of about three miles from the city and about two miles from the Railway Station, practically the site formerly selected for the jail. It was on the Cantonment side of the railway tracks, which in itself signified a cultural gesture, to be away from the city and near the Cantonment.

The physical development work of the Khalsa College was entrusted to a thirty-member Executive Committee constituted on 18 December 1892, from the over one hundred member Khalsa College Council, which at the time had Dr. William H. Rattigan and Bhai Jawahir Singh as President and Secretary General respectively. Sardar Dharam Singh, Civil Engineer was specially transferred from Bannu and placed in charge of the building operations of the College. It was not till September 1896 that some of the buildings were ready for the school students



to be shifted from Pandit Behari Lal's house to the new premises. The first building to be occupied was the boarding house.

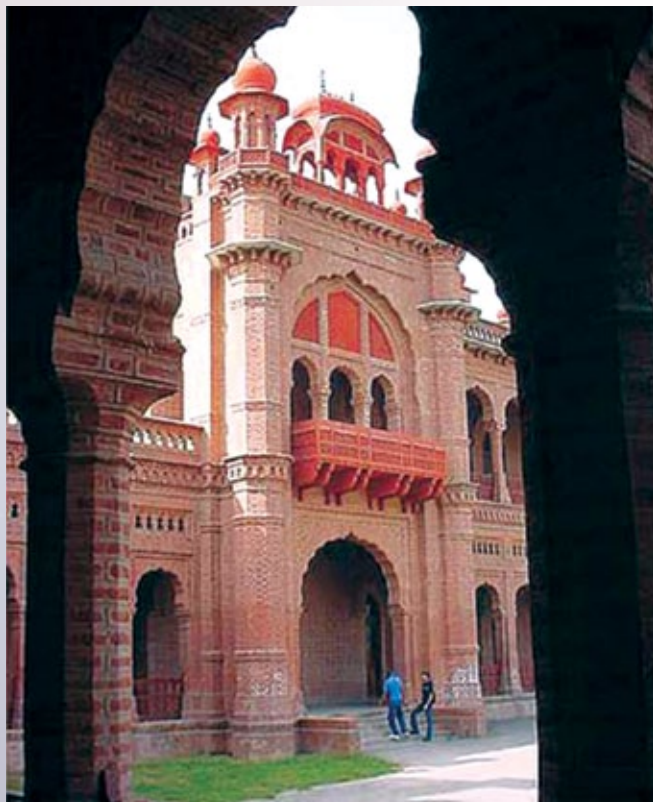
Ram Singh's master-plan proposed the main academic buildings of the College in the forefront, facing the Grand Trunk Road, with boarding houses at the rear. The principal's residence along with accommodation for other staff was located on the southwest corner of the complex. The buildings were generously set back from the road and the foreground developed as spacious lawns. The College main building was to accommodate academic needs and was thus designed with a hall, classrooms, library, laboratories and ancillary facilities. The construction was planned in phases and as the classes were already being held in rented buildings, priority in construction phasing was given to the boarding houses to provide proper accommodation to the students from outside Amritsar.

The College boarding house, 'the Patiala House', for 250 students was a gift of the Patiala officials and subjects, to mark the assumption of the Government of his state by Maharaja Rajinder Singh. The school boarding house was meant for 490 students. The plan

of the School boarding house was an inverted T with a centralised entrance and six rooms (20 feet by 16 feet) flanking both sides of it, with large rooms of 28 feet by 20 feet at both ends, giving a frontage of 350 feet. Verandahs, with jalli brickwork in the openings, on both sides protected the rooms from the scorching heat of the Punjab.



*Verandahs, with jalli brickwork surround the Khalsa College main building*



*Khalsa College, Amritsar: entrance to the School Wing*

The Executive Committee decided, on 15 March 1896, to add a Gurdwara/dharamsala and one year later on 6 March, 1897 they also decided to build a hospital and gymnasium as a memorial to Sardar Sir Attar Singh, Vice President of the Khalsa College Council who had recently passed away. The Dhramasala was designed as a high open hall, large enough to seat 500 boys for morning and evening prayers, with ancillary rooms. It was constructed soon after at the site where Sir James Lyall had earlier laid the foundation stone.

Hectic efforts were made, through the years 1902-03 to raise funds for completion of the essential buildings and for the endowment fund of the College with the Lt. Governor, Sir Charles Rivaz, patron of the College, himself joining the efforts with a contribution of Rs 50,000 from the Provincial Government revenues, towards the building fund on his visit to





Khalsa College, Amritsar: "the massing of domes and cupolas"

the College on 15 August 1903. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy, joined the effort, urging the Phulkian States to contribute generously. The Government of the Punjab approached the Sikh gentry through the Deputy Commissioners to provide financial help. The design for the Main Building and other structures, the gymnasium, dispensary, workshops and staff quarters was already prepared and estimated to cost Rs 2,50,000.

On 17 November 1904, Sir Charles Rivaz performed the foundation laying ceremony of the Main building and the drawings of the project were displayed prominently and much admired by the Lt. Governor and visiting gentry. The Main Building was designed to accommodate 1800 students, with the College facilities on the front side of an essentially H-shaped building, and the School facilities at the rear, the connector of the H-shape being a large hall, 100 feet by 54 feet named the Rivaz Hall in honour of the patron.

By attaching two wings at the rear of the H-shape building, additional facilities were provided for the school. The building was a monumental structure, about 500 feet in length (frontage), with a prominent central entrance leading to the foyer and the hall

beyond. Other entrances dotted the façade with two prominent entrances at the ends. The building was double storied; the central entrance was surmounted with a composition of domes at a maximum height of 116 feet with a four-sided clock with six foot dials.

The monotony of the long verandahs was broken using multi-foil arches running across and the exposed brickwork of the jack arched ceiling. The building, however, took several years to complete, the cost having appreciated to over Rs. 500,000. It was largely completed by October 1910 and occupied by 9 October 1910, but there was still work to be done and the Principal was still collecting money for it in 1916, the year that Bhai Ram Singh passed away.

The design of the Khalsa College constituted the high point of Bhai Ram Singh's career as an architect and through this project he was able to explore a vocabulary which he used to good advantage in his later works, like the Punjab University Senate Hall (1905) and the Islamia College, Peshawar (1912-13), which he is reputed to have designed and the Khalsa College, Gujranwala, where presumably the Amritsar design was adapted. The major development he carried through from the Khalsa College is his articulation of the skyline of his buildings. His earlier attempts, such as in School of Arts building, appear hesitant, or as in Aitchison College, a bit crowded, in comparison with the masterful use of the cupolas, domes, *chattris*, *palkis* that he employed to great effect. The central clock tower made an appearance as the focal point of the façade composition which he used later in the Punjab University Hall.

Ram Singh was appointed as the Principal on 25 September 1910 and retired from service in October 1913, after being at the Mayo School for thirty eight years. On his retirement, his Vice-Principal Lionel Heath was made Principal of the School on 1 November 1910. In his first report he acknowledged Bhai Ram Singh's long association and wrote in his annual report "The Principal, Sardar Bahadur Ram Singh MVO, retired from service in October 1913. He was one of the first students to join the School of Art in 1873, and was appointed to the staff 10 years later, becoming Principal in 1910. Sardar Bahadur Ram Singh's talents are widely known, and his long and honorable career is one for the students to emulate".

As an architect and a master craftsman he designed with equal facility a building, a piece of furniture, a shamiana or a certificate. Ram Singh's impact on the





*Portrait of Bhai Ram Singh by Saeed Akthar, former Head of Fine Arts Department, National College of Arts, Lahore which now hangs in the Principal's Office. The work was commissioned in 2006 by Prof. Sajida Haider Vandal, Principal National College of Arts*

architecture of the Punjab, and Lahore in particular, can also be gauged as a contrast with other colonial period buildings in Lahore: the Lahore General Post Office, High Court, Municipal Hall, Assembly Hall are designed by different architects of the period. Each is a building of merit employing European motifs and vocabulary and with attempts to use 'native' features. Almost all these attempts of mixing the 'native' with the 'European' romanticise Indian architecture with details employed without conviction. They employ features such as the horse shoe arches of the Town Hall, Lahore, the mini Qutab Minar version in the Lahore High Court and so on, in a most superficial manner, almost turning the native features a farce or, at best, as a fig leaf to cover the European styles.

The buildings designed by Ram Singh stand out in contrast to the eclectic structures such as Government College, the Patiala Block of the Medical School and the Mayo Hospital. The less than successful attempts to incorporate Eastern architecture in the City Hall with



*Entrance to the Lahore Museum*

its horse shoe arches and disproportionate handling of the overall mass of building, also bring into limelight the almost effortless mastery of Bhai Ram Singh's genius.

Ram Singh's work, Aitchison College, the Mayo School of Arts (now the NCA), the Lahore Museum, the Punjab University Hall, the boarding house of the Government College and above all the Khalsa College at Amritsar on the other hand, show an integrity in design with a masterly handling of the details of construction, in proportion, texture and rhythm. Whether it is the mundane feature of the Albert Victor Hospital porch, or the soaring tower of the Punjab University, the lofty domes of the Lahore Museum, the playful yet noble rhythm of the cupolas of the Khalsa College, the grandeur of Aitchison College, Ram Singh imparts to his buildings that touch of genius that differentiates the ordinary from the truly inspired works of Art.

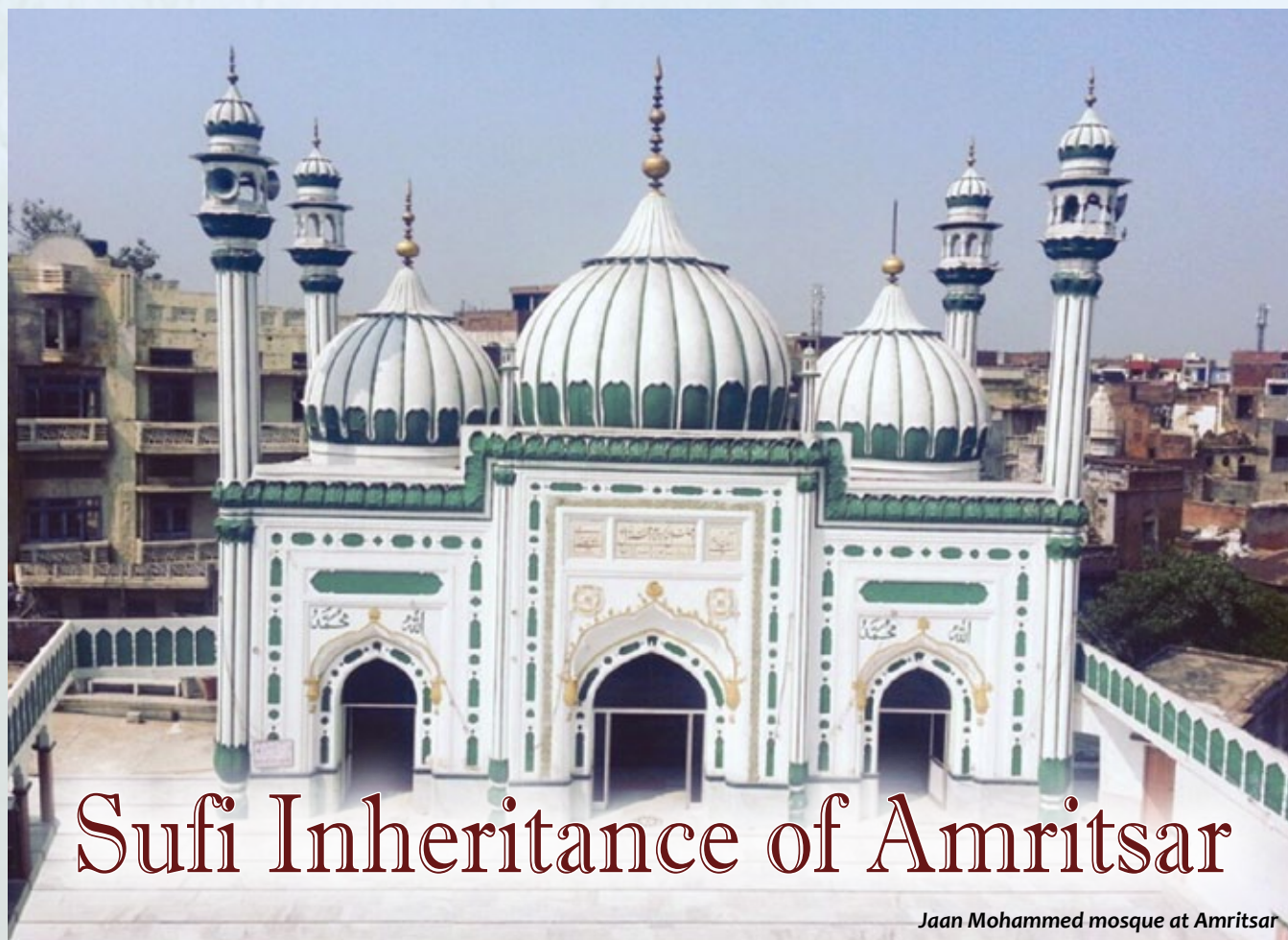
Ram Singh continually posed challenges to the brick-makers of Lahore to develop new shapes. He teased out of brickwork the carved texture of wood. His use of the rope motif, the stylised animals, the variation in levels to play with the strong sun of Lahore and the resultant chiaroscuro effects of light and shade give his walls a life of their own. The walls change with the sun, now shining with strong light and later brooding in the setting sun, they convey messages so typically Indian in their complexity of emotions strongly attached to nature and its vagaries.

***Pervaiz Vandal and Sajida Vandal***

Pervaiz Vandal and Sajida Vandal are noted Pakistani architects and have published a book on Ram Singh, 'The Raj, Lahore & Bhai Ram Singh'. Sajida Vandal was the principal of National College of Arts.



Yogesh Snehi recalls the



## Sufi Inheritance of Amritsar

*Jaan Mohammed mosque at Amritsar*

Established by Guru Ramdas, Amritsar owes its name to the sacred tank (*amrit sar* or the pool of nectar) at the centre of which was laid the foundation of the holiest of Sikh religious shrines by Miyan Mir, a Qadiri Sufi mystic of Lahore, in 1588. Sikh tradition acknowledges the role of Sufi mysticism in its tradition through the inclusion of Baba Farid's mystical poetry (Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, a Chishti Sufi saint of Pakpattan who died in 1266) in the Guru Granth Sahib. The Punjabi Sufi saint is also vibrantly present in popular commemorative practices and this intimate relationship between Sikh Gurus and Sufi saints continues to resonate in popular memory well past the Partition.

According to demographic data available since the nineteenth century, Amritsar was largely a Muslim-dominated city. Their presence was particularly marked

along the outer edges of the walled city. Hindus and Sikhs dominated the inner zones (*katras*) of the walled city. Muslims in 1852 comprised about 49 per cent of the total population of Amritsar, 9 per cent more than that of its own district while the Sikhs constituted 15.05 per cent of the total population of the city in 1941 (Gaubha 1988: 262). Anand Gauba observes that,

*... one could find Muslim traders and shopkeepers in the heart of the old city like Bazar Sheikhan adjoining Guru Bazar. The Muslim priestly class had also their residential localities in old Amritsar: Kucha Qazian, Kucha Ragian and Rababian who sang and played celestial music were such examples. But Muslims in general had mostly settled in the outermost quarters of the city, close to the wall like Katras Khazana, Hakimian, Karan Singh, Garbha Singh.*



Historically, the land on which the city evolved was owned by a mixed community of Muslim Syeds, Sheikhs and Rajputs. The tomb of Syed Fateh Ali Shah, one of the former “owners” of the site, is located outside the fort of Gobindgarh, to the west. The site of Harmandir Sahib was first purchased by the fourth Sikh guru, Guru Ram Das, marked by a small natural ‘pool of water’ which was said to have been visited by Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh faith. On the side of this pool Guru Ram Das erected himself a hut. In 1577, he obtained a grant of the site, together with 500 *bighas* of land from Akbar, on the payment of 700 *akbari tankas* to the *zamindars* of village Tung, who owned the land. Habitation was limited to the periphery of the Harmandir Sahib which was founded by Guru Ram Das. The major expansion of the city took place during the time of Ranjit Singh who got the wall constructed around the city and divided the city into *kutchas* and *katras*.

Besides several major Gurdwaras, two important mosques were located in the Hall Bazaar. Pre-Partition, Muslim religious places were also located outside of the walled city. The *Jami Masjid* was outside the Rambagh Gate, several *takias* (guest houses) associated with shrines of Sufi saints and successors were located outside this city wall; for instance, those of Pir Shah, Bahar Shah, Noor Shah, Jane Shah, Miraj-ud-Din. Some of the *takias* also had *khanqahs* attached to them.

According to the Census of 1941, there were 657,695 Muslims residing in the district, whereas their number post-Partition in 1951 was reduced to just 4,585. “The Khojas and Shaikhs among Muslims formed the chief trading class. Khowaja Muhammad Shah and Mian Muhammad Jan, both shawl merchants, were the founder members of Amritsar Municipal Committee.... many Shaikhs had orchards or agricultural lands around the city in 1935”. The newcomers who resettled in the district were far fewer



ਹਾਲ ਨੰ: 1, ਆਰਟਿਸਟ : ਸ. ਕਿਰਪਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ (1979), ਸਾਈਜ਼ : 8x10

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜਨ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੇ ਕੇਂਦਰੀ ਧਰਮ ਅਸਥਾਨ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਹਰਿਮੰਦਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਨੀਂਹ ਪੱਥਰ ਰਖਵਾਉਂਦੇ ਹੋਏ। ਇਸ ਮੌਕੇ ਹਜ਼ਾਰਾਂ ਸਾਈਂ ਮੀਆਂ ਮੀਰ ਜੀ, ਬਾਬਾ ਬੁੱਢਾ ਜੀ, ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਅਤੇ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਲੂ ਜੀ ਵੀ ਮੌਜੂਦ ਸਨ।

Contemporary painting by Kirpal Singh (1979) depicting Miyan Mir laying the foundation of Golden Temple  
(Source: Album, Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar, 1996)



in number than the outgoing Punjabi Muslims who were residing in the district. Despite their significant presence, post-Partition historiography does not attest to the presence of Muslims or Islamic influence in the lives of people of the walled city pre-Partition.

