

**Gaining Authority and Legitimacy: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee
and the Golden Temple c. 1920–2000**

by

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DEDICATION

To Samarth, Ozzie and Papa

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GLOSSARY

Adi Granth	Literally “the first book”. Early compilation of Sikh scriptures by Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh Guru, in 1604.
Akal Takhat	Literally “eternal throne.” The pre-eminent of the five seats of Sikh temporal authority. Power exercised by Akal Takhat’s Jathedar is not shared by the other four Takhats. The actual building is in the Golden Temple (Harimandir Sahib) complex of Amritsar, facing the Harimandir Sahib, and was constructed under the direction of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru.
Amrit Sarovar	Sacred water tank.
Amrit	Literally “nectar.” It is composed of water and sugar and is stirred with a double-edged sword while prayers are spoken. Initiation into Sikhism involves drinking Amrit. Can also refer, more generally, to the ambrosia of God’s name.
Amritdhari	Baptised Sikhs, who have vowed to be Khalsa Sikhs.
Ardas	Sikh culmination prayers.
Ath Sath Teerath	Place of <i>nirvana</i> , with iconic 88 steps leading to spiritual liberation.
Bunga	Literally “rest houses.” These were institutions of learning that were built up around the Golden Temple.
Darshan	The act of being present with the Guru.
Dera	Both a monastery and a place for the exposition of dharma. Deras are homes of spiritual leaders, and encampments are built around these in some cases.
Dhadi	Martial singing tradition, associated with Guru Gobind Singh’s time.
Dukh bhajini	Breaker of sorrows.
Gatka	The Sikh martial art form.
Giani	Someone learned in the Sikh religion. Often leads the congregation in prayers, such as Ardas, or in singing kirtan.

Golden Temple	A gurdwara of historical, spiritual, and emotional significance to Sikhs, called Harimandir Sahib in Punjabi. It was first conceived of by Guru Amar Das (the third Guru), although construction did not begin until Guru Ram Das (the fourth Guru) became the Guru. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had the structure plated with gold in the early nineteenth century. In 1604, the <i>Adi Granth</i> , which had recently been compiