

THE SIKH HERITAGE BEYOND BORDERS*Authored by Dalvir S. Pannu*

Reviewed by Dr. Rabela Junejo*

With the mass exodus, began the 100 miles journey to cross Radcliffe demarcation line separating millions of people into two nations.” Pg. 10.

These words from the author Dalvir Pannu are what that makes this book a significant piece of writing. For those who are unaware of the Radcliffe line, it divides present day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). The line became an official border between the two countries on the night of 14th and 15th August 1947. The fateful night and the division of Indian subcontinent into two separate nations was never a straightforward political event, the horrors of it still resonate with those who had to migrate on either side of the border leaving everything behind – their homes, belongings, friends and sometimes families and their rich built heritage, religious and/or otherwise. This book is about such religious heritage and the mass migration or more aptly, diaspora of Sikh population of West Punjab to East Punjab, since it was Punjab and not India or Pakistan. The excerpt quoted above and the introduction of the book provides a minor peek into what ensued when thousands of people left their homes of many years, mostly on foot with cattle and measily belongings, as much as they could manage, fearing for their lives constantly, because the British decided to leave the subcontinent forever, dividing the large geography into two nations.

The divide was never on the land, it was, due to the events that followed, forever etched in the minds of people. It transcended the age old associations and neighborly love that were independent of one’s religious following and somehow managed to, in the wake of independence, breed a rancor that resurfaces every now and then. This is perhaps because the cost of independence is such and when the seeds of discord are sown they are meant to grow into something more than pure hatred or animosity.

The book is also about nostalgia and longing for the home that once was, and the author narrates several stories of the

Sikh communities that lived and in many instances were the first people to nurture those agriculture lands that are today part of Punjab Pakistan, the people of the soil. Almost eighty plus Gurdwaras are photographically documented and discussed in the book and there are mentions of many that are perhaps lost, the number is telling of a thriving Sikh community that dotted the landscape of Lahore, Sheikhpura, Kasur and Nankana Sahib etc. that are now lost. The book, then, also becomes a story of loss – loss of ethno - communal ties, loss of diversity, religious – ethnic – socio-cultural and architectural, and the loss of Sikh population that had to move due to their religious difference, since the land they inhabited for centuries was no longer safe for them – diametrically opposite to the promises made on both sides of the border by the leaders. Although the author’s narration focuses on Sikh community and Punjab in particular the story was no different for multiple ethno religious groups that had to migrate.

The contents of the book are sorted geographically, discussing major and minor Gurdwara sites in every region. The first of them is Nankana Sahib Region, of which fourteen monuments are presented in the book. The most important of those being Gurdwara Janam Asthan Sahib, opening the enlistments in this four hundred page undertaking. It was a decade long endeavor for the author since the relations between the two nations oscillated from being semi cordial to outright hostile after Aug. 1947. Stories of Guru Nanak’s birth and his growing up years in Nankana Sahib are narrated along with each Gurdwara, places where he played with his friends as a child, where he grazed the cattle with his father and where he attended schools all those sites and the Gurdwaras have a story to tell. The narration is filled with anecdotes and stories of miracles of Guru Nanak are quoted from various auspicious Sikh texts with a dash of salt.

The author is cautious and objectively cross references each narration and questions the idea of miracle association with saintly beings like Nanak Sahib. He supplements the text with similar accounts related to other saints from Muslim or Hindu community to draw parallels and also reflect as to

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how these stories of miraculous benevolence transcends the religious barriers. These were narrations in the style of hagiographies a literary genre of writing on / about the saintly figures. The subcontinent produced many such writings and their use of similar evocative writing style for Guru Nanak Sahib is comprehensible in the context these were produced. Guru himself was a proponent of intercultural and religious harmony and respect as referred by the author. The legends also have their own life and transformative quality and they live on for generations, transforming and growing and flowing from one dimension into another. The legends then perhaps are part of the land that sows and grows it and with time as different people get associated with that land the legends subsequently get associated with them.

Although not explicitly discussed in the narration of the book, the emblematic architectural features of Sikh Gurdwaras are quite discernible from the pictures. The mostly golden fluted dome with a large finial, kiosks or chattri, balconied oriel windows and porticoes are some common repeated features. It is however not a hard and fast rule that every Gurdwara temple sports these features, but they appear to be the most commonly repeated and identifiable ones. Looking at the monuments enlisted in the book it will be an injustice to reduce this architectural heritage to these elemental markers only, as they all have remarkable architecture and

the narrative wall and ceiling frescoes of some of the Gurdwaras of Kasur are a sight to behold.