My surveys suggest that many shrines that were earlier under the control of Muslim caretakers (though not all street shrines associated with Sufi mystics had Muslim caretakers) remained desolate for almost a decade after 1947 at least until 1964, the year in which the Central Wakf Council was established. Even when taken over by a new set of caretakers, restoration of ritual practices took a longer time. Much of these sacred spaces which consisted of mosques, *dargahs*, *khanqahs*, *takiyas* or graveyards remained desolate or were encroached upon and put to alternative private use. However, it is curious to note that *dargahs*, *khanqahs* and *takiyas* associated with major Sufi mystics or local saints of Punjab were either restored of their ritual practices within the early decades post-Partition or were gradually rejuvenated through the agency of some individuals or local community of practitioners of Sufi saint veneration.

The restoration of ritual practice at Sufi shrines was a long-drawn process and involved absorption of the shrines into the transformed demographic milieu as the old patrons had left for Pakistan. Before the Partition, major gatherings and festivities took place at Kotli Shah Habib, the shrine of the saint near Ramdas in the Ajnala Tehsil. After Partition of the Punjab, at least until the 1970s, no such gathering was held, nor was a fair held at the shrine of any other Sufi saint in the district. Gradually, fairs dedicated to saints like Baba Sher Shah Wali started at Gharyala (Patti), Baba Bakhar Ali Shah was held at Khutril Kalan (Ajnala) and Takiya Baba Rodey Shah at Chung (Patti). One should however be wary of representations of religious identities of medieval saints and their shrines as exclusive and impenetrable domains of religious boundaries. Sufi shrines particularly defied these exclusivities.

In the context of Amritsar, *urs* at one of the oldest shrines, that of Syed Fateh Ali Shah situated outside the walled city of Amritsar, was re-started in 2004, more than five decades after the Partition. Some of these shrines were major centres of veneration in the

pre-Partition milieu. For the people who were leaving their familiar spaces in Pakistan, the location of these shrines at least partially substituted their earlier lived landscapes. The scenario was different for smaller street shrines dedicated to popular Sufi mystics. Such shrines were particularly located in the walled city and resonated the continuity of pre-Partition cultural flows. One of the prominent saints associated with these shrines was Khwaja Khizr or Jhule Lal.



A banner announcing the mela/urs at the shrine of Baba Hasan Hussain near Hussainpura in 2011 (photo by author)

These unique street shrines defy easy classification as a Hindu, Sikh or Muslim shrine and practice. These shrines are a blend of pre-Partition and contemporary shrine practices. Khwaja Khizr or Khidr has complex histories associated with religious traditions of the Middle East and South Asia, traversing trade and trans-regional religious networks. The river cult might have had its origin in the indigenous population and the mercantile communities might have played an important role in its propagation. As a giver of waters of immortality, Khizr is also known as Jinda or Zinda Pir (“one who never dies”), a title which is, however, more often used for Gugga Pir. In many parts of India, Khwaja Khizr is identified with a river god or the spirit of wells and streams, revered both by Hindus and Muslims.

It is interesting to note that several Sikh Gurus invested in the digging of wells for both ritual and irrigation purposes. Some of the early Gurdwaras associated with Sikhism were also associated with



water bodies: Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar (pool of nectar), Baoli Sahib (step well) at Goindwal and Chehereta Sahib (well with six Persian wheels near Amritsar), to mention some that were established in the sixteenth century. Fish survive as an important residue of Khwaja Khizr/Varun *devta* in water bodies in Gurdwaras of Punjab. Their ubiquitous presence is a reminder of the significant presence of the cult in the period before the rise of Sikh practices. It is not a surprise that most water bodies, ponds as well as stepwells, associated with significant Gurdwaras have also been associated with the power of healing skin diseases, particularly leprosy. The popular practice of ritual bathing is associated with these water bodies, once again an adaption of earlier religious practices linking bathing with healing and immortality.

Of particular interest are wells (*khu*) dedicated as shrines to Khawja Khizr or Jhule Lal in Amritsar. Several localities in the walled city of Amritsar are named after wells (*khu*): Khu Kuhadian, Bombay-wala

Khu, Khu Suniarian, Chatti Khu, to name a few. Major shrines dedicated to the saint are located on or along the prominent sources of water, primarily wells of the city. According to an estimate, from 1892-93, the drinking water in Amritsar was entirely obtained from around 1,400 wells. Most of these wells are no longer extant but among those which exist, many have shrines dedicated to Khwaja Khizr or Jhule Lal. The ubiquitous presence of Jhule Lal in Amritsar problematises the belief that Jhule Lal is a predominant saint of Sindhis who have negligible presence in the Punjab.

In the specific context of contemporary Amritsar, the role of urban mercantile Punjabi Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs assumes significance. Khwaja Khizr thus became patron saint of the *bhishtis* (water carriers) of the river Indus and its tributaries, protector of boatmen, fishermen, mariners and travelers and god of water. His sacred shrines are situated at Katra Sher Singh, where it is managed by Rajkumar and at Khu Kaudiyan, where his shrine is situated along with popular iconography of the 'family of Shiva' and Gugga Pir.

The city also memorialises several Sufi mystics each year through *urs* celebrations in the memory of Sakhi Sarwar (Baba Lakhdata), Baba Farid (Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar), Gaus Pak (Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani) and several other *pirs* that transform the space of the walled city, engaging people from a diverse spectrum of caste, class and religious hierarchy, defying communal stereotypes. Sakhi Sarwar's public presence



Khwaja Khizr at a shrine in Katra Sher Singh, Amritsar  
(photos by author)



A popular post-card of Baba Farid in circulation in Amritsar  
(photos by author)



is visible through commemorative practices such as *urs* organised annually in the memory of the saint by Sai Baba Gope Shah ‘Chishti Faridi Sabri’ since the year 2000.

In 2007, the practice of organising a *qawwali darbar* was also started. Since then Daman Sabri, the *darbari qawwals* of Kaliyar Sharif perform at the occasion. During the annual *urs* organised in 2010 at the telephone exchange chowk, Sufi Rashid Mian (Delhi), Sai Baba Mehshi Shah ‘Chishti Faridi Sabri’ (Batala Sharif) and Baba Gope Shah (Amritsar) were present. The fair is attended predominantly by a non-Muslim audience (except for migrant Kashmiri Muslims artisans who participate) and is organised under the banner of *Anjuman Ghulame Chishtiya Sabriya* an umbrella organisation of Chishti Sabri followers in Punjab founded by Baba Ghulam Jilani of Kaliyar Sharif that includes Aroras, Brahmans, Khatris, Mahajans, Ravidasias and Valmikis from several religious affiliations. The branch at Amritsar does not consist of Muslims. These commemorative practices play a significant role in the articulation of pre-Partition memory in the streets of Amritsar.

Baba Farid, one of the most significant of Punjabi saints also remains alive in Amritsar through

commemorative practices. Considered to be the father of Punjabi poetry, his contribution to vernacularity of Sufi mysticism is immense. Farid was a disciple of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki whose shrine is situated at Mehrauli in Delhi. Sabir Pak (Makhdoom Alauddin Ali Ahmed Sabir) was a direct disciple and nephew of Baba Farid and founded the Sabiriya branch of Chishti mysticism in western Uttar Pradesh.

This intimate link between the shrine of Baba Farid at Pakpattan (in Pakistan Punjab) and Sabir Pak in Uttar Pradesh finds its contemporary relevance in the spread of the latter in contemporary (Indian) Punjab whose direct relationship with Baba Farid’s shrine at Pakpattan was severed post-Partition. Baba Ghulam Jilani had been a frequent visitor to Amritsar post-Partition and also played an important role in organising Sabiri fraternity in the city through the circulation of mystic literature, ideology (via ritual intermediaries and musicians) and a wider network of shrines from Amritsar, Batala to Patiala.

Commemorative practices have also found expression in the foundation of a minor Valmiki shrine in the memory of Baba Farid that was laid near Lahori Gate on 25 December 2007 and a *chirag* (lamp) was lit by Baba Ghulam Jilani. Harish Sabiri



Darbari qawwals from Kaliyar Sharif performing at Amritsar in 2010 (Photo by author)



has been instrumental in establishing this shrine. Morning and evening prayers at this shrine are performed in the Sabiri tradition. Every year on the same day an *urs* is organised by the community of the area which comprises primarily of Dalits. The youth of the area organises regular pilgrimage to several places associated with Chishti Sufis like Kaliyar Sharif (Roorkee), shrine of Shamsuddin Panipatti and Bu Ali Qalandar (Panipat), Nizamuddin Auliya (New Delhi), Muinuddin Chishti (Ajmer). Several Dalit families of the locality have been venerating *pirs* for several generations and most have dedicated a corner of their house to *pirs*. These commemorative practices have an important link with pre-Partition memory.

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*A shorter version of this article was earlier published in The Tribune.*

## Dargah of Baba Hussain Shah Qadri at Raja Sansi

Raja Sansi is a suburb of Amritsar, in which area is located the *Sri Guru Ram Dass Jee International Airport*, skirted by the Ajnala-Raja Sansi road. The well known Haveli at Raja Sansi has been the residence of the erstwhile Sandhanwalia *misl*.

Not far from Raja Sansi village is the Dargah of Baba Hussain Shah Qadri. Since the partition of 1947, the Dargah has been meticulously looked after by a Nihang family with utmost reverence and care.



(photographs by Pushpindar Singh)



Salman Rashid reflects on this

# Line Across the Heart of a Timeless Land



The border separates Padhana in West Punjab from Gandiwind in East Punjab (Google Maps)

January 2010. My wife and I were in Amritsar with our friend Ramesh Yadav. We had earlier met Pamma, Paramjit Singh, from village Gandiwind, a short ways south of town. He, from a farming family with a large holding had invited us home for an evening of refreshments and food. The soiree was a riot as any could be expected with friends in Punjab. In that fog of near delirium I remember the patriarch of the family, Sardar Tarloke Singh, Pamma's tayaji, telling us of the troubles their village saw during the Partition unrest. He said he was in his twenties and remembered everything well.

When the riots began, perhaps on the very day of the divide or a day or two earlier, the Sardar's father gathered together several Muslim families in his large home. It was thought, said Tarloke Singh, that the rioting was only a passing occurrence. Why,

everyone had always lived so peacefully in Gandiwind so how could they now even think of turning against their neighbours. The Muslims were assured that they would all be safe in the Sardar's home until they could return to their own.

How the innocence of misguidance convinced them that once the unrest died down, things would return to the age-old normal.

A hoodlum, whose name I now forget, from a neighbouring village then descended upon Gandiwind with his band of thugs and demanded of Tarloke Singh's father to hand over the Muslims to them. The good man refused. There was every chance of the hoodlum attacking the Sardar's home when an army patrol arrived to drive them away.

Seeing that things were not as they had imagined, the senior Sardar gathered together a large posse of





View of India from Pakistan (image courtesy the author)

armed men from the village, all of them Sikhs, for protection of the Muslims. But rather than subsiding, the plunder and killing was only escalating all around. At this point, the Sardar told the Muslim families to lock up their homes and armed Sikhs would conduct them safely across the border, only some kilometres away. They could return when peace returned to the land.

“We escorted the entire lot of Muslims to village Padhana on your side,” said Tarloke Singh. “Not one drop of Muslim blood flowed in Gandiwind. Every single man, woman and child went across in safety,” he added. We were taken up to the roof and the lights of Padhana were pointed out, faint in the distance.

“Our family did well to save all those blameless souls from the dreadful end,” said the Sardar. “*Ess karan he sahnū bhag laggay*.” (It was because of the good deed that the family was blessed with prosperity.)

I pledged to visit Padhana on our side to see if anyone remembered or had heard of Tarloke Singh. But ten years were to go by until young Ganeev Dhillon emailed to ask if I had a cross-border story to tell that had not been told before. And so on a mild late September morning, my friend Shafiq Baloch led

Jawad Sherazi and me on the tree-shaded road across the Bambanwala-Ravi-Bedian Link canal towards the border with India.

It was still early when I parked under the spreading banyan near a shed under which four elderly men sat with a hookah. The oldest, Mohammad Yasin, said he could not be certain of his age for in his time who cared about such things. He said he was a *gabru* (full-blooded youth) at the time of Partition and reckoned he would be just shy of ninety.

My friends asked the questions, I listened taking careful note. No, said Yasin, there had been no killing in Padhana when the divide took place. Of course, there were Muslims streaming into the village from the other side. Yet they took many Sikh families safely across the couple of hundred metres of ground that separated the village from the border. Those coming to this side had nothing on them and most of them made for Lahore.

There was no killing in Padhana because for as far back Yasin recalled, everyone lived in complete amity. Most of them were Jats of the Sandhu clan and had the same festivals and shared each other’s joys and griefs. But they who left Padhana, never returned. Not even to check on their old homes, said Yasin. His voice was impassive; devoid of any trace of emotion or longing.

The longing I had hoped for was laced into his final sentence: ‘We were divided. Even our festivals became separate.’

Our host Irfan Sandhu took us up the roof of a haveli. About a hundred metres away was the meandering course of the Dhab stream, on its far shore



Way to the historical village Padhana





*View of the border from the Indian side of the fenced border (photo by Rashmi Talwar)*

was a field with bales of harvested crop and just by one of the golden bales was a whitewashed triangular border post. 'India begins at the white post,' said Irfan. Between the line of the white posts and the infamous border fence that separates two people who share the same language and culture was a hundred-metre width of green fields. 'And the green fields belong to Indian Sikh farmers,' Irfan clarified.

Beyond the fence rose two brilliant whitewashed domed buildings, thinly veiled by the morning mist. The larger one with its four domes, Irfan told us, was the gurdwara of Naushehra village. The other was also a religious building of which he wasn't sure. I would have thought it a Samadhi.

In another world, perhaps Utopian but certainly without hatred and animosity, the border would have been marked by the pillars all right. But there would be no fence and people from one side wandering over to the other would not have feared persecution, incarceration or even death as spies. Sadly, India and Pakistan do not belong to that fantasy.

When Indian farmers needed to work in their fields on our side of the fence, they were accompanied by BSF soldiers, Irfan said. They were not permitted to speak with anyone on this side.

Having fed us breakfast, Irfan took us to meet with Sardar Irfanullah. His grandfather, Sardar Harcharan

Singh Sandhu, was drawn to Islam. He gave his land for the mosque and would go to the Friday prayers to hear the sermon. In 1942, the Sardar converted to Islam together with his second wife, Channan Kaur, and seven year-old son, Khazaan Singh. They became, respectively, Bibi Ghulam Fatima and Sardar Amanullah while the senior Sardar took the name of Nasrullah.

Sardar Nasrullah's other wife, Bibi Kartar Kaur, remained with her husband and together with her three grown up sons from him kept their religion. In the five years they remained together, there was no friction within the family until Partition sundered them. Yet even after all these years, Irfanullah referred to his father's elder half brothers as his *tayas*. From time to time, they visited home from the other side.

I asked if Sardar Amanullah had ever mentioned Sardar Tarloke Singh of Gandiwind and Irfanullah did not have to think. Yes, the Sardar had been mentioned several times. He was remembered as a good man, a man of integrity and perhaps an intellectual who had something to do with reading and writing. The last part seemed improbable, for I remember the late Tarloke Singh as a farmer. But that could be attributed to a muddled memory for it had not been refreshed since Sardar Amanullah passed away in 2013. Had I kept my pledge of visiting Padhana in 2010, I could



have heard all the stories preserved in the memory of the man. Fortunately, Irfanullah did keep a vague memory of the Sardar of Gandiwind chaperoning Muslim families to Padhana.

‘There was no bloodshed in Padhana,’ said Irfanullah. Only Sardar Mewa Singh was lured back by death to give up his life in his home. This was the very place from whose rooftop we had looked upon the gurdwara of Naushehra.

The man had left all his belongings in his locked home when he took his family to safety across the border. About ten days after the divide, he came home to retrieve what he could. “It was death bringing him home,” said the elderly retired schoolmaster Hanif who had been listening in.

Discovering that Mewa Singh was home, local ruffians surrounded his home. The Sardar locked himself in. The besiegers wanted him to open up and it seems may have offered him safe passage back

Mewa Singh’s lifeless body was dumped in the Dhab where it floated for ten full days, said Irfanullah. The description passed down to him by his father was utterly *Mantoesque*: sometimes it drifted to the bank closer to us, and then to the other. For ten days it moved between the two shores of the Dhab as if uncertain where Mewa Singh wanted to be in death.

Irfanullah mentioned a Sikh woman and her daughter-in-law who were sheltered by his grandmother. Sher Mohammad demanded they be handed over to him. Ghulam Fatima and Sardar Amanullah stood their ground and under escort took them across the line Cyril Radcliffe, completely ignorant of reality, had drawn across the heart of a timeless land.

I asked what became of Sher Mohammad? Master Hanif said he died a very miserable death immobilised by elephantiasis. He implied this disease was visited upon him because of the inhumanity he had committed. The old schoolmaster could not get himself to name rape.

Across the border, Sardar Tarloke Singh’s family believe they have thrived because of the goodness of their elders. On this side, Sardar Amanullah has the same feelings. Like the Sardars of Gandiwind, the Sardars of Padhana have done well preventing evil to take place under their watch. On neither side did I find prejudice or hatred for the other.

And how could that ever be? These were a people who had always attended the same festivals together.

**Salman Rashid**

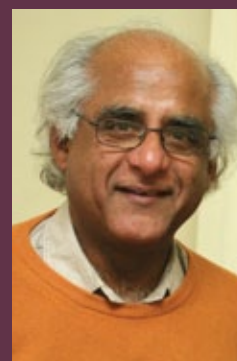


View of the now ‘abandoned’ haveli at Padhana

because he asked for three notable men to come before he would open. One of them was Siraj Din, schoolmaster Hanif’s father. But even before the three could be informed, the unfortunate Mewa Singh was inveigled to open a window. No sooner had he done that when Sher Mohammad ran a barchhi through his abdomen. And then they plundered his home.

Though Irfanullah could not meet her, but he knew that the unfortunate Sardar’s granddaughter Satwant Kaur had visited a few years ago. He said she came for only a short while to “take home a mental image of her grandfather’s home”. Going by the ruinous state of the once grand haveli, she would surely have left a heart-broken person.

Salman Rashid is a Lahore-based travel writer. He has to his credit 10 travel books on Pakistan, and a memoir of his journey to Jalandhar, his family’s native town. He is a storyteller with a deep interest in the ancient history & geography of the subcontinent.







The Haveli of Sardar Jawala Singh Padhania at Padhana village, not far from Lahore, which has been 're-discovered' as a heritage site after decades of neglect

Visiting this heritage site just near the border with India with some of my friends from Lahore, we immediately felt the history and times of the Sikh Empire, amazing for history lovers. According to historians Padhana village was founded by Sardar Sadhu Singh, Padhania, one of the principal families of the Majha and part of the Sandhu clan. Their origins are from Ghazni who moved to the Majha area and settled there.

The once magnificent Haveli of Sardar Jawala Singh Padhania is today in ruins but they were amongst the oldest Sardars of the Punjab. The eldest sister of Rani Jind Kaur (Empress of the Punjab) was married to Sardar Jawala Singh of Padhana during the reign of *Sher-e-Panjab* Maharaja Ranjit Singh. These were powerful Sardars of Padhana of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries until the Partition of 1947.

Jawala Singh Padhania alias Lakhdata was a renowned military commander. His father, Mit Singh had joined service under Maha Singh Sukkarchakkia and then continued to serve under his son Maharaja Ranjit Singh, taking part in several military expeditions.

Jawala Singh took part in the Maharaja's Malwa campaigns of 1807 and in expeditions to Multan, Kashmir and elsewhere. He later was made in charge of the fortress at Attock which he, with a handful of troops, successfully guarded against Afghan onslaughts. In 1829, Jawala Singh suffered a stroke of paralysis and retired from active service.

A brave soldier, he was a man of generous disposition, and there are many legends about of his generosity towards *faqirs*, *Brahmans* and indigent persons. It is recorded that he rescued from custody one Diwan Baisakha Singh, by paying his entire fine of over one lakh rupees after which he came to be known as 'Lakhdata' (dispenser or lakhs or millions). Jawala Singh, who was married to the elder sister of Maharani Jind Kaur, also laid out an extensive garden midway between Lahore and the Badami Bagh, which became the Maharaja's favourite resort, who also held his court there and received foreign dignitaries.

**Khurram KSK**  
Tourist Guide



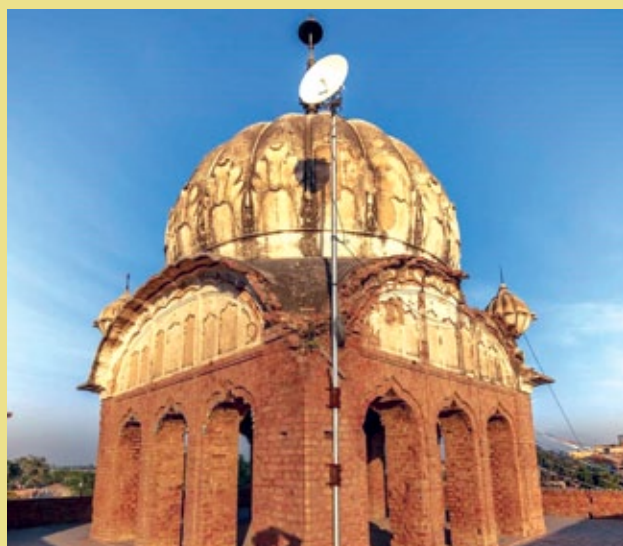
# Visiting the village of Padhana today



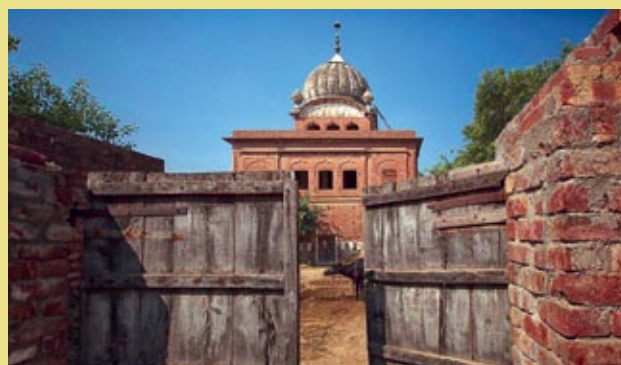
Villager of Padhana, near the Rangers' post



The historian, author and columnist Bobby Singh Bansal from the UK visiting Padhana and seen with Anjum J. Dara Sahib, Director Archeology Department Punjab



Dome of the Magnificent Gurdwara at Padhana (image courtesy Amardeep Singh)



Padhana Gurdwara is now occupied by a migrant family from Mewat (image courtesy Amardeep Singh)



Birdseye view of the Haveli at Padhana (image courtesy Amardeep Singh)



Padhana is also famous for its 'burfi' made from Buffalo milk. The hot sweet milky liquid is churned in giant vats for 4-5 hours until it becomes thick, creamy and ready for production. Padhana which was once predominantly a Sikh village, is now home to Muslim migrants, but its past is regularly recalled

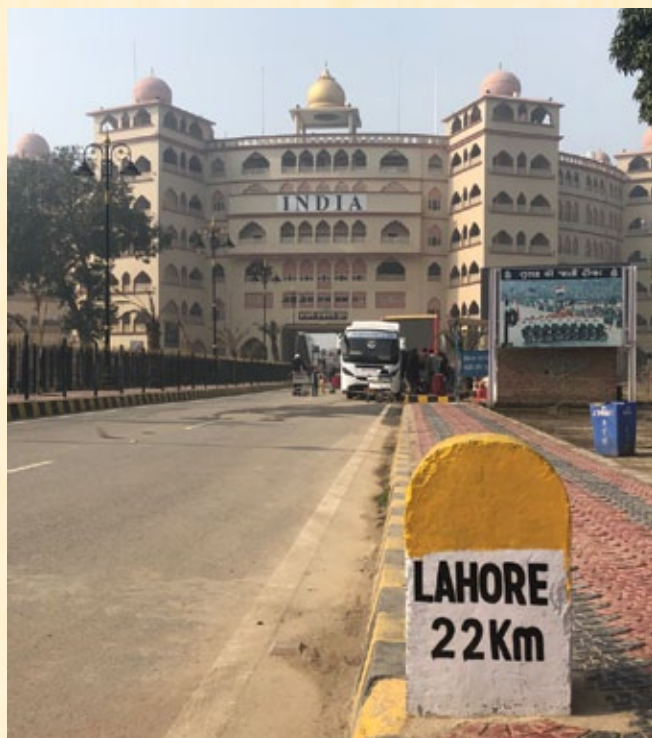


The Haveli at Padhana sadly lies in ruins today. Built with small bricks and still standing strong it has become a favoured site for tourists and as a location for fashion modeling



Ammara Ahmad writes on the

# Separated Twins of the Sub-continent



The first time I visited Amritsar, I was bewildered, smitten and deeply saddened. This was in 2008, on a trip with my college friends from Kinnaird College, Lahore. We reached Amritsar from Delhi, after having visited other major towns of north India. My paternal grandfather, who raised me, was from the eastern Punjab district of Gurdaspur, Tehsil Batala.

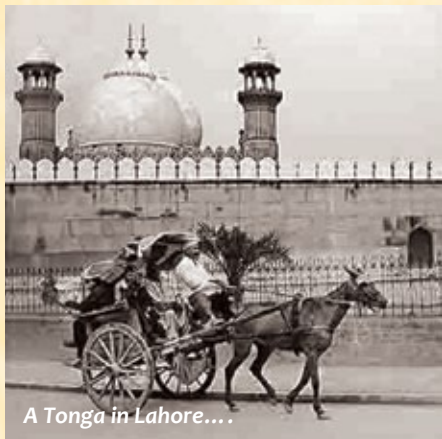
Since I was a little girl, he had pointed to the wall next to our house and said our “home” is there, across the border in India. When I crossed Wagah on foot ten years ago and boarded the bus later, I was surprised as to how close Amritsar was and a bit disappointed that my grandfather had failed to come this close to rediscover his own home. He later confessed that he found the journey too burdensome to make. The journey across Wagah took several hours because

the border authorities thoroughly inspected every bag and passport.

But after the border crossing, everything was the same, except that many more turbans appeared on the horizon and young women were seen riding on scooters. We were all young women in our teens and early twenties. There was a loud gasp or sigh at everything different or similar. The boards in Gurmukhi were fascinating and the *sarson ke khait* reminded us of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*.

Most people who have moved between the two Punjabs are awe-struck by their resemblance. Particularly when the journey is made on a train or bus and one can see the lush fields. The food, the language and everything else are so alike that the Radcliffe Line just doesn't make sense. The final question everyone asks is: why the partition?





A Tonga in Lahore....

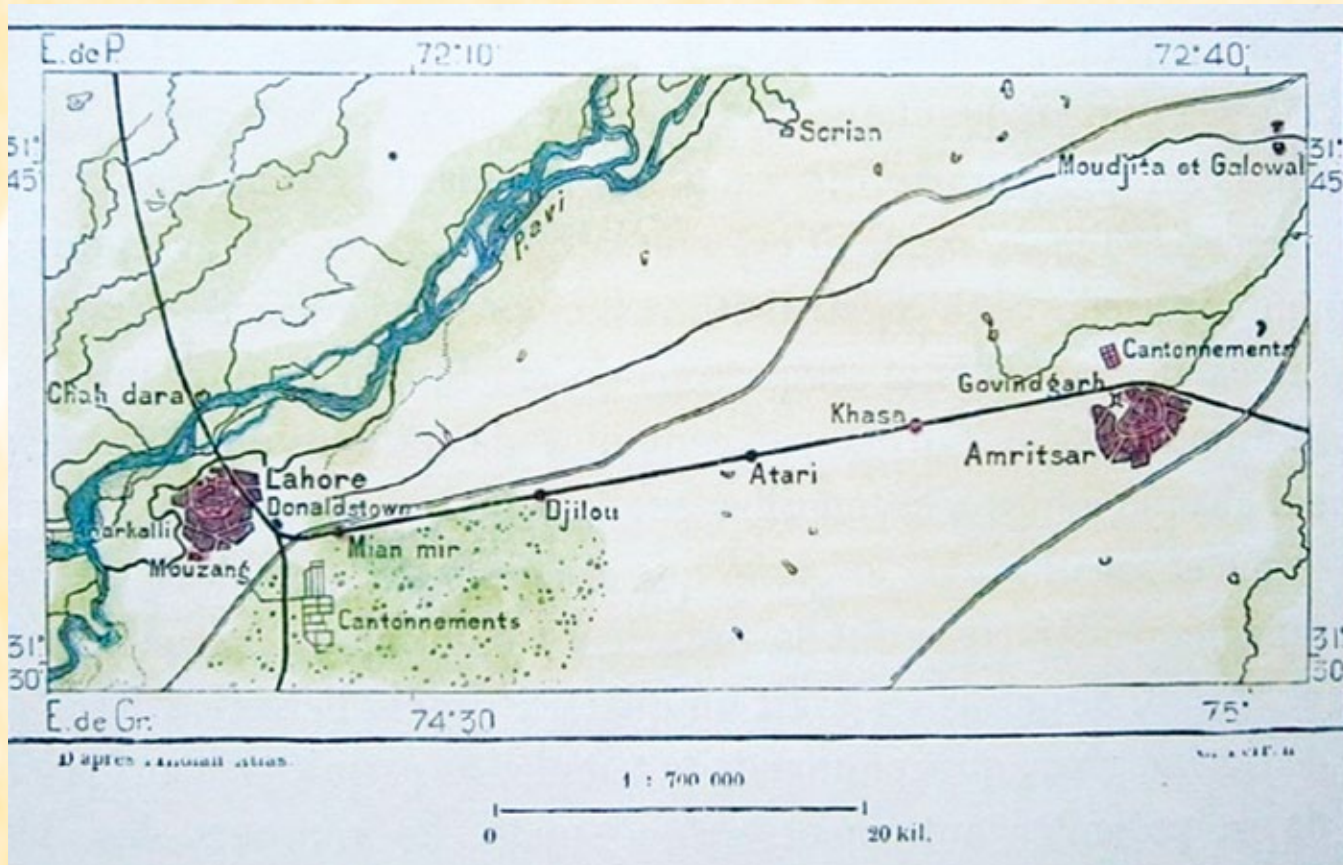


.... and at Amritsar



Lahore and Amritsar are the most famous twin cities in India, perhaps in the world, partly because of their tragic separation in 1947. They are just 50 kilometres apart and a fast train like the ones we see in Tokyo would transport us from one city to another in just 10 or 15 minutes.

The cities have a similar ethos, of course, as they are both Punjabi and geographically extremely close. The two cities have a comparable layout: old walled cities to defend from invaders and a dozen gates to protect those cities. Lahore has the Badshahi mosque, Shahi Qilla and old city at the one corner while Amritsar has the Harmandir Sahib or Golden Temple and the Gobindgarh Fort on the other.



Nostalgia captured in an old French map, depicting the twin cities of Lahore and Amritsar connected by the Grand Trunk Road (Courtesy: Harleen Singh)



They even have the same Mori and Lahori Gates in their old cities. Both the Shah Alam Market in Lahore and the Hall Bazaar in Amritsar were badly affected during the 1947 disturbances. During the partition of India, both Lahore and Amritsar witnessed deadly riots. And much of the migration

Author Pran Neville, best known for his book called *Lahore: A Sentimental Journey*, told me he used to study at the Government College at Lahore and cycle to Amritsar to watch a film or two. Twin cities are always special. I was sent to Minneapolis as an ICFJ fellow in 2015. Minneapolis is a twin city of St



Entrance to Hall Bazaar, Amritsar



Sheranwala Gate, Lahore

took place towards refugee camps established in the two cities. The two cities were the largest commercial hubs in the pre-partition Punjab. And they served as home to all the three major, religious communities—the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Though the Muslims had a slight majority, the population was evenly balanced.

Paul's. And I often wondered what it would be like if Amritsar too was a lazy train ride away. We could have crossed over, visited the Golden Temple and returned. Friendships and professional associations could have been maintained. I could even teach at my grandfather's alma mater, the Khalsa College at Amritsar and return by evening.



Students at Aitchison College, Lahore



Students at Khalsa College, Amritsar



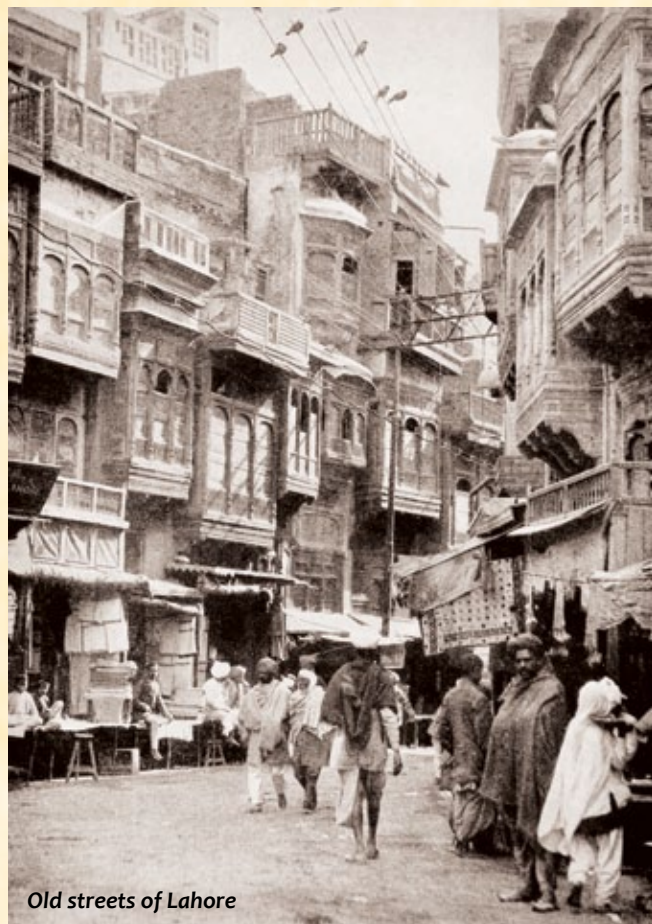
These are urban centres that are close to each other and each grows over time. There are no precise criteria for the definition but a similar administrative setup is obviously required. In some cases, the cities grew into each other, defying borders and barriers and losing their individual identity. This is impossible in Lahore and Amritsar's case, of course, considering there is a barbed border between the two. Still, from 1947 to 1965, there was no formal border and people commuted back and forth between the two towns. Businessmen came to Shah Alam Market and Urdu Bazaar for buying and selling.



A cluster of authors moved from Lahore to other parts of India in 1947. This included Amrita Pritam, Balwant Singh, Khushwant Singh, Krishen Chander and Pran Neville who shifted to other parts of India, mostly Delhi and East Punjab. Similarly, writers from Amritsar moved to Lahore because of its status as the cultural hub of the Punjab. Also, of course, transition to the closest Punjabi city must have been that much easier.

Punjabi poets Saifuddin Saif, Ahmed Rahi and Firozdin Sharaf moved from Amritsar to Lahore. Ahmed Rahi's poetry collection *Trinjan* became a seminal Punjabi work regarding the women victims of partition violence. Manto was born in Samrala but his Kashmiri family hailed from Amritsar. He too famously adopted Lahore as his home after leaving Bombay. So did MD Taseer. These authors did not just enrich Lahore's literary landscape, but also fuelled the *Progressive Writers Movement*.

Bhisham Sahni (brother of actor Balraj Sahni) and Dalbir Chetan moved from Lahore to Amritsar.



I am slowly discovering their contribution to my mother language Punjabi, a language now as divided as the region itself.

However, the case for their retaining the status of twin cities very much still stands. The two towns, Lahore being the much larger counterpart, should have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the city governments. They should aid residents or





*Entrance to the Town Hall at Amritsar, location of the Partition Museum*

select groups from each town with the visa process, particularly the students, sportsmen, and artists to come on an exchange in the city which is next door. There is so much goodwill and shared history to explore. Of course, this requires a lot of will-power given that even the Wagah-Attari bus service is often closed and ties between India and Pakistan are very tense. But if a group of people, particularly youngsters work on increasing cooperation, it might be fruitful, particularly when Indo-Pak relations become more relaxed.