It is a huge undertaking to write on eighty plus monuments of varying scale spread across an array of locations from rural to urban Punjab on the other side of the border, supplementing the text with excerpts from the scriptures and making the reading viable. The author must be credited for this undertaking. The provision of locational coordinates of each monument is an added bonus in the book, not to forget the photographs that facilitate the reader. Leafing through the pages of this book is pure delight with tinge of loss of a thriving community. It is recommended to read the book with its introduction to truly appreciate the endeavors of the author and to encompass the intent with which he envisions and narrates about these places.

The Radcliff line comes with its problems and is difficult to reason with, but what appears to be rather attainable is safeguarding this heritage not only for the Sikh community but for Pakistan and its cultural multiplicity, what once was and which we are losing. If we lose these pre-independence sites to intolerance, August 1947 will forever resonate as partition.

ARCHITECTURE OF SIKH SHRINES AND GURDWARAS IN PAKISTAN

Authored by Samia Karamat

Reviewed by Dr. Masooma Shakir*

Samia Karamat's *Architecture of Sikh Shrines and Gurdwaras in Pakistan* documents the architectural legacy of the Sikh community in Pakistan, from where it originated. It is a valuable contribution to a subject that has been sporadically covered. Ms. Karamat, a graduate of the National College of Arts Lahore, practicing architect, along with experience in teaching, traces the political and religious history of the region and outlines the fundamental religious principles that influenced the form of emerging architecture and its subsequent evolution, as the faith consolidated shaping settlements and their community centers. Kartarpur, Narowal, for example, marks the place of origination of the faith, where Guru Nanak established himself and developed the various community principles and values into rituals, preaching tolerance, social equality and charity.

The monograph is spread over sixteen chapters, the first two of which chart the historical narrative of the religion and its architecture in Punjab. As some of these architectural monuments lie in ruin due to neglect and given that most of the Sikh community migrated (as a collective decision) to Indian Punjab at the time of Independence, the study is a worthwhile documentation of the community's religious architecture within Pakistan. Thirteen of its chapters present the monuments in detail, supported by precise drawings of plans, sections, along with photographic documentation of its elements and ornamentation details, motifs, materials and building crafts employed in the construction of the building.

The book spans descriptions of monuments of Sikh religion, including mostly Gurdwaras and some *samadhs*, over geographical spread from Lahore, Sialkot, Narowal, Rohtas (Jehlum), Wazirabad (Gujranwala), Hasan Abdal (Attock), Kasur, Rawalpindi and Okara. The monuments are not only used for religious activities but are commemorative, narrating the history of the evolution of the Sikh religion. They mark place and events of historical significance in connection with the Sikh Gurus.

The publication is supported by detailed endnotes and a list of bibliographical references that show a well-researched publication, supported by fieldwork documentation. Colorful images throughout the book of buildings, frescoes, paintings depicting history along with black and white photos of the past present a good photographic documentation of the said landmark buildings. Frescoes within the heritage narrate the belief systems as an art form.

Quoting Prof. Vandal (Preface), 'the *Gurdwara* symbolized freedom from oppression, equality among the living and encourage people to focus around that symbol of human wisdom, the Guru Granth Sahib, holiness personified'. The word *Gurdwara* is a composite word of *Guru* and *Dwar*, *Guru* meaning master or guide and *Dwar* meaning house, door or seat. It represents a place used for congregational religious or social purposes, *sangat* (communal prayer), its size depending on resources of the local community. Harimandar or the Golden Temple of Amritsar became the most significant Sikh building, built by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan. Built on axial symmetry, the Gurdwara appears to be floating in a large water body, the *sarovar*. The temple is considered to be the 'fountainhead of the Sikh religion'. The structure became an inspiration for all the later Gurdwaras, constructed in a similar pattern. Water bodies built also as artificial lakes, became an important part of the Sikh religious architecture given its association in religion for giving sanctity and purity.

The Gurdwara is associated typically with a centralized square plan that may rise to a double storey height, sometimes with multiple stories on top with verandahs. Typically, an arcade surrounds the central space. The monuments range from complexes to single space configurations. The building vocabulary is similar to the constructions of the time. It is probable that the craftsmen who built these structures were involved to also work and ornament monuments belonging to other religions. Ms. Karamat has done a commendable documentation in several measures, of which one is the identification of the various architecture and decorative elements with the local terms. The supporting local stories

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add a layer of association to their structures.

The various buildings display use and perhaps experimentation with variety of arches, materials brick, stone and use of iron girders to support upper stories. The elements most popularly used are the fluted onion dome and tripartite divisioning of multifoil arches articulating the square, centralized plan of the Gurdwara. Singular arched openings on either side of these mark the ambulatory or verandah, locally called the *parikrama*. This would also absorb a bigger audience. The upper room with a dome and arched windows on four sides was mostly dedicated for the quiet reading of Granth Sahib.