There is great need to reignite this association between Amritsar and Lahore. Both sides of the Punjab are now dominated by just one religion and have lost the multi-ethnic/multi-religious fabric that existed for centuries before partition. Today, Punjabi on both the sides has a different script and diction. The Pakistani side has the Persian and Shahmukhi script while the Indian side has the Gurmukhi script plus Hindi vocabulary infused into it. There is a need for cooperation in Punjabi literature and an exchange of ideas between artists and authors from both the sides.



*Entrance to the Lahore Museum*

and that too thanks to the improved relations with India during the Musharraf era. Eventually, that too withered away and we were all left in limbo. I felt some fraction of the pain my grandfather must have felt when he was forced to leave his hometown. The sense of a loss and enforced displacement is with me to this day.

Hopefully, a new wave of cooperation and friendly ties will open new doors to our past and heritage and bring in a bright future.

*First published in 'Daily Times'*



# Amritsar and Lahore: Hockey Champions of the World!



*Images from the Internet*

Legends were born on the playing fields of Aitchison College in Lahore and Khalsa College at Amritsar which, in the 1920s and 1930s, produced some of the world's finest hockey players. The Indian hockey team continuously won

the gold medal at the Olympics in 1928 (Amsterdam) 1932 (Los Angeles) and 1936 (Berlin), many of the Olympians being from these two reputed institutions in (undivided) India. There were no Olympics over the next eight years because of the Second World



*Aitchison College Hockey Team: Winners of the Hot Weather Tournament 1946  
Sitting: Nazar Mohd, S Sham Singh, Mr JD Ward (Principal), Azhar H Sadik (Captain),  
S Harnam Singh (President), M.Haneef, Ranbir Singh Bajwa*

*Standing: Ahmad Nawaz, Anantpal Singh, Younis H Sadik, Kerinder Singh, Bhopinder Singh, Mir Afzal, Anoop Singh, Nur Zaman*





*Khalsa College Hockey Team 1942: Champions Punjab University Tournament*

*Sitting: Santokh Singh, Manna Singh, S Jodh Singh (Principal), Ranjodh Singh (Captain), Harbail Singh, Maqbool Hasmat.  
Standing: Himmat Singh, M Samdami, Ram Sarup, Kuldip Singh, Gurdip Singh, Rajinder Singh, Amar Singh, Ghulam Qadir, Sher Singh,  
Last row: Abdul Hamid, Achhar Singh*

War and the first such Olympics thereafter were in 1948 in London, where the legendary Balbir Singh (Senior) won his first Olympic gold medal, having earned his reputation on the hockey grounds of the Khalsa College at Amritsar. He had earlier been playing hockey at Lahore and then took his prowess to Amritsar in 1942 to begin intensive training and practice sessions at Khalsa College which institution had four splendid hockey grounds.

Aitchison (Chiefs) College at Lahore was an elite institution, founded in 1886 with the object of educating “The relatives of the Ruling Chiefs of the Punjab, youths of good family, and the minors under the guardianship of the Court of Wards.” The college had excellent playing fields and natural surroundings, with professional coaching and sports facilities.

Not too far a distance away, Khalsa College at Amritsar was a most premier institution of higher learning established in 1892, “an institution to achieve high degree of excellence of mind and body for the welfare of the youth”. Just an hour or so away by bicycle, the College would regularly host friendly hockey matches against Aitchison College teams which, combined, once boasted half a dozen Olympians!

Many veterans recollected with great nostalgia those halcyon years when hockey teams would mount their bicycles and ride along the Grand Trunk (GT) Road to each other’s colleges for a vigorous game and then cycle back home, such was the great sporting spirit that prevailed.

*(Images courtesy Aitchison College Archives,  
via Umer Zaman Khan from Lahore and  
Satyajit Singh Majithia, Khalsa College Amritsar)*



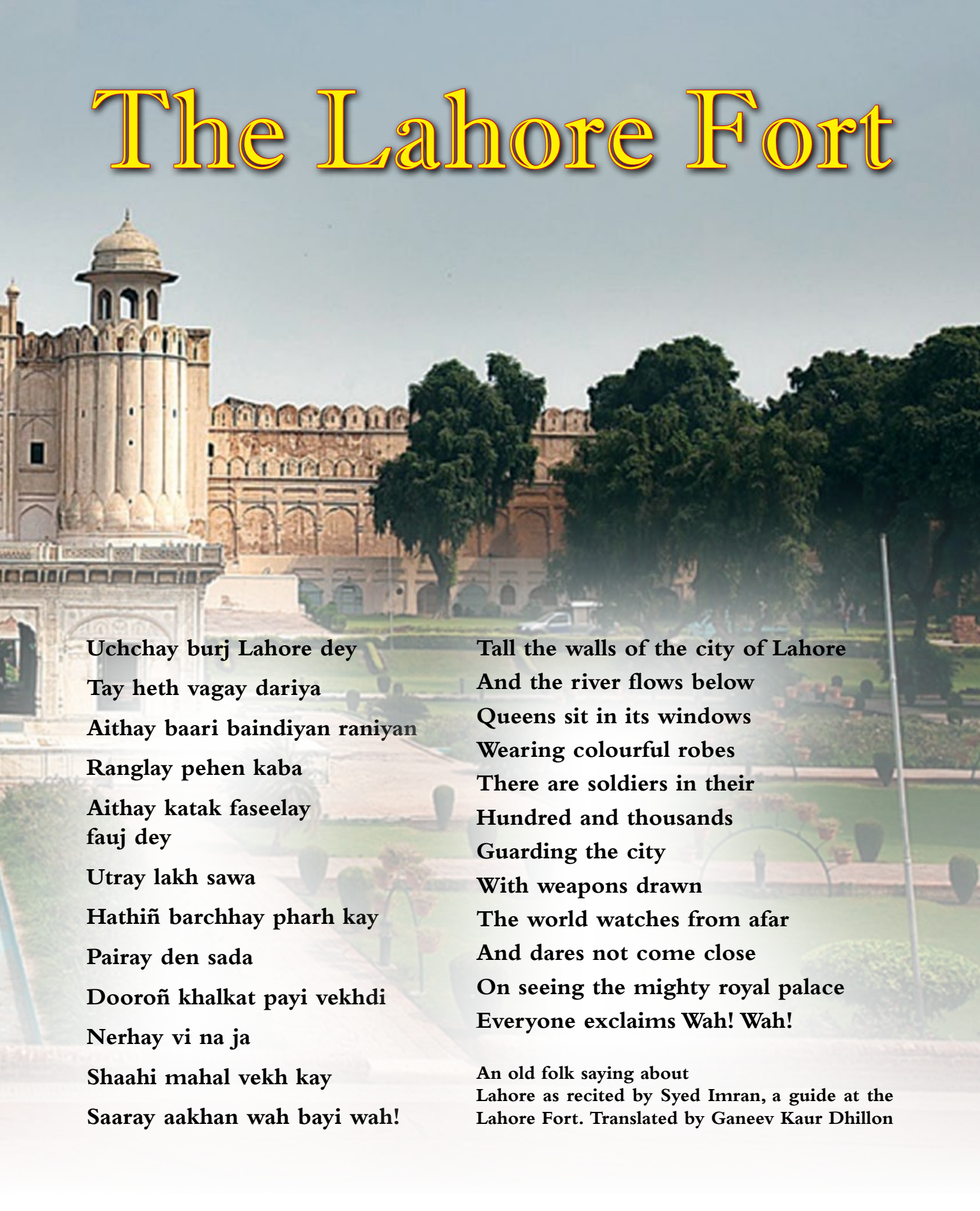
# Wah! Wah!

ਉੱਚੇ ਬੁਰਜ ਲਾਹੌਰ ਦੇ  
ਤੇ ਹੇਠ ਵਗੇ ਦਰਿਆ  
ਇੱਥੇ ਬਾਰੀ ਬਹਿੰਦੀਆਂ ਰਾਣੀਆਂ  
ਰੰਗਲੇ ਪਹਿਨ ਕਬਾ  
ਇੱਥੇ ਕਟਕ ਫਸੀਲੇ ਫੌਜ ਦੇ  
ਉੱਤਰੇ ਲੱਖ ਸਵਾ  
ਹੱਥੀਂ ਬਰਛੇ ਫੜ ਕੇ  
ਪਹਿਰੇ ਦੇਣ ਸਦਾ  
ਦੂਰੋਂ ਖਲਕਤ ਪਈ ਵੇਖਦੀ  
ਨੇੜੇ ਵੀ ਨਾਂ ਜਾ  
ਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਮਹਲ ਵੇਖ ਕੇ  
ਸਾਰੇ ਆਖਣ ਵਾਹ ਬਈ ਵਾਹ!

ਅੱਜੇ ਭੁਰਜ ਲਾਹੌਰ ਰੇ  
ਤੇ ਝਿੱਝੇ ਗਏ ਦਰਿਆ  
ਐਥੇ ਬਾਰੀ ਬਿੰਦੀਆਂ ਰਾਣੀਆਂ  
ਰੰਗਲੇ ਪਹਿਨ ਕਬਾ  
ਐਥੇ ਕੱਟਕ ਫਸੀਲੇ ਫੌਜ ਦੇ  
ਅੱਤਰੇ ਲੱਖ ਸਵਾ  
ਐਥੇ ਬਰਛੇ ਪੈਰ ਕੇ  
ਪਹਿਰੇ ਦਿਨ ਸਦਾ  
ਦੂਰੋਂ ਖਲਕਤ ਪਈ ਵੇਖਦੀ  
ਨੇੜੇ ਵੀ ਨਾਂ ਜਾ  
ਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਮਹਲ ਵੇਖ ਕੇ  
ਸਾਰੇ ਆਖਣ ਵਾਹ ਬਈ ਵਾਹ!



# The Lahore Fort



Uchchay burj Lahore dey  
Tay heth vagay dariya  
Aithay baari baindiyan raniyan  
Ranglay pehen kaba  
Aithay katak faseelay  
fauj dey  
Utray lakh sawa  
Hathiñ barchhay pharh kay  
Pairay den sada  
Dooron khalkat payi vekhdi  
Nerhay vi na ja  
Shaahi mahal vekh kay  
Saaray aakhan wah bayi wah!

Tall the walls of the city of Lahore  
And the river flows below  
Queens sit in its windows  
Wearing colourful robes  
There are soldiers in their  
Hundred and thousands  
Guarding the city  
With weapons drawn  
The world watches from afar  
And dares not come close  
On seeing the mighty royal palace  
Everyone exclaims Wah! Wah!

An old folk saying about  
Lahore as recited by Syed Imran, a guide at the  
Lahore Fort. Translated by Ganeev Kaur Dhillon



Amy Singh's initiative

# Letters of Love & Longing “To Lahore, from Chandigarh”



## Daak: To Lahore with Love

Dear Lahore,

How are you?

Let's trip in time, shall we?

I was 14 years old, half-tucked in this small bed in this huge hospital of Amritsar,

Trying to tune into radio stations to keep me company  
When I first stumbled upon the fearless, seditious radio waves of yours.

*Main hairaan thi, aur behadd khush bhi*

*Ki in tarangon ko nahin rok paayi Wagah-Attari ki koi sarhad.*

*Mujhay yaqeen tha is ke baad agar jeena hai, toh isi tarah –  
Awaara, bey-baaq, bey-khauf jeena hai.*

After that every night, your radio sang songs of my heart  
And I went to bed with City FM 89 putting me to sleep.

I'm 26 now.

This morning I woke up with Lahore Radio paying tributes to Mehdi Hassan

So I quickly took a postcard from my collection and wrote:

*Kis kis ko bataaeyingay judaii ka sabab hum*

*Tu mujhse khafa hai toh zamaanay kay liyey aa –*

Addressed it to General Post Office,

Shahrah-e-Qaid-e-Azam,

near Anarkali, Mall Road, Lahore, 54000.

I posted it on my way here, and I wonder what will happen when it reaches you,

Lahore,

Will you write me back?

*Dekho na, main sarhadon ko saraab kar aayi hoon*

*Faraz ney kaha tha*

*So dosti ka haath barha aayi hoon,*

Lahore, will you hold it?

*Eik dost nay phone par kaha,*

*Amy, julaayi mein naatak lekar Lahore ja rahein hain*

*Tumhaaray liye kuchh ley aaiyein kya?*

*Mainay kaha: Lahore hi ley aa saktay ho kya?"*

So he laughed. And I said:

No, I do need a few things actually:

*Thodi mitti jilaani park ki*

*Jisay main rose garden ki har kyaari mein chirhkha dena chahti hoon*

*Thoda paani Raavi ka*

*Jisay Sutlej main mila kar Punjab ko uskay kho chukay*

*maeenay lautana chahti hoon*



Kaan laga kar sun-na wahan Bhagat Singh, Rajguru,  
Sukhdev kay Inqilab kay naaron ki goonj hai  
Main usay apney galay mein sama lena chahti hoon.  
Eik gaon hai meray daari ka jahan main kabhi nahin gayi.  
Wahaan kay kisi buzurg kay haathon ka saaya apnay sar par  
orhaa lena chahti hoon.

Noor Jehan ki gazalein, kuchh an-sunay lok geet jo sham  
hotay hi jawaan ho jaatay hongay  
Unhein bhi apni zabaan pe saja ke ley aana  
Main bhi unhein gungunaana chahti hoon.  
Allama Iqbal ki qabr sey koi phool bhi ley aana  
Main usay Surjit Patar ki kitaab mein sajaana chahti hoon  
Aur suna hai ki Androon-e-Lahore ki baaz galliyan itni tang  
hain

Ki agar eik jaanib sey mard aur doosri taraf sey aurat aa rahi  
ho

Toh darmiyaan sirf nikaah ki gunjaaish bachti hai  
Main uss gunjaaish ko bhi azmaana chahti hoon  
Aur...iss sey pehlay main kuchh aur kahti  
Meray dost nay mujhay toktay huay kaha,  
Samajh gaye Amy, samajh gaye  
Lahore hi ley aana parhega  
Lahore hi ley aonga.

So tell me Lahore,

Will you come?

I will keep the door open.

I will lay the table with home-made aloo-paranthas

Lahore, will you come and dine with me?

There isn't anything I can send you which isn't already  
yours

Kyunki eidharlay Punjab da saara kuch tay odharlay Punjab  
da vi saara kuch

Mainu haalay vi apni dadi dey sanduq'ch paye ohna dariyan-  
bistareyaan varga lagdai

Jisdai bacheyan di poori malkiat hundi hai

So tell me Lahore

Apni jaaidaad ka lutf utha lein

Yeh jo saari laqeerein hain, hayal darmiyaan

Inko mita lein

Lahore-Attari ki lohey se bani sakht oonchi diwaaron main

Hum donon kuch masoom bolti khirkiyaan bana lein

In hope of a day when this letter will no longer need

An international postal stamp

Chandigarh toun, Lahore waali

**Amy**

**A**my Singh had been writing letters addressed to the GPO at Lahore for three years and had received no response, before she went public with her initiative. In August 2019, she addressed Lahore directly in a poem she shared on social media. She also encouraged people to send letters of love, harmony and hope to Pakistan, expressing the spirit of oneness, endorsing cross border love and commonality in the time of divisive politics and communal hatred. The post went viral and her initiative, *Daak: To Lahore with Love*, exploded. People from both sides of the border began writing to each other via letters, emails and social media posts!

Amy had no direct connection with Lahore but as a young child, she had heard her grandfather's fond recollections of the city and grew up holding the passed-down memory of Lahore close to her heart. In 2016, as India-Pakistan relations reached a low point, an eatery in Chandigarh changed its name from Lahore Chowk to Lucknow Chowk. This small act moved Amy to write her first letter to Lahore. She wrote whatever caught her fancy, reflecting her mood at that time - a one-sided epistolary romance with a city that she had never visited and where she knew no one. But such is the power of Lahore – of which it is said that

*Jis Lahore nahin vekhya oho jammeya hi nahin!*



Amy Singh is a poet, activist and teacher, based out of Chandigarh. She strongly believes that writing can and will bring change! You can follow the initiative @daak\_tolahorewithlove on Instagram



# The Splendour of Amritsari Textiles

It might be regarded as the undisputed food capital of North India today, but once upon a time, Amritsar was a major textile trading centre too, as Jasvinder Kaur writes



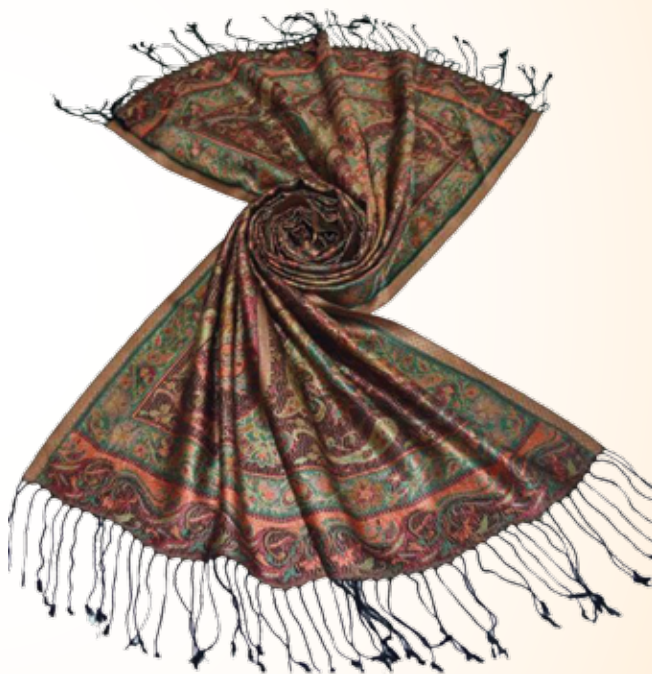
*Kashmir-style embroidery in a floor spread, made in Amritsar*

Around 200 years ago, even as Maharaja Ranjit Singh, aided by his legendary French generals, was consolidating his kingdom, the latter were introducing rich northern Indian textiles to Europe. At the heart of this trade was Amritsar, the undisputed food capital of North India today, but a major centre for textiles in the not too distant past.

Amritsar, for many centuries, has in one way or the other been associated with textiles, either as a producer or as a trading centre. In fact, it became

a centre for production of shawls and was at the forefront of exporting these to Europe during Ranjit Singh's rule.

Kashmir had become a part of the Sikh kingdom in 1819 after Ranjit Singh had incorporated this area into his Empire. Shortly afterwards, in 1822, Ranjit Singh engaged officers from Napoleon's army,



Jean-Francois Allard and Jean-Batiste Ventura, as his generals. But beyond soldiering, by 1835 these generals were also exporting shawls to Europe, with Amritsar becoming the centre of the Kashmiri shawl trade.

Weavers and dyers from Kashmir settled in the plains and hills of Punjab during this period. One of the factors that pushed them to do so was famine and Kashmiri colonies were soon established in the Punjab, particularly in Amritsar and Ludhiana and also Narpur and Tiloknath, in what is today's Kangra of Himachal Pradesh.





A velvet saree blouse. (Early 20th Century.)

Shawls made in Amritsar—*jamavar* or *kani* and *amli*—were of high quality. Writing in 1872, Baden Powell mentions that shawls from Amritsar were close in quality to those from Kashmir. The striped shawls were called *jamavar* or *kitraz*, and were particularly popular in Iran and Turkey. These were made by the complicated *kani* technique. As these were used to make *jamias*, the word *jamavar* was also used for them. The *amli* shawls, on the other hand, were embroidered Kashmiri shawls.

### A complex weave

Weaving of *kani* shawls in the early 19th-century Kashmir was a slow and laborious process. A single shawl could take up to 18 months or more. Owing to their high demand, a method was



soon devised to weave the shawl in pieces on two or more looms. This way, the shawl was made in much lesser time. These pieces were then handed over to the *rafugar* or *darner*. He would join them with such precision that it was hard to tell what was original. William Moorcroft, an English explorer mentioned this in his writing in 1821 and called it “a recent innovation.” He undertook a detailed study of the shawl industry between 1820 and 1823 and wrote an account that has been preserved at the India Office Library, now part of the British Library in London.

Early 19th century saw the beginning of the *amli* or embroidered shawls. These were introduced in Kashmir at the instigation of Khwaja Yusaf, an Armenian, who came to Kashmir in 1803 as an agent of the Constantinople Trading Company. He saw a chance to produce the embroidered shawls in a much shorter time than *kani* or *jamavar*. Since these shawls did not fall into the category of woven shawls, he was also able to escape the duties levied on *kani* shawls. His company thus made huge profits and ushered in embroidered shawls. This also pushed the demand for plain *pashmina* shawls which were then used as a base for *amli* shawls.

By the third quarter of the 19th century, the important centres of weaving plain *pashmina* were not only in Kashmir but also in Ludhiana and Amritsar, the holy city becoming a major source. At an art exhibition held in Lahore in 1864, shawls - *pashmina*, *amli*, and *kani* or *jamavar* - from Kashmir, Amritsar and Delhi were duly exhibited.

With time, the shawl industry declined and the carpet industry came up to fill the gap. Trade in carpets rose partly on the ruins of the *pashmina* shawl trade. By 1911, Amritsar was exporting carpets worth Rs. 5 lakh which picked up at steady pace after the ‘Great Depression’. Among other specialities made in Amritsar were different styles of embroideries. Again Powell, in 1872, writes about Lahore and Amritsar “as the centres for gold embroidery or *salma* work”. Amritsar was also producing some of the finest *phulkaris*, some of which were even exported to America.

During the British Raj, the most important item of import were piece goods, with Amritsar trading in silk and woollen cloth. Silk trade centre was located at Batti Hattan, later shifted to Katra Ahluwalia, which,





The way we were: Bridegroom in resplendent achkan in the Punjab of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

in turn, became the centre of trading in piece goods. Sant Ram Reshamwala was one of the importers of silk from Europe.

The fabric imported in early 20th century did not just include pure silk, but also artificial silk from Japan, Italy and France. This was cheaper and came in attractive colours. In the 1930s, majority of silk was imported from Japan, so much so that many firms from Amritsar opened offices in Japan. From Europe, cottons with European motifs like roses were imported.

From Amritsar, the fabrics made inroads into other parts of Punjab and soon became popular with women, who used them to make suits and *dupattas*. The designs, patterns and textures were different from what was locally available. Women here knew

them by various names like *Lady Minton* (probably Lady Hamilton), *Malaysia*, *Dil-ki-pyaas*, *Aap-ka-nasha*, *Do-ghorae-di-boski* (probably from China), *Shangai* (probably from Shanghai). The most famous among these was the *Do-ghorae-di-boski* or double horse *boski* from China. The brand still sells on [alibaba.com](http://alibaba.com).

### Fashion fabrics from parachutes

In the Punjab, another interesting fabric that came from abroad and became very popular among women was the one used for making parachutes! Known as 'parachute cloth', it was not sold as continuous yardage, but in pieces. The stitched parachute would probably be opened up and sold in triangular pieces or *chattrian* (umbrellas) about 6-7 feet wide and 10 feet long.





These were probably surplus parachutes that were cleared for sale after World War II was over in 1945. During initial years of the war, the material used for making parachutes was silk. After America joined the war at the end of 1941, the Allies used parachutes made of nylon as they were now unable to import silk from Japan.

In Britain, there have been many stories of women making their wedding dresses, blouses, *petticoats* with the RAF parachute material. These were white, lime green and sometimes orange in colour. It was, however, not an easy material to get as it was illegal to obtain this while the war was on. Even the used parachute had to be turned in to the authorities for investigation. Women in England however would use any material available to them during the war for their wedding dresses, whether it was parachute silk or blackout material, which had been duly bleached.

Many fashion fabrics that were used by women in the Punjab before India's Independence were used as a base for doing *salma* or gota work. Velvet, another popular fabric, was used not only for garments but also for *palangposh* (bedcover) or other household articles like cushions. All fabrics sold during the British Raj were available at shops in big cities. And Amritsar, being a trading centre, played an important part in the textile trade and in distributing these to other parts of the Punjab.

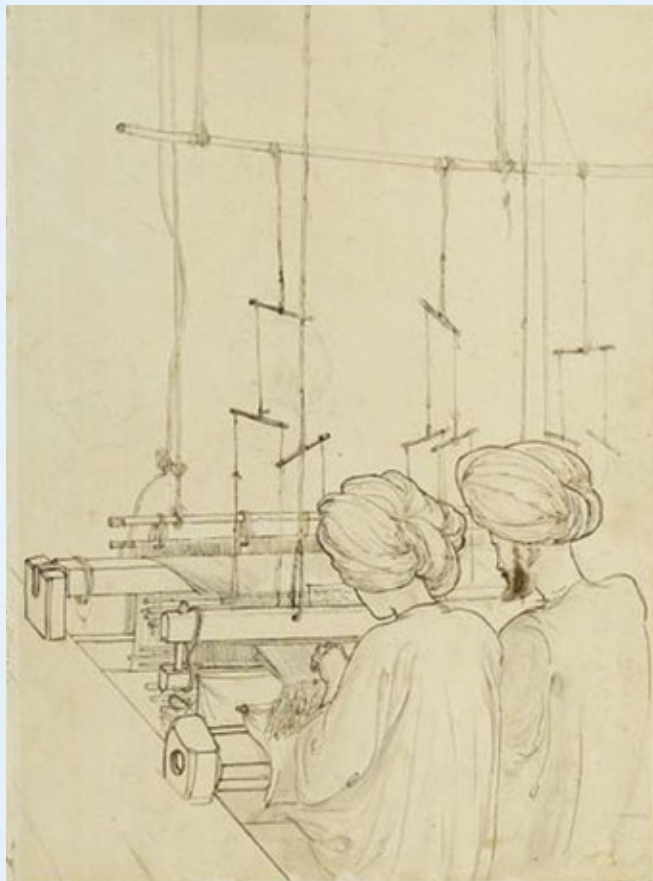


*Jasvinder Kaur who has worked as a consultant with Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, is also author of the book: 'Attire and Textiles of Punjab – Influences of the British Raj'.*

*Images from author and the internet*



# Interwoven History of Lahore



Two turbaned men seen weaving a shawl on a loom. The faint outlines of two more men are seen at far end of the loom

Often referred to as the heart of undivided India, Lahore holds a unique place in the imagination of people and poets, even today. The 17<sup>th</sup> century poet Jatmal Nihal in his poem *Lahore ki Ghazal* says that when he saw Lahore he forgot all the other cities. Others have noted that this was not an exaggeration as Lahore's size, wealth and population in that period was unrivalled by any other city in the East or West. Nihal, in his ode to Lahore, not only immortalised the scenes of the city, but his 110 lines provide a vivid description of city-life under the reign of Emperor Jehangir, and the various occupations and activities including brisk trade in commodities carried out in the city. Traded goods consisted chiefly

of textiles including Chenile or velvet (a tufted fabric with a cotton base), *dariyai*, *dhankuti*, *zarbaft*, *atlas zari*, *dulicha* or carpets and Indigo.

Beginning with the reign of Akbar (1556-1605) who abandoned his architectural marvel of Fatehpur Sikri and established Lahore as his capital (1584-1598), the city flourished. Its fortunes and its preeminence as the centre of the Mughal aesthetic continued through the reigns of Jahangir and Nur Jahan (reign 1598-1627) who are buried here and Shah Jahan (reign 1627-1658) who appointed his beloved son, the crown prince Dara Shikoh, as the governor of Lahore.

*Lahore became the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Kingdom till its annexation by the British in 1846, but that's a different story: Ed.*

This article is an attempt to provide a brief overview of the history of key textiles and textile related goods, once produced in or traded in Lahore, from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, including carpets, fabrics, embroideries and Indigo-an essential ingredient for the global textile industry.

## Luxury Underfoot

Today, carpets from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries may not have survived intact, but their fragments and evidence from later periods shows that Lahore once was not



Carpet with Palm Trees, Ibexes, and Birds (late 16<sup>th</sup>-early 17<sup>th</sup> century)



only a major trading but also a manufacturing centre of carpets of the finest varieties. Although carpets were produced in the pre-Mughal and Sultanate periods, it would be fair to say that it was under Akbar that, for the first time, carpet production was brought into a court workshop or *karkhana*. Evidence from the *Akbarnama* (the illustrated court chronicle completed in 1590) and the documentation of his administration in the *Ain-e-Akbari* by Abul Fazal records that the emperor was intimately involved in the design process, reviewed paintings on a weekly basis and even tried his own hand at the various arts and crafts in the royal *karkhanas*.

The royal Mughal ateliers had attracted a number of Persian artists, artisan designers and craftsmen, who had begun to flee Persia, beginning with emperor Humayun's return to the Delhi throne in 1555. Carpet patterns appear to have transitioned from illuminations on paper, which carried a unique Persian aesthetic, and illustrated manuscripts produced at the time perhaps served as reference tools for the artists across mediums, during Akbar's reign. Thus carpet-weaving centres were set up in Lahore, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri. As noted by the Jesuit Montserrat, a *Farrashkhana* or a carpet and soft furnishing repository existed at the court with numerous types and designs of carpets for the royal palaces along with *qanaats* (tents) and *masnads* (floor coverings).

Mughal buildings are largely built in red sandstone and white marble. During Shah Jahan's time, marble floors with running water underneath were a cooling device for the hot summer months but the winter season meant that the floors needed warmth and layers of covering. The harsh winters in Lahore, Delhi and Agra had led to the creation of woollen and pashmina tufted carpets on a cotton or silk warp, woven in Kashmir and Lahore, just like the enormous shawls or *do-shalas* as favoured by Akbar.

The tradition continued under Jehangir who ruled from 1605-1627, when landscapes replete with animal forms and scrolling vines appeared in carpets, just as they became notable in albums commissioned by him and manuscripts of the time, including his biography.

The Mughal style of carpets inextricably linked with Lahore, which is further substantiated by the



Carpet with Niche and Flower Design (mid-17th century)

label 'Lahori' attached to several floral patterned rugs in the collection of the Jaipur Palace. Scholars have studied this attribution, beginning with AJD Campbell of the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1929, who listed the entire collection of more than 200 carpets bought by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh (1688-1743). This was followed by Beatty in 1972 and finally Dan Walker who built on those two works, while publishing the catalogue 'Flowers Underfoot' which is perhaps the most comprehensive exhibition on sub-continental carpets ever to be staged anywhere and held at the Metropolitan Museum in 1998.

It is notable that the first shipment from the port of Surat in 1615 by the East India Company (EIC) to England was that of carpets of varying sizes from Lahore. That these were fine and few and took a long time to make is something that eluded the English traders, as more and more wishlists of large format carpets began. Accounts by Thomas Roe, first ambassador of the EIC also notes his eagerness to acquire the highly desirable 'Persian carpets from Lahore', by which it is safe to believe that he was referring to carpets made in Lahore, of Persian designs, which subsequently popularly became known as the 'Indo-Persian' carpets. One of the earliest and of particular note is the 'Girdler's carpet', with a pattern of scrolling vines and a court of arms, which was commissioned in Lahore 1630-32, for the Worshipful Company of Girdlers in London. That it found its place on *top* of a table is its other distinction. In contrast to the Eastern practice of carpets as floor



coverings, tent partitions or wall hangings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the English primarily used these to cover tables and trunks, while the cold stone floors of their enormous stately homes remained covered in coir matting, till the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century!

Indian carpets were at their zenith during the period from 1550 to 1740. Though it is not easy to find as many dexterous weavers in Lahore today, the flower gardens that were created may now be seen across museums in the Western world. Significant among them are the collections at the Textile Museum of the George Washington University in Washington D.C., the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Austrian museum in Vienna and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Antecedents of the carpet, textile and shawl weavers in Lahore came from Persia, Central Asia and Kashmir. The carpet patterns of the *bagh*, the *shikargah* and other animals and later period geometric patterns, permeated into other woven textiles. Luxurious silk velvets, at times with golden warp threads in a recessed field have also been attributed to the Mughal workshops, and the earliest Safavid inspired figurative velvet panels, could also have been produced in the royal Lahore *karkhana*, much like the carpets. Many floral motifs of later velvet panels are also reminiscent of those found on 'Lahori' carpets.

Whereas the woven shawls of Punjab (Lahore & Amritsar) never quite reached the quality or status of luxuriant *pashminas* from Kashmir, a plain field woolen shawl with a silk edge is catalogued in Forbes Watson's assemblage of 1867, as 'woven in Lahore'. Though none of the painstaking and time-consuming multi-weft *kani* weaves *a-la Kashmir* were ever attributed to Lahore, hand-embroidery on shawls, and later, on robes, seems to have gained favor in the two cities, particularly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and patrons appear to have included both Muslim and Sikh nobility. The embroidery includes the Kashmiri style *ari* work in thread, *dori* or *marori* (twisted wire) work in gold *zari* thread with *kani* shawl like motifs of *buteh* (cypress tree), *paan* (beetle leaf) and *kairi* (raw mango) popularly referred to as the 'Paisley'. Museum specimens at the V&A also include a woollen robe with figures, birds and even a court scene embroidered with *kora* or floss silk.

The city of Amritsar gained more prominence in Ranjit Singh's reign (1801-1839) as a production and export centre for woven shawl. Shortly after he conquered Kashmir in 1819, two French generals Jean-Francois Allard and Jean-Batiste Ventura joined his army. By 1835, these generals were exporting shawls to Europe, and Amritsar had become the centre of the Kashmiri shawl trade just as its sister-city Lahore became the centre of Indigo export to Europe. It would be more than a coincidence, as noted by Majid Sheikh, that 'Serge de Nime', a canvas-like fabric woven in the city of Nime in France, used largely for uniforms and sailor's attire, and a precursor of the blue denim we know today, was dyed with Indigo from India.

### The trade of textile materials: Indigo

Indigo trade in Lahore was big business in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and traders of the material abounded in the city, making it the greatest and the oldest export commodity. According to the city's historian Majid Sheikh, markings on graves from the pre-Sikh period in the area around the Nila Gumbad at the edge of Anarkali Bazaar, carry descriptions that provide evidence of these belonging to 'indigo planters'.

In 1611, William Finch, an English trader, visited Lahore with the sole purpose of buying indigo for industrial use in England, which by his own account, after deducting all expenses including transportation along the River Ravi from Lahore (through Multan and Karachi via the Middle East) to England, made him a neat 400 percent profit!

Astonishingly, it was Finch who for the first time wrote about Anarkali, the beautiful courtesan of Lahore, who was allegedly ordered by emperor Akbar to be buried alive. It is thought that Finch heard the fable on the streets of Lahore and from other Indigo traders, for whom such a court scandal was no less than 'breaking news' of its time.

*Nili Gali* inside Lohari Gate of the walled city still exists, where 'neel' (ultramarine) is sold. This is the same location where, once, one of the world's largest indigo markets existed. Although it is another matter that none of this was grown in or around Lahore, but the superior quality of indigo from the Punjab was named *Lahori* as its round balls yielded much more



pigment than the flat caked variety of *Sarkhej* (grown in the namesake town near Ahmedabad in Gujrat), which had nominal amounts of sand intermixed. *Lahori* commanded the higher price in Europe, but it cost more to put on the market and the variation in Indian prices was the principal factor in determining the quantity of each brand to be exported by the EIC and the Dutch in any particular year. From development of the export traffic as a whole, indigo clearly stood in first place, as also noted by Sir Thomas Roe and in 1793 rose in excess of £ 3.5 million. Its demand as a dye for woollen textiles in England and as bleach for bright whites made it a covetable item. The EIC and the Dutch tried to corner the lucrative indigo export market, a move which emperor Shah Jahan attempted to thwart by declaring its trade as state-monopoly, but which he had to reverse in a year's time, as the wily foreign traders resorted to price fixing and even managed to garner support from local growers.

During 1886-1895, the export of Indigo from India (the Punjab and Bengal) to the rest of the world was in excess of Rs. 38 million. Soon enough European substitutes and synthetic indigo were discovered and Indigo, planted by the colonials in America and the West Indies, also found its way into European markets. The British who had cornered the indigo trade after capturing the Punjab in 1849, seeing their fortunes dwindle, switched focus towards cotton as primary export from the Punjab from where it became the basis for the industrial revolution in England led by the textile industry.

### The Woven & Embroidered Heritage

Other than carpets and shawls, the woven heritage of Lahore includes handspun and woven fabrics such as the *deriyai*, a shot silk woven using warp and weft of two different brilliant colours, commonly also referred to as *dhoop-chaun*, which was woven on a pit loom. According to textile historians, it was woven with silk from Bokhara and had a distinct stiffness unlike the silk woven with Far Eastern yarn. It was widely used for garments and can be seen in museum specimens as trousers and the lining of robes. Like other woven raw silks including *susi*, it was initially woven on a narrow loom, until the Kasuri or Amritsari loom came into vogue, which allowed for a 30" width.