While the ritualistic and congregational use of the spaces was defined by the belief, architecture elements like dome, arch, lintel, door show parallels with the regional practices. As the faith consolidated and spread, surface embellishments were elaborated with special focus, particularly *jharokas* and doorways, marking a celebration and blooming of the new faith.

The subsequent chapters on the monuments are organized to present the physical documentation and detail along with local stories, history, anecdotes attached to place, while the first couple of chapters are the most interesting, as these narrate the religious and political history. Chapter 1 talks about the history of the religious figures / the Gurus, their evolving practices and consolidation over the geographical terrain. The second chapter talks about the evolution of the architecture itself, in tandem with the social and political influences.

Baba Nanak grew up in the late fifteenth century, his rise paralleled the rise of the first Mughal Emperor Babar in the Indian subcontinent, while the decision of the last Guru to end the family Guruship was taken at the time of the end of Mughal rule, that were Aurangzeb and Bahadur Shah Zafar's rule. The holy book, Granth was given the status of a living Guru by the tenth Guru, dissolving the thread of the family Guruship due to rivalries between the multiple heirs. The historical account highlights the interactions and relations

between the subsequent Gurus and the Mughal Emperors of the time. At some occasions, the Gurus blessed the Emperors for the expeditions, at others the rulers offered support and protection to their sprouting settlements.

The text outlines the development of religio-social and political dynamics of the Sikh faith, its struggles and finally its blooming and celebration through architectural endeavours, landmarks, formation of new cities and settlements like Kartarpur (by Guru Nanak himself), Goindwal, Amritsar (by Guru Ram Das, developed around Golden Temple Complex), and development of other Punjabi settlements/cities. Important rituals and activities of Sikh community highlighting the use of their various spaces include *sangat*, a holy fellowship in which people pray together; *langar*, a people's kitchen and refectory; *pangat*, the communal act of eating together.

The historical account is comprehensive in charting the political and social evolution of the Sikh community, highlighting the constructions and later reconstructions of some of its monumental architecture, additions, expansions, renovations and emerging significance of particular sites and cities.

The publication in all is an excellent and welcome addition to the genre of South Asian religious architecture and contributes to research knowledge on Sikh architecture. It is a noteworthy documentation of history and historical artifacts that surpasses previous published works in its detail.

The author Samia Karamat is a practicing professional and architect with much teaching experience. A graduate of the National College of Arts, Lahore, she started teaching in Karachi at the Indus Valley School in 1998 and has also taught at her graduating institution in Lahore and then at Rawalpindi Campus of NCA, with a brief teaching experience at Cardiff University in UK. In her long professional career, she has designed and supervised a variety of architectural projects ranging from hospitals and medical centers, pharmaceutical plants, factories, educational institutes and residences.

THE SIKH HERITAGE OF PAKISTAN: SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB

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Reviewed by Dr. Rabela Junejo*

Book Review:

<i>Ik Oankar</i>	There is only one God
<i>Sat Naam</i>	True is His name
<i>Kartaa Purakh</i>	He is the Creator
<i>Nirbhao</i>	He is without fear
<i>Nirvar</i>	He is without enmity
<i>Akaal Moorat</i>	He is immortal
<i>Ajoone</i>	He is beyond births and deaths
<i>Saibhang</i>	He is self-existent
<i>Gur Prasaad</i>	He is attained by the grace of Guru

This book that takes us on the journey of selected architectural heritage of Sikh community that was part of the pre-partition Punjab and migrated to India in the wake of separation of the Indian subcontinent in August 1947. The book starts with the *Mool Mantar* prayers excerpted above, chanted by the Sikh religious community. The Sikhs follow the dictates of Guru Nanak Dev Ji as their spiritual guide and Sri Guru Granth Sahib as their spiritual book. What Guru Nanak achieved through his monotheistic, the prayer above is suggestive of it, spiritual teachings was a massive followership in Punjab. Over a period of almost two hundred years and nine additional Gurus, Sikhism became a religion in itself, with major following in Punjab on both sides of the current border. They garnered political domination with Raja Ranjit Singh and his control of Punjab in the early nineteenth century, with Lahore being the seat of power. The religion or spiritual

path of Sikhism, as one can infer, grew incrementally, as the book also suggests. The nine additional Gurus or spiritual guides, who followed Guru Nanak played a vital role in charting out the course of Sikhism. For example the second Guru, Guru Angad Dev, compiled Guru Nanaks compositions, adding his own works in it and introducing a new script *Gurmukhi* for the task that loosely translates to “*from the mouth of the Guru*”. The last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh made Sikh community into a *Khalsa Panth* “the community of the pure”, who were required to follow the prescribed ritual and communal ways that grew over time and came to a formal close with Guru Gobinds death in 1708. The ritual formalization nevertheless did not impede the communal growth of the community that gained a strong militaristic hold with Ranjit Singh. Some of the identification markers prescribed for the Sikhs in an already diverse ethno

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religious landscape of subcontinent were, men growing their hair long, wearing steel bracelet, cotton boxer shorts, keeping a wooden comb and a sword subscribing to the prescribed five K's the *Kesh*, *Kara*, *Kacha*, *Kangha* and *Kirpan*.