The *susi*, a cotton-silk not too dissimilar from *Mashru*, was woven in several towns in Punjab until recently, largely for use in women's lower garments, and its brilliant colours are distinctive and close in sensibility to the *lungis* and *lchas* or waistcloths commonly worn by Punjabi men and women. These tend to have a checkered or a striped field with a solid coloured border, at times interrupted with a line of woven motifs in gold thread.

Embroidered cloth with gold and silver was another textile art which Lahore, together with Amritsar, was known for. As a Mughal capital, the royal *karkhanas* in Lahore produced fine embroidered shawls and soft floor furnishings including tents, quilted wall hangings, *masnads*, pillows and bolsters for the palaces and court. These were usually in plush velvet and woven silk, embellished with precious metal wire work. The ceremonial quiver of Maharaja Ranjit Singh commissioned in 1838 to be worn at the wedding of his son Kharrak Singh, which was auctioned in 2018, is attributed to his *toshakhana* or treasury in Lahore, which was where a number of luxurious items continued to be manufactured for royal use. This leather quiver and bow holder is also rendered in velvet with extremely fine *zari* work and gold sequins.

Together with Agra, Benaras, Bhopal, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Surat and Madras, Lahore has been acknowledged as having its own distinct school or individual technique of silver and gold embroidery. Baden Powell, in 1872, wrote about Lahore and Amritsar as the centres for embroidery with gold thread *zari* work, while Birdwood confirmed in 1880 that Lahore together with Delhi was the main



Drawing of a young woman seated on a charpoi, spinning shawl wool on a spinning-wheel (charka). She also holds a baby in her arms at the same time



production centre for gold and silver thread in Northern India.

The 1867 eighteen-volume 'samples' of Forbes Watson for the textile trade outside India, represented Lahore shawls, *khes*, *lunghis*, and block printed fabrics. Lockwood Kipling, curator of the Lahore Museum and Principal of the Mayo School (now National College of the Arts, Lahore) from 1875 until his retirement in 1893, commissioned many embroidered and block printed textiles from towns in Punjab such as Kamalia (today known for its coarse cotton *khaddar* fabric). The prints made in Lahore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were also inspired by Persian *kalamkari* designs, and many bedspreads of fine cotton can still be found in British homes. These complex prints were largely in four colours plus a fifth for the black outline, and the fine blocks used for printing were made with *Shisham* wood. Today printing akin to the Lahore tradition is done in the town of Kahrur Pucca near Bahawalpur.

No account of textiles of the Punjab or Lahore would be complete without a mention of the vibrant *Phulkari* (flower work) embroidery, the earliest mention of which is found in the famous epic of Heer Waris Shah, written in 1766. *Phulkari* was essentially a domestic textile made all over the province. It was an embroidery tradition throughout the Sikh Kingdom extending from Swat and Hazara in the North (in present day Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province) to Rawalpindi, Chakwal, Jehlum, Sialkot, Lahore, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Patiala and Rohtak. The sheen of their threads and the visual impact compelled many observers and textile collectors to take note. Mentioned among others by Flora Annie Steel in 1888, as an endangered textile under threat from imports, it was included by George Watts in a catalogue for the 1903 exhibition which indicated the Hazara *Phulkaris* as "specially worthy of study". Thus the very private labour of love began to be exoticised and commodified and displayed via various world fairs and international industrial exhibitions, beginning around 1864. It is recorded that Kipling commissioned *Phulkaris* for the Lahore Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum collections and a number of them were also shipped out to America.

*Phulkaris* were among the items of personal use that experienced geographic displacement at partition in 1947, however a mixed variety and quality of them were often sold in Lahore by door-to-door vendors till the 1980s. These intricate floss (untwisted) silk embroideries, rendered using *raffu* or darning stitch were originally made by generations of rural and urban women in the family, for trousseaus or as gifts for rituals and special occasions like weddings and births, and never intended to be bought or sold. The *phulkari* motifs vary from animal forms including birds, peacocks and elephants, human figures, household objects and jewelry, to imposing medallions and repetitive geometric shapes made up of vertical and horizontal stitches that inhabit the entire field of the home-woven, narrow width *khaddar* fabric, often dyed with madder or indigo. In some instances, once the embroidery was complete, with the base fabric barely visible, these appeared like golden tapestries. The shiny silk thread was usually in bright fuchsia, red, amber and ivory, with occasional flashes of purple, blue and green, to break the monotony. The patterns are never drawn or printed but the textile is embroidered by counting threads on the reverse of the ground fabric, leaving a long floating stitch on the front.

*Phulkari* has been extensively researched and written about, both from the point of view of 'tradition' as a domestic textile and Punjabi 'heritage'. There have been successful attempts at its revival as an art form on both sides of the present border. Whereas its revival since the 1990s in Pakistan has been outside Punjab mainly in the Hazara region, and in India in Rohtak and Amritsar.

**Phulkari in times to come could end up as the common thread that re-connects the soul of the two Punjabs!**

*Fatma Shah is a freelance consultant with more than 20 years experience in Economic Development and Finance. She occasionally writes about the visual arts and artists, cultural heritage and reviews books in her areas of interest.*





# The Imperatives of Trade



One of the important issues raised at the inauguration ceremony of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor in November 2019 was the vital need to enhance trade links between India and Pakistan in general, and East Punjab and West Punjab in particular. Navjot Singh Sidhu, a close friend of Imran Khan (*seen in photograph at Kartarpur Sahib*), credited by many (especially in Indian Punjab, and large sections of the Sikh diaspora) for giving a fillip to opening of the corridor, had during his speech, urged the Pakistani prime minister to facilitate closer economic linkages between East Punjab and West Punjab.

Navjot Singh Sidhu, while pitching for closer economic ties and more porous borders, stated that this would not just help the bilateral relationship, but also provide landlocked East Punjab access to the markets of Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia.

It would be pertinent to point out that after taking over as Pakistan's Prime Minister, Imran Khan had spoken in favour of bilateral trade with its neighbours, including India. Even when he was the opposition leader, Imran Khan had batted for robust economic ties with India.



Such demands have been made in the recent past too. India's former Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh during an address made in 2007, stated that he dreamt of a day when he would have his breakfast at Amritsar, lunch at Lahore and dinner at Kabul. "That is how my forefathers lived. That is how I want our grandchildren to live".

Interestingly, even after the bitter and acrimonious partition of 1947, for a long time India remained Pakistan's largest trading partner. According to a





USAID Report, *A Primer: Trade Relations between Pakistan and India 1947-2012*, in 1948-1949 India accounted for well over 20% (23.6%) of Pakistan's global exports. India's share of Pakistan's global imports was a staggering 50.6 percent. Pakistan's economic and trade relations with India began to deteriorate as a consequence of acrimony and ultimately, the 1965 war was a game changer not just in terms of its impact on economic linkages. For nearly a decade, bilateral trade between India and Pakistan remained disrupted after 1965, and was resumed only in 1974.

### People to people linkages, religious tourism and economics

In the past, attempts have been made by numerous governments to initiate *Confidence Building Measures*, as well as economic ties not just between the two Punjabs,

but other border provinces as well, however tensions at the national level have acted as a major impediment.

Some of the notable initiatives, pertaining to strengthening linkages between not just the Punjabs, but even other border provinces were initiated during the former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government. This included rail services connecting Munabao (Rajasthan) and Khokhrapar (Sindh) in 2005 and a bus service connecting Amritsar (Punjab, India) with the holy city of Nankana Sahib in Punjab, Pakistan in February 2006. While speaking on the inauguration of the Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus service (which later was stopped as a result of there being very few passengers), Dr. Manmohan Singh hoped that this would pave the way for other people to people and economic linkages.

Pakistan on its part has also been encouraging religious tourism, given that it would benefit its economy. Former President Asif Ali Zardari had stated that while after the Mumbai attacks in 2008, economic ties were disrupted for some time between 2011 to 2014, steps were taken to move beyond people to people linkages to normalise the economic relationship between India and Pakistan. The setting up of an Integrated Check Post at Attari (Indian side of the Wagah-Attari land crossing) was an important step in this direction and, for a while, there was an incremental rise in trade through the land crossing and the tertiary sector of Amritsar also got a boost and land prices in the border districts of Indian Punjab rose. After May 2012, bilateral trade through the Wagah-Attari land crossing nearly doubled.







The Punjab government has also taken up the issue of opening up the Hussainiwala-Kasur border, since there have been demands for the same from both sides. Opening this land crossing will benefit the region of Malwa (Indian Punjab). However, since 2016, after the Uri terror attacks, the bilateral relationship has continuously gone downhill, and people-to-people ties as well as economic links have been directly affected. The links between the two Punjabs have suffered as a result, however with occasional glimmers of hope such as the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor in November 2019.

It is interesting that Pakistan had expressed willingness with regard to including India in the Afghanistan, Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), through which Indian products could pass Pakistani territory and enter Afghanistan. However, the Government of India then refused this offer.

### Kartarpur Corridor and bilateral trade linkages

The decision to go ahead with creating and opening the Kartarpur Corridor in 2018 also raised hopes of closer trade linkages, but the Pulwama terror attack in February 2019 (after which India suspended *Most Favoured Nation* (MFN) status to Pakistan), ensuing tensions and the suspension of trade and people-to-people ties by Pakistan after the revocation of Article 370, took matters back to the worst ever. Bilateral tensions and the lack of trade via the Wagah-Attari land crossing have caused tremendous harm to the border districts in Punjab. Some detailed studies have also shown that families of small traders

and workers have been severely affected. According to a report published by the Bureau of Research on Industry and Economic Fundamentals (BRIEF) in New Delhi, the city of Amritsar itself has been losing some Rs 30 crore annually.

All sections of society are actually losing out as a result of the disruption of trade. According to estimates, the impact of this has been profound. If one were to do a detailed breakdown of the report, 1700 families of traders, 4000 families of those dependent upon trucks for their livelihood, 126 families of

customs house agents, roughly 2,500 families related to labour, 175 families of those running dhabas and stalls and over 30 fuel stations have been directly impacted.

Unfortunately, in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic has led to closure of the Kartarpur Corridor, as well as Wagah-Attari border and even trade with Afghanistan via the land crossing had stopped for some months, but began again in July 2020. Traders from the border belt in Punjab (India) have recently been pitching for revival of bilateral trade between India and Pakistan arguing that if trade with Afghanistan can carry on through the Wagah-Attari land crossing, there was no reason why bilateral trade between India and Pakistan should not be allowed.

### People-People linkages

It is important to be tempered in one's expectations given the complex geopolitical configurations of the region and also bear in mind that aside from the





Kartarpur Corridor and limited people-to-people contacts, both countries have currently little if any engagement. In the past, however, Punjab-Punjab linkages had continued between the peoples even when relations between New Delhi and Islamabad were at least manageable. One must remain optimistic as there are opportunities for both countries to revive engagement. Both India and Pakistan in general, and the Punjabs in particular, are dependent upon remittances from overseas and because of the pandemic, there is likely to be a drastic reduction which will hit both countries. It is here that the two Punjabs could certainly exploit opportunities for potential cooperation.

### Religious Tourism and the Sikh Diaspora



The Imran Khan government has been trying to give particular importance to religious tourism and recently made an announcement, that it would promote group tourism for Hindu and Sikh pilgrims in Pakistan. One of South Asia's foremost strategic commentators, C. Raja Mohan has in a recent article alluded to the possibility of Punjab playing an important role in reducing tensions between both countries. He also made an interesting argument that apart from the governments, the Punjabi diaspora could play an important role in getting both the eastern and western Punjabs closer.

In the not too distant past, civil society groups and intellectuals in the diaspora have played a proactive role in pitching for harmonious ties between East

and West Punjab. The Pakistani government has been reaching out to the Sikh diaspora to invest in infrastructure projects, linked to important Sikh shrines. Some members of the diaspora have already committed to investing in religious tourism related projects in Pakistan. One such example is the *Peter Virdee Foundation* of UK, which had committed in June 2019 to investing GBP 500 million over a period of 5 years. This Foundation, along with a number of UK-based Sikh businessmen, had made this commitment during meetings with senior officials of the Imran Khan government.

There have also been plans for the Baba Guru Nanak International University at Nankana Sahib, with classes from 2021, when some part of the construction of the buildings have been completed. As the recently appointed Vice Chancellor, Asghar Zaidi, said the University would "encourage research on Sikhism and promote the Punjabi language". The University is likely to seek involvement from the Sikh diaspora and would provide an important opportunity for interaction between scholars of Eastern and Western Punjab.

It is hoped that the Kartarpur Religious Corridor inaugurated in November 2019 should pave the way for closer links, economic and people-to-people between both Punjabs. All stakeholders including political players, civil society, business communities and, importantly, the Diaspora need to play their role in the same. While certainly there would be hurdles, concerted efforts from stakeholders are likely to help in breaking the barriers as cooperation between the two Punjabs could hopefully result in dramatically altering the geopolitical and economic situation in South Asia.

The author, Prof. Tridivesh Singh Maini was a visiting fellow with The Jindal School of International Affairs (July 2013–July 2014). He was also a Public Policy Scholar with The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, Chennai (November 2013–March 2014), and an Asia Society India–Pakistan Regional Young Leaders Initiative (IPRYLI) Fellow (2013–2014).



# Turbans Galore at Lahore!



Sakina Abbas Zaidi and Ali Kakri on their sangeet with the turban-wearing Men. Can you tell the Indians from the Pakistanis?

Sakina Abbas Zaidi was 13 years old when she crossed the Wagah border into India for the first time. She was an excited teenager looking forward to her first holiday abroad, but as the family drove into India, down the Grand Trunk Road, she was bewildered. At Amritsar, she finally exclaimed *kuchh bhi toh mukhtalif nahin hai yahan pe!* (“nothing is different here!”) other than the script on the road signboards, it was just like the Punjab she had left behind in Pakistan and not the “foreign” country of her imagination.

Over the next years, her family continued visiting India regularly. The Rizvi/Zaidi families had migrated from Samana (near Patiala) and Malerkotla in 1947. While that was the initial draw that brought the extended Rizvi/Zaidi clan regularly to India (Sakina

would sometimes spend her summer holidays in Chandigarh), the friendships formed during these visits grew into relationships that transcended borders to become *family*.

The 2000s were good years: getting visas and crossing the Radcliffe line were relatively easy affairs. For Sakina, Chandigarh and Jalandhar became almost as much home as Lahore. As the years passed, she planned that whenever she got married, she would have one wedding function hosted by her Indian family. However, by February 2020 when her wedding was fixed, the political situation had drifted far away from the hopeful 2000s and the possibility of a large contingent from Lahore crossing over to India for a few days of celebration was virtually impossible. Instead, Sakina decided to celebrate her



deep connection with India – by having close family and friends wear turbans on her *sangeet*!

Thereupon friends travelling from Chandigarh to Lahore also carried 200 metres of voile cloth for the turbans, dyed a pretty pink. On the day of the *sangeet*, held in the historical settings of the Haveli Baroodkhana in the walled city of Lahore, a handful of Sikh men tied more than 25 turbans for the guests, only stopping when demand outran the available supply!

Wandering through the crowd, one felt the sharp nostalgia for the scene that in a different time, a different universe, could have been a regular occurrence in Lahore and Amritsar - a mixed crowd of persons wearing Patiala *shahi paggan* and Sindhi *pagdis*, of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, having a most joyful time together - and for that I remain grateful to Sakina for making real, even if for one evening, a vision of a different future.



Sakina entering the venue, accompanied by her father (left), brother (right) and cousins



Kharag Singh ties the turban on a young Pakistani man

Sakina had shared her thoughts on her idea of having the male members of her family wear the turban on her *sangeet*. She wrote:

*The turban is undoubtedly one of the most powerful and recognisable symbols of regality throughout history. It has been worn for centuries by kings and holy men in South Asia. In different styles and drapes, the turban held significance for many different communities, equally prestigious to all regardless of any religious differences. The turban took a revolutionary turn with the birth of Sikhism, and today continues to be an integral part of a Sikh's identity.*

*Like any other bride, I wanted to tick off all the boxes of a big, fat, traditional wedding. I have always felt that I was the daughter of two countries. With utmost love and respect for the Sikh families in India who literally saw me growing up and becoming the person I am today, I thought it would be an excellent idea for all the men to wear turbans for my big day. The turban is found in Muslim history too, and is still honoured with great pride. Seeing all the men in my family wearing Sikh-style turbans brought to me an intense joy even more than I had visualised.*





Pawaninder Singh Dhillon dancing at Sakina's wedding

*Joie de vivre!*



"Our family" : (left to right) Alayna, Naininder Singh Dhillon, Hooria Abbas, Harpreet Kaur Dhillon and Yumna Rizvi

*With this enormous amount of love that we share, I feel the whole idea of divisions and politics as propagated in our news on both sides is a complete waste of time.*

*It was a cold February evening when beautiful petal-pink turbans spread out under a misty, blush-coloured sky. I felt immense pride in this celebration of our shared culture.*

*The whole day carried a completely different vibe, swathed in emotions and prayers from across the border. The turbans broke the border barriers in the blink of an eye that evening.*

*Our borders can't hold us back, they truly cannot - says the heart of a bride!*



Cidra Waqas, Ganeev Kaur, Aliza Hashim

*Article and Images by*  
**Ganeev Kaur Dhillon**



# Meeting of Hearts

## Opening of the Kartarpur Corridor



*"Saadey pindon vi koi aaya?" S. Naininder Singh Dhillon with Shaukat Ali at Kartarpur Sahib*

The Opening of the Kartarpur Corridor - the *Kartarpur Langha* - has sent a frisson of excitement through Punjab with the Kartarpur Corridor agreement between India and Pakistan allowing visa-free access for Indians to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib situated 4 kilometres inside Pakistan. Punjabis had been asking for access to the Gurdwara since 1947.

Kartarpur Sahib is where Guru Nanak settled for the last 18 years of his life, the place where he founded some of the basic tenets of Sikhism including communal meals (*pangat*) and spiritual fraternity (*sangat*). It is believed that upon his passing, both Hindus and Muslims claimed him as their own, but the next morning his body was gone and the funeral sheet was instead divided in half between the two communities - one part being cremated and the other entombed close by.

The Gurdwara at Kartarpur Sahib is situated amongst the fields that Guru Nanak ploughed and



*First view as one enters the Gurdwara Sahib*

marks the location where his last rites took place. After the Partition, when an arbitrary drawing of the Radcliffe line resulted in the Gurdwara falling just in Pakistan, Indian devotees would gather on the Indian side of the border to catch a glimpse of it through binoculars. The opening of the Kartarpur Corridor, therefore, holds great significance, especially for Punjabis.

One can also accept that the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor serves political ends on both sides of the border but the complete and utter joy amongst the common people cannot be ignored: there is an excitement, a celebration in the opening of this short corridor in the middle of over a thousand miles of an electrified fence, guarded 24x7 by heavily armed troops. A reaching out, a shaking of hands, a making of peace that had been 72 years in the making—the Punjab has been ready to move beyond the Partition for a while and finally this opportunity has come that has such immense potential to 'break the border' for all practical purposes.





Thousands at Kartarpur Sahib, from Pakistan, India, the world over on the formal opening

I first visited Kartarpur Sahib in February 2020, while on a visit to Lahore for a wedding. We had visa permission to visit it from the Pakistan side and so did not travel through the ‘Corridor’. This allowed us to stay at the Gurdwara beyond sunset, late into the evening. The experience was one that will stay with me forever. Most Gurdwaras in Pakistan are quiet places, with entry prohibited to non-Sikh Pakistanis and only small groups of non-Pakistani Sikhs visit them once in a while. Most of these Gurdwaras that hold so much historical and emotional connection for Sikhs, resplendent with crowds less



Sikh pilgrims with locals outside the Darshani Deori, Kartarpur Sahib

than a century ago, now lie empty and desolate. Since opening of the Corridor, Kartarpur Sahib is an exception – joyful crowds of Pakistanis and Indians intermingle in a manner unimaginable perhaps even by the governments when they had agreed to this *Langha*. People on both sides of the border have for so very long wished to visit their old villages, to meet someone, anyone, from there, get some news and so, until the visas get easier to obtain, Kartarpur Sahib is a place for meetings and friendships.

As soon as we reached the Gurdwara and were waiting for our dispersed group to gather, Shaukat Ali who was visiting from Gujranwala walked up to us, asking “*Saaday pindon vi koi aaya*”? (“Is there anyone here from my village too?”). Shaukat Ali was from Karnal and Ambala until the Partition forced him to leave his home and he came to Kartarpur Sahib looking for an opportunity to rebuild relationships and connections with lands left behind. He was not the only one. As anyone visiting Kartarpur Sahib will testify, Pakistanis and Indians want to talk with each other, take photographs and hopefully meet someone who comes from or near their ancestral village.

For Punjabis, who face the brunt of any war or breakdown in diplomatic relations, the Kartarpur Corridor represents the chance of a peaceful future and has given rise to the hope of more lenient visa regimes and easier travel between the two countries. For both Punjabis, the dividends of opening the borders are high – socially, culturally, historically – this would not just recognise our shared heritage, but also makes sense as a purely pragmatic decision, for the opening of trade through the Punjab border would result in financial advantages for both sides. The Kartarpur Corridor



“Our shared heritage”: painting by Ibraheem Ramay on display and for sale in the exhibition hall





*A Pakistani offers prayers at Kartarpur Sahib...*

shows that if the governments were so inclined, nothing is impossible. Until then, this Corridor demonstrates the untapped potential of the Punjab.

Ravinder Singh Robin, an Amritsar-based journalist, who traversed the 4 km journey to Kartarpur Sahib from Dera Baba Nanak via the official shuttle, recorded and shared his conversation with his shuttle-driver, Saddam Hussein. In the video that went viral, an emotional Hussein exclaims, “I don’t know if you have felt the happiness as much as the tears



*... in homage to Guru Nanak*

of joy that I have shed! You have come home here; you have come to your Guru’s home. Allah knows, I am feeling the same way as I do when we go for Hajj. You have come here, *Mashallah*, the same way. I swear, I cannot believe it... what should I say. I have no words, *Mashallah*, I am so happy. Punjab has become one again, in a way. May Allah keep you happy like this, may you keep visiting like this. Our arms are always open to welcome you whenever you come.”

There is such beauty and truth in the honest words of Saddam Hussein. May his words ring true forever. May the relationships built today, be for always.

*Article and images by  
Ganeev Kaur Dhillon*

*Ethereal! Kartarpur Sahib gurdwara at night, beacon of peace*





# Mouth Watering!



Artika Aurora Bakshi on

## The Culinary Delights of Amritsar

There are two things you can do if you want food recommendations, especially when visiting a city that's known for its culinary delights - you can either go through the multitude of food articles, recommendations and blogs, or you could ask someone who belongs to that city, even if that someone is a friend of a friend of a friend!

I fall under the latter, a classified and approved expert when it comes to giving recommendations, because on an average, I get around 12-15 calls and messages a year, solely for my knowledge of Amritsari culture. I don't live in Amritsar anymore, but my connection to the city is as strong as ever, especially since my family lives there. My trips to India are a symbolic return to the land where I was born, having nostalgic experiences, meeting family and friends, and

of course, ticking off the many food spots that hold a place in my heart. The taste of Amritsari food is not only a product of its ingredients and cooking but also the camaraderie and warmth that I feel when I enter these humble abodes of a literal food heaven.

The owners of these establishments are well aware of who I am; a familiar face that keeps coming back for more. Why? Because there is no place on this God-given Earth that can come anywhere close to replicating the gastronomical experience and emotions evoked that I experience in Amritsar.

ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਰਾਮ ਜਲੇਬੀ ਵਾਲਾ  
GURDASS RAM JALEBI WALA

It's standard Amritsari tradition to feel connected to one another, whether you're a visitor or a local. When asking an Amritsari about their city, and in particular their food, make sure you have time on your hands to appreciate the passion with which we speak. The stories, the memories, the emotion, all spoken with a beaming smile and a slight twinkle in the eyes.

And as the gastronomical narration goes on, many a times, there will be a line added to say that Amritsari and Lahori food is talked about world over. Now why would the name of Lahore come up, when you are talking about Amritsar and the culinary delights it has to offer?





The answer is very simple, food stories have passed on from generations and the two (twin) cities, since times immemorial, were known for their food.

*Jinhe Lahore Nahin Wekheya, Unhe Kuch Nahin Wekheya; Je Amritsar Wekheya, Pher Eik Hi Gal Hai...*

These lines ring through my ears every time a conversation about the twin cities comes up. My Lahori friends have heard their grandparents talking about Amritsar with equal fondness, reminiscing about the times, when one could cycle between the two cities, catch up with friends, shop in the bazaars, the *galis* and the *katras* and then, to top it all up, savour the gastronomic delights being offered. The quintessential Punjabi *kulcha channas* and freshly churned *lassi*, piping hot *pooris* and *gur da karah*, a plate of *Amritsari tikkas* with the juicy mutton *chaamps*.

Harmandir Sahib (universally known as the Golden Temple) is the nerve centre of Amritsar, attracting thousands of visitors everyday. It's influence surpasses what the mind can fathom. There are many in Amritsar who start their day with a visit to Harmandir Sahib. The *langar* halls function 24x7, highlighting the Sikh tenet of *Vand Chakna*, or community sharing, irrespective of caste, religion or

nationality. The standard fare is simple; freshly made *parshada*, *daal* and *kheer*, with a few things added, depending on the seasonal produce. The *langar* is strictly vegetarian, not being objectionable to any religion. Prepared by volunteers, in a kitchen that works 24 hours, with the sublime sound of *Gurbani* drifting through the environs, this divine offering tops every list ever made on what's special in Amritsar.

A short walk from the Golden Temple, down the *galis*, frozen in time with majestic buildings, telling the tale of their times, you reach *Katra Ahluwalia*. Founded by the famous general, Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, *Katra Ahluwalia* was the hub of trade in the eighteenth century. Nestled in a corner of the main square, is *Gurdass Ram Jalebi Wala*, one of the oldest and most famous shops, selling crisp, syrupy *jalebis* and succulent *gulab jamuns*, made in pure *ghee*. These delights sell like hot cakes. The rush around the tiny shop is enough to deter the pseudo food connoisseur, but those who worship flavour will patiently wait, because there is none other that can match the taste.

Traversing the *galis* and the *katras*, a further short walk away from *Katra Ahluwalia* is Chowk Passian, the textile hub of Amritsar. It's claim to fame is *Kesar Da*

## Langar and Devotion at Darbar Sahib





*Dhaba*, the world renowned Amritsari *dhaba*, known to be a favourite with all visiting celebrities. Dating back to pre-partition days, the *dhaba* was started in 1916 at Sheikhpura, near Lahore.

The owners migrated in 1947, carrying with them their dreams and signature recipes. The food is still prepared in the original style, with *tandoors* churning out crisp *paranthas*. Giant cauldrons on wood fire simmer with the famous *daal makhani*, Amritsari *channas* and *palak paneer*. The meal here is incomplete if you don't finish it with the sweet *kesar phirni* that *Kesar Da Dhaba* is famous for.



In the walled city itself, opposite the Town Hall, is another famous landmark of Amritsar. What started as a tented stall in 1912, is now the famous *Bharawan Da Dhaba*, serving authentic Amritsari food.

The vegetarian fare here is slow cooked in pure *ghee* and special spices and is an explosion of buttery rich flavour, that is impossible to forget. A regular *thali* comes with flaky *paranthas*, the famous *daal makhani*, Amritsari *channas* and curd with *boondi*.



A visit to Amritsar is incomplete if one hasn't tried the Amritsari *lassi*, the sweetened curd drink with oodles of fresh buttercream on top, and that too at *Giani Punjabi Lassi*, opposite Regent Cinema. The shop has been there since 1927. Sardar Surjan Singh,



the 4th generation in this renowned establishment, passionately shares his love for the business of his forefathers: "My forefathers grew this business with love and affection".

"It's because of this that we have gained a name world over. I have been asked as to why I continue, and my answer is very simple. The love our customers show us, their appreciation, it just keeps us going. The only way we can reciprocate this love is by making sure that we give them the best *lassi* they have ever had. Something they will always remember and come back for."





Everyone who loves Indian cuisine, knows what an *Amritsari kulcha* is. And when in Amritsar, head to where the Amritsaris go when they are craving the famous *kulcha*, visit *Kulcha Land* in Ranjit Avenue. Flaky, buttery *kulchas*, fresh out of the *tandoor*, smothered with *ghee* and Amritsari love (this is what the owner Sardar Sucha Singh said) and piping hot *channas* with the signature onion chutney. For three generations, Sucha Singh and his family they have been doing just this. His son, Sardar VP Singh has also joined the family business and says, “In our own way, we are showcasing the Amritsari hospitality.”

They were originally located in the old city, near the Golden Temple. Business was flourishing, but as the city grew, they decided to come and open a larger establishment in Ranjit Avenue.



Sanket Kambhoj, the owner of *Kanha Sweets* on Lawrence Road says, “our first branch crossed 100 years in 2017 and the Lawrence Road branch is completing 30 years. This business is very special to me because *Kanha Sweets* is well known for its speciality, *poori* and *channa*, as well as sweets like *Amritsari pinnis* and *besan laddoos*.”

“You cannot find these anywhere else. Our *gur da karah* is also well known. We serve the best quality delicacies and have always done that. This is the legacy of *Kanha Sweets* and it will always be special for me and that’s why I feel proud of being a part of it.”



Generously sharing the recipe for their signature *gur da karah*, he says, “the secret behind our success is using the right ingredients, the right quantities and our passion to serve”.



When you talk about Amritsar and its culinary extravagance, even though you will have *channas* coming out of your ears, you cannot ignore the *bheeja kulcha*, a baked *kulcha*, soaked in *channas* and garnished perfectly with raw mango, *amla* and green chilli. Making a *bheeja kulcha* is an art and there is precision in how the *kulcha* is soaked; not too long that it disintegrates, and not too short that you can taste the bread as you take a spoonful. There is no way that this can be compared to the stuffed *Amritsari kulcha*, so there is no use trying to figure out which is better.

The right thing to do is to head to *Pappi Di Hatti* on Green Avenue and just dig in. *Bheeja kulchas* are available all over Amritsar, in stand alone little shops and with the hawkers who traverse the *galis* of the old city. Find it anywhere you want, but for me, it’s always been *Pappi Di Hatti*. The familiarity, the warmth, the perfect *kulcha*, eaten in a less crowded and sanitised place.

As far as recipes for the *Amritsari channa* go, there are as many as there can be, with each recipe having its own uniqueness and taste. No two preparations of *channas* taste the same and when asked, every individual credits it to the magic in the hands.

But it’s not all *channas* and *lassi* and sweets in Amritsar. For those craving non-vegetarian food, there is plenty on offer. From the famous *Amritsari fish* to the juicy mutton *tikkas*, Amritsar is a meat-lover’s heaven too. The recipes are impossible to perfect because every establishment has their own secret ingredient, which they will refuse to share (and that too with a warm smile), so best that you tuck in all that you can eat.

*Makhan Fish* was started by Sardar Sucha Singh, in 1962, on Majitha Road who passed his recipes and legacy further on. The *dhaba* is now a multi cuisine



restaurant, catering to varied tastes. But the *Amritsari fish* and tandoori chicken that they serve has stayed true to the original recipe.

The fish recipe is hard to get, but Sardar Hardit Singh, the grandson of Sardar Sucha Singh, shared the recipe for their famous tandoori chicken:

“A kilo of chicken, marinated in curd, ginger-garlic-green chilli paste, with salt, cumin seeds, caraway seeds and red chilli powder. Use generous quantities of butter.” The recipe is simple, but the taste is nearly impossible to replicate. The secret again is in the way the *tandoor* is handled.

The famous *Chajju Da Dhaba* is nestled in a little nook on bustling Lawrence Road and somehow everyone who goes looking for it, finds it. The branch was opened almost 40 years ago, to cater to the growing number of tourists and the Amritsaris who had moved out of the old city into newer areas. A visit to this humble eatery, with a massive *tava* and *karahi*, on which the sizzling chunks of mutton are cooked, is an absolute treat for all the senses. Eaten with toasted *kulchas* and Chajju’s signature chutney, the *Amritsari tikkas* are a meat-lover’s delight. The taste is so unique that most visitors like to pack some to take back with them.

“When you talk about Amritsari food, our name is always on the list,” says Rajinder Sethi, whose father started the business 70 years ago. “It all started in Pratap Bazaar, close to the Golden Temple. Times have changed, but the flavour stays the same. We are known for three things; the brain curry, mutton *tikkas* and mutton *chaamp*.”

Forget calories and diets, because tomorrow is always a new day! Moving away from the world of



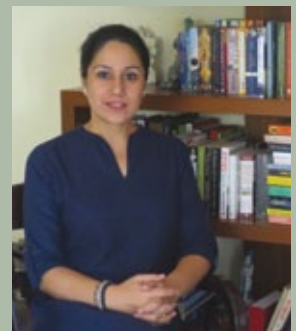
gelatos and frozen yogurts and going back in time, a minute’s walk from *Chajju Da Dhaba* is *Sukhram Fruit Cream*, started 70 years ago by Sukhram ji. Famous for their fruit cream and mango ice-cream, *Sukhram*’s is a name everyone knows, though he himself is no more.

Meena Sharma, his daughter, is taking forward his legacy. “The business was started by my father. I don’t know why he started it because I never asked. But I always saw him passionately making the fruit cream and the mango ice cream. Even today we make our fruit cream and mango ice cream the traditional way, churning it by hand. These are the only two things on our menu and people come from all over to enjoy these”, she says, her voice brimming with pride.

There are many more places that come to mind when one talks about Amritsari food, but then, the list always varies, depending on where one gets the recommendations from! It’s about personal preferences and for me, the places listed here evoke a memory of a rich life in Amritsar, full of flavour, warmth and the sense of being home.



**Artika Aurora Bakshi**, writer of this mouthwatering article on the culinary delights of Amritsar, was born and grew up in this holy city of the Sikhs and now lives with her husband and family near Colombo in Sri Lanka. She is the author of two well-acclaimed children’s books, *My Little Sikh Handbook*, *My Little Sikh Handbook 2: Ardas*, and an anthology of stories, *Hold On To Me*. Her first story, set in Amritsar, during the pre-Partition period, *All She Had Left*, was published on ‘Story Mirror’. She co-manages [thegoodbookcorner.com](http://thegoodbookcorner.com), a manuscript help and book review site.



Welcome to the Nishaan Editorial Panel!

*Images from the author and internet*



# Mouth Watering Two!

Sheharyar Rizwan writes on the delectable fare of Lahore



Pakistan and India may have been separated nearly eight decades back from a unified subcontinent, but that has not broken the aeons-old connection and ties between them. Peoples on either side of the border are still tied together in a bond by many a thread of cultures, traditions, languages, sports, entertainment, lifestyles to the so-called social values or even varied levels of tolerance—we often find ourselves in uncannily similar situations. Which makes us realise, we may be divided through a physical border, but we never really grew apart.

The similarities, connections and close proximity manifests in no better way than the fact that one can just walk over to Amritsar in Indian Punjab from here in Lahore in Pakistani Punjab through the Wagah border. Just a few steps and you're inside Indian territory. It's that convenient, though practically, anything but, owing to the fluctuating tensions between both sides. However, people on either side have not let the politics affect them and found virtual means to connect with their neighbours in this constantly advancing age of technology. Hence, the two sides remain bonded together. And gauging from

the conversations on social media, the conversations between the two sides mainly revolve around films, sports, politics and... of course, food!

As for Lahore and Amritsar, which were intrinsic part of the unified Punjab province of the Indian subcontinent till 1947, among the many things that closely knit these twin cities is their combined love for gastronomy. Punjabis on either side are known for their hospitality, warmth and their near obsession with food. It is known among Punjabi families, both in Lahore and Amritsar, that their breakfast table discussions revolve around the lunch menu and the lunch table discussions around that of dinner.

After bidding goodbye to their homes in Amritsar to make that dreaded move and attempting to start life afresh in the new country, many of these families,





scarred by Partition, brought with them to Lahore the memories of their hometown and set up businesses here named after it. Needless to say, many of them were food joints - some new, others an extension or a shadow of what they did back in their previous hometown, selling all sorts of traditional fare from *halwa puri*, *hareesa* and sweets to *dahi bhallay*. Some set up shop right after the break-up, while others a few years later.