The identity markers were probably needed in the diverse ethno religious region of subcontinent, as a multitude of faiths with Hindus, Buddhist, Jain, and Muslim along with their myriad sectarian permutations and combinations, already existed and the new found faith required the followers to be identified. This however, does not eliminate the fact that overlaps were not present. These overlaps are part of the recipe that nurtures diversity where myriad faith based conceptions find a common ground for discourse and where communities can co-exist. Similar commonalities between Sikhism and Islam are spelled in the book, and going back to the prayers narrated above, it is the monotheistic inclinations of Sikh faith and its worship of the formless God that becomes the common ground for the two faiths to have co-existed. It is therefore, not implausible to find commonalities in Sikh and Mughal architecture, that makes the major part of the book, as it is about the heritage of Sikhs mainly on the Gurdwaras of holy shrines, although secular domestic architecture is also presented.

Although the basic layout of Gurdwaras appears to be rather fluid there are some permanent ritualistic features, like *darbar* or hall, where the Guru Granth Sahib (the holy book) resides on a *takht* or throne, much in likes of the *minbar* one finds in the mosque. Since the Sikhs worship the formless God and the Gurus, the revered guides being no more alive, the holy book acts as a Guru in their stead and hence is held in highest esteem enthroned in the main darbar. The ritual purification water tank or *sarovar*, the *langar khana* or communal kitchen and an inner sanctum where the holy book retires for the night, all draw attention to the similarities that the faiths share when it comes to spatially formalizing the rituals. As, for example, the *langar khana* is an important feature of Sufi shrines and the congregational character of the hall, with focus on the holy book parallels with the Muslim prayers and holy sermons. The water tank for purification is something that is akin to many faiths and is almost a universal element of the sacred spaces. Many faiths prescribe to the idea of purification with water leaving the profane world behind and cleansing themselves within the very boundaries of holy space. One recalls the water basins placed on the boundaries of Greek agora, where those entering cleansed themselves as agora was held sacred, an important feature of the Greek civic life.

Other than these ritualistic features that make up the layout,

elements like domes and canopies, lotus finials, multi-foil arcades, *jalis* or screens, and *baradari* or arcaded pavilions etc. are consistent with most Gurdwaras as demonstrated in the book, both textually and pictorially. The Mughal vocabulary of architecture is fairly apparent in the makeup of elements, however there are variations. One encounters colonial language transpiring with use of Doric like pilasters in Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Katarpur. It is safe to infer here, that the shrines borrowed from the existing architecture and transformed, as the faith itself did, over a period of time. It added elements from multiple existing vocabularies and architecture, mirroring the transformation of the faith, formalized elements that later became associated with Sikh architecture like the lotus ribbed dome mostly colored golden.

The *havelis* or residences of Lahore discussed in the secular architecture are a delightful sight, and the frescos with Sikh variants of Mughal miniature paintings appear at par with Mughal art work itself. The aesthetics were definitely shared and with Sikhs in power and the shift of patronage perhaps, provided an opportunity to the artisans to align their work as per the wishes of the new clientele and expand their artistic jargon. With the Sikh clientele, it appears that the armature of architects, masons and artist definitely expanded. All of these artistic and architectural feats are narrated via images rather than by text, and that makes the book more of pictorial documentation compared to textual one. This heavy laden pictorial journey makes the book an easy read for a layperson as well.

The general writing of the book is also unpretentious and caters to a larger audience than particularly the serious history and architecture academics. The outline is simple, giving general history of Sikhism with incremental religious and political growth of the Sikh community, stressing on the inter-communal Sikh and Muslim harmony. The recent events are also discussed, like the opening of the Kartarpur corridor to facilitate Sikh diaspora to visit their holy shrines on the other side of the border. It is discussed as a welcome and positive political initiative by Pakistan, considering the always volatile conditions with the natural neighbor. Was this celebration of the affability between Muslims and Sikhs had to be spelled out so enthusiastically is the question that must be left to the readers.

With the prayer chants of *Mool Mantar Jap* resonating in the ears and the nostalgia of a lost community, the reviewer closes this text hoping this book makes us more accepting toward interfaith commonalities rather than differences and provides us with a chance to become more tolerant and accepting, as our forefathers once were.