One such shop was the now-popular *Amritsari Sweet Shop*, located on Beadon Road close to the iconic Lakshmi Chowk. It had been established in the Indian Punjab city it's named after at least 20 years before Partition. "My forefathers started making and selling *mithai* in Amritsar at least 20 years before Partition under the same name. They were experts at it there. So when they moved to Pakistan in 1947, they naturally set up a shop here, on Beadon Road, retaining its original name. And it's been here since then. My brothers and I are the third generation of our family handling this business. We have a branch in Johar Town also," narrated Maqsood Mustafa, one of the owners of the family business.

Talking about their Indian background, he said none of their relatives live in India anymore as everyone had migrated. He also shared a landmark moment in the shop's history, stressing how popular they were even back in India. "In 1978, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Pakistan for the first time as the external affairs minister, he especially asked for our sweet shop and went to Beadon Road personally to have our *mithai*," Mustafa claimed.

There were some migrants who had to spend the initial years post-Partition trying their luck with various jobs and small businesses to eventually come up with what they're now recognised for.

Shahbaz Riaz of *Amritsari Hareesa* says his grandfather, Haji Sirajdin, started selling hareesa around 60 years ago from a humble shop on Nisbat Road, and named it so as an ode to his Amritsari roots. "Earlier, he had a small roadside hotel, but later started selling hareesa. He was not into the same business back in India; he only got this idea from his ustad, Sadruddin, who was the first one to introduce hareesa to the post-Partition Lahore. After the ustad died, Dada jee decided to take on the mantle, and



Billboard: 'Amritsari Sweet Shop in Lahore, opened in 1947'

started this hareesa shop. The recipe we use till date is the same that our *dada jee* developed."

Mr Riaz says that after his grandfather died in 1989 aged around 80-85, his father, Haji Riaz, took over and then it was the turn of the third generation - his siblings and him. "In the beginning, there was only beef and *desi* chicken hareesa available on Thursdays and Fridays. But now for at least 12 years, we have mutton also. And we operate from 5:30am to 1:30am."

Ask him about the origins of this thick, grainy gravy mixed with a bunch of tiny *seekh kababs*, he claims this is an Arabic dish that originated at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and has been popular since then. "It is blessed with a lot of nutritional value and removes weakness, as it has a combination of *daals*, porridge, meat, all topped with *desi* ghee. It's a popular winter dish that gives you the much-needed warmth and energy in such weather. And the best part is that you can have it as any meal



of the day. Even if you have it for breakfast, you won't feel full or lethargic all day," he explains.

Riaz feels that though the younger generation is more into fast food, it is also enthused by such traditional dishes. "Most of them don't know about the traditional fare, or what carries nutritional value



and what doesn't. It's the job of the parents to inform their children about such good food."

Riaz fondly says that his grandfather had named the shop after Amritsar in remembrance of his background and hometown. "We only knew of a brother of our Dada jee who still lived in Amritsar after everyone else moved here. After Dada jee's death, no one knows anything about his brother, or even if he's alive. There has been no connection or communication with him after Dada jee died."

Then there's *Amritsari Dahi Bhallay* that was the brainchild of Muhammad Siddique, who moved to Pakistan during Partition. After a few years of selling fish, he set up a roadside stall at Lakshmi Chowk



selling *dahi bhallay*. Now, the patriarch may not be around anymore, but his speciality is spread around at least half a dozen spots across Lahore. Not all those who started food business in Lahore named them after their birthplace in India, but that doesn't take away from their association with the city they once called their home.

*Sadiq Halwa Puri* on Railway Road has been in business since 1880, says a board hanging inside the shop, but not from this very spot. Muhammad Jameel, the current owner, says his grandfather, Chiragh Din, started selling *halwa puri* in Amritsar in 1880 under this very name and migrated to Pakistan in 1948. He continued with what he knew best, from a small shop nearby and later moved to this spot. However, he says, this shop is named after his father, Muhammad Sadiq, and now the fourth generation of the family ran it, as Jameel's son has started looking after it too.

Narrating details of the business back in India that he had heard from his father, Jameel says the shop had been spread over eight kanals at Chitti Haweli in Amritsar and employed around 200 workers. He claims they were a big deal there and that his grandfather was the first Muslim in the subcontinent to enter the *halwa puri* business in Amritsar.

On the other hand, there's a *halwa puri* seller whose association, or probably fascination, with India could bring a smile to some faces. He, or his forefathers, may not have migrated from Amritsar, or any other part of India, but the elderly Chaudhry Muhammad Akram of Taj Mahal Sweets had one desire in his childhood: to see the majestic Taj Mahal at Agra!



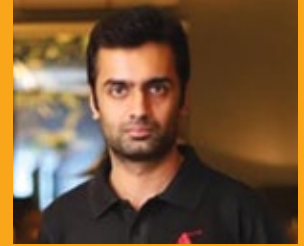


This is the very desire that decades ago led Akram to name his *halwa puri* shop, located in the equally historic narrow streets of Taxali Gate opposite

the Badshahi Mosque inside the old Walled City of Lahore, after that ‘monument of love’ in Agra, India.

And his wish did come true, around 40 years ago when he saw the actual Taj in all its glory. Proud of what he made, Akram also said that during that visit he also went to quite a few cities in India, but did not find *halwa puri* that could match his! Mouth watering!

The writer is a Lahore-based journalist associated with the *Dawn* newspaper. He writes on lifestyle and entertainment, and is passionate about music, movies and food.



## Sarhad – the restaurant which synthesises culinary ties between Amritsar and Lahore



*Sarhad* was opened in 2012 on the Indian side of the border on GT Road, less than five kilometres from Pakistan. Its menu primarily is a tribute to the shared cultures of the two cities. While one can order Indian favourites such as *daal makhani*, *chicken tikkas* and *aloo paranthas*, there are also *bakarkhani rotis*, *chapli kebabs* and *miyanji ki dal*, made from Lahori recipes.

Apart from introducing diners to the dishes of Lahore, *Sarhad* also stocks favourite foods from Pakistan for Indian diners to sample. One of these is the *Khalifa khatai*, made by Lahore’s famous *Khalifa Bakers* in Akbar Mandi in the Walled City. Similar to the *nankhatai*, the *Khalifa khatai* is a biscuit made from butter and sugar and is best eaten with a scoop of ice cream.



# What is Punjabiya?

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ  
ਪੰਜਾਬੀ



Golden fields of the Punjab

Left inset: Punjabi in Shahmukhi and Gurmukhi

A very clichéd question. Nobody asks what is *Madhya Pradesh*iyat, or *Maharashtra*iyat or any other 'yat' on the sub-continent!

But there must be something unique and special and multi-dimensional and mysterious about the Punjabis, which is why this question is often tossed around.

Punjabis are life-loving and life-preserving people! Their priorities in life are love, labour, living life to the last dregs. For aeons they have been standing



Baba Nanak in Kartarpur Sahib (painting by Arpana Caur)



Living life (Image by Mani Sidhu from artsquare.in)



like a shield for the sub-continent against all foreign invasions. The British ruled the entire country for over two centuries, but could not incorporate the Punjab for about a hundred years and that too after very fierce wars and insidious betrayals. They ruled the Punjab for just 98 years.

Even during those ninety eight years, Punjabis were always fighting for freedom. Freedom for the entire country. There was that terrible massacre in

## That is Punjabiya

In the new Millennium, I sincerely wish that Punjabi culture returns to its roots of poetry and literature, music and architecture, paintings and lyrical sufi mysticism. I wish for a less obtrusive pop music culture and hope too for some meaningful, sensitive films and theatre from Punjabis such as Gulzar, the whole clan of Prithvi Raj Kapoor's family, and other well-known Punjabis in the film



Jallianwala Bagh, but there also were Ghadri Babas who gave a clarion call for freedom resulting in the full-blooded Ghadar Movement. And the *Kisan Movement* which was responsible for enlightening eighty per cent of the rural population, imbibing in them the feverish fervour for freedom.

During India's Freedom Struggle, the largest number of people who were hanged or were sent to the horror of the Cellular Jail in far-away Andamans, known as *Kaala Paani*, to serve life imprisonments, again were the Punjabis.

Then, after going through one of the most terrible blood-baths in history during the Partition of India in 1947, Punjabis on both sides of the Radcliffe Line took new roots and recreated their lives with just their Punjabi spirit of courage and determination intact.

world. Punjabi writers and Punjabi painters have continuously created profound works of art and literature.

## Punjabiya and the Punjabi way of life

Punjabiya, or the Punjabi way of life, is not only the life-pattern of Punjabis, it is much more. Its boundaries extend to the whole sub-continent. Now the whole world in fact. It is a feeling of full-blooded living, of embracing the entire humanity in loving and compassionate embrace, of brotherhood and unabated courage, of giving up one's own life for justice and for saving the downtrodden.

This way of life is reflected in Punjabi literature which transcends religious perceptions and prejudices. Like other literature all over India, roots of Punjabi





*The Punjabi -Sufi connect*

(Image: Medium.com)

literature can be traced in the oral tradition and is preserved in folklore.

Written literature can be traced back to the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries when Nath Jogis started penning their poetry and their philosophical ideas. After that, Sufis came on the scene, the most important being Baba Sheikh Farid who lived 800 years ago. He was followed by Bulleh Shah, Shah Husain, Sultan Bahu and others. All over India, wherever Sufi poetry is recited or sung, Punjabi poetry of Baba Sheikh Farid, Bulleh Shah and Shah Husain forever shines.

The Bhakti Movement blossomed in the Punjab about five and half hundred years ago, and the wonderful poetry of the Sikh Gurus gave the movement a voice which portrays immense lyrical beauty, transcends the age-old shackles of superstition and casteism, speaks of pure love which unites a human being with other human beings and also with God, a God who is not



*Shades of gold: A painting of the Golden Temple  
by Sanjeev Kumar Sinha*

to be feared but who loves and needs to be loved. All ten Gurus portray God as a lover, a beloved, a father, a mother, a friend, who cares for only love and is always ready to shower it back on all humanity.

These superb hymns uttered by the Gurus form a major part of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book of the Sikhs. Besides these hymns, poetry of other major poets from all over India is also included in the Holy Book. Thus it presents not only a national character, it becomes a corner-stone of Punjabiya which embraces everybody, from all parts of the world, and from all castes and faiths.

With the poetry of Hindu Nath-Jogis, with the Sufi poetry of Muslim Sufi saints, with the poetry of the Sikh Gurus and the Bhakti poetry of other poets of the Indian subcontinent included in the Guru Granth Sahib, the unique character of Punjabiya was enshrined.



**Bhai Veer Singh**

(image from: [www.dasmeshdarbar.ca](http://www.dasmeshdarbar.ca))



**Dhani Ram Chatrik**

(image from: [www.punjabigram.com](http://www.punjabigram.com))



**Feroz Din Sharaf**

(image from: [www.triloksinghartist.com](http://www.triloksinghartist.com))



**Prof Puran Singh**

(image: [www.sikhnet.com](http://www.sikhnet.com))



Also emerged was a new structure of society which was not divided by caste and creed, by any 'upper' or 'lower' strata of society because special care was taken to include the hymns of those whom society had always shunned or trodden upon, the so-called 'lower castes' like weavers, shoe-makers, barbers, tailors, dyers. By giving them an honoured place in the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Gurus deliberately founded a new pattern of life, of reality.

This new consciousness forms the texture of Punjabiya, that of life which is true Punjabiya and emphasises the dignity of labour, on working intensely by putting in honest labour, putting one's heart and

soul in one's work, and then sharing whatever one earns with others who are needy.

Punjabiya is the other name of being always happy and contented in all conditions and circumstances, of good-heartedness and good-neighbourliness, of a conscious effort to prove oneself, of knowing that whatever others can do and achieve, Punjabis can do better! All this is ingrained deep down in the psyche of Punjabis, erecting solid pillars of that uniqueness which is called Punjabiya.

After the Bhakti poetry, the *kissas* formed a major and one of the most prominent phases of Punjabi literature, starting with Damodar who

**Some of our most prominent Punjabi poets were Shiv Kumar Batalvi, Amrita Pritam and Mohan Singh.**



Shiv Kumar Batalvi  
(image: in.pinterest.com)



Amrita Pritam  
(image: jagran.com)



Mohan Singh  
(image: veethi.com)

**Great Punjabi writing is being done on the 'other side' of the border too. The most prominent Punjabi fiction writers in West Punjab are Fakhar Zaman and Mohammad Mansha Yaad. Khushwant Singh came from Hadali in West Punjab where his ashes were interred after his passing.**



Fakhar-Zaman  
(image: alchetron.com)



Mohammad Mansha Yadd  
(image: www.rekhta.org)



Khushwant Singh  
(image: www.thefamouspeople.com)



wrote the first *Heer Ranjha* and who was a contemporary of Akbar. Waris Shah wrote his immortal *Heer Ranjha*, and others wrote about many other legendary lovers, or lovers who became legends because of the great and soul-searing poetry which portrayed them.

This literature highlighted another trait of the Punjabis – that of being great lovers! This all-embracing love, which has the power to break all barriers including those of life and death, is another prominent characteristic of Punjabiyaat.



(Image: Tribuneindia.com)

Punjabis are essentially children of the soil and have worked very hard to produce that new variety of wheat which helped to feed the entire country and saved it from the ignominy of having to virtually beg the 'First World' for sustenance. The 'Green Revolution' was in fact Punjab's way of greatly strengthening the country.

As for industry, inspite of the fact that the Government did not set up any large public sector undertaking in the Punjab, Punjabis have excelled in various

innovative engineering and production skills. For instance, Ludhiana has become another 'Manchester', with its bicycles and knitwears earning billions in foreign exchange.

The last half century has certainly filtered into the Punjabi psyche as well but is not the type which overwhelmed the West over the last decades. Punjabis have the strange – and unique – capacity to assimilate modern ideas of the West and filter them via their own perspective, resulting in a unique modernism which continues to have its roots in the soil of Punjab. Keeping close to their own roots and traditions, the Punjabis have amalgamated with global culture.

Punjabi culture or Punjabiyaat is today one of the most outstanding of international cultures – and the world rejoices!



Sikhs in Manhattan parade (image: deccanchronicle.com)

In contemporary literature, at the turn of the century, four towering literary figures were Bhai Veer Singh, Dhani Ram Chatrik, Feroz Din Sharaf and Prof. Puran Singh who said *Punjab wasda guraan de nan te*.

Punjabis are also great adventurers and great travellers. For the last more than a hundred years they have been moving abroad and taking roots in different countries all over the world. In fact, today, wherever one goes, even in the remotest parts of the world, one will find Punjabis, well-settled and prospering.

Such spreading out all over the world has opened them upto the new age of information technology and advanced sciences. However, they are keen to remain attached to their roots, and keep coming home to their villages in rural areas, bringing with them modern ideas and influences, contributing to the future in many ways. Certainly, the Punjabis also imbibe the latest in the modern way of life.

Ajeet Cour is a noted Punjabi author and a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Padmi Shri



Mother and Daughter: Ajeet Cour, the writer and Arpana Caur, the artist



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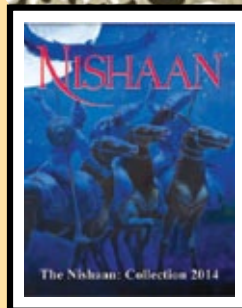
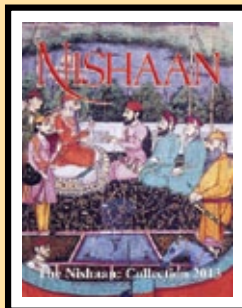
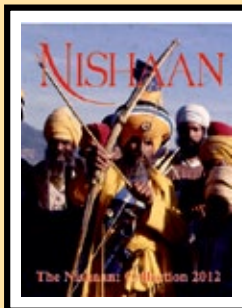
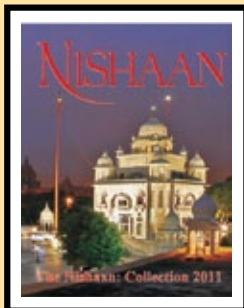
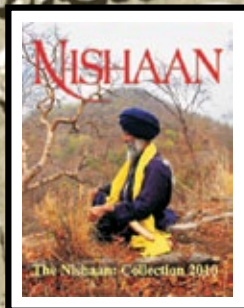
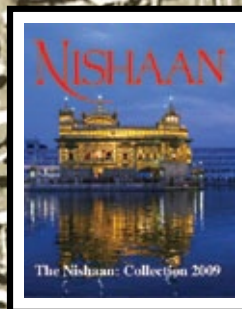
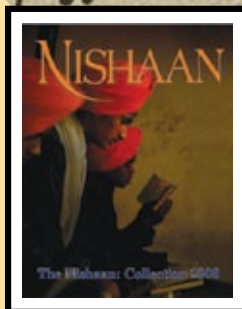
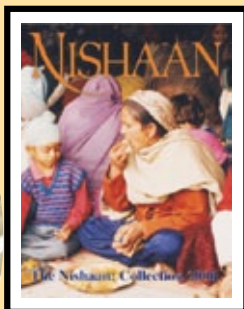
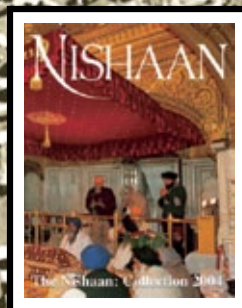
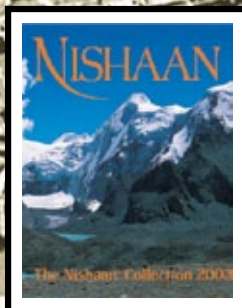
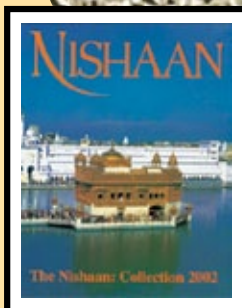
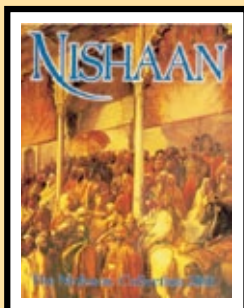
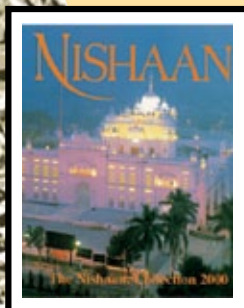
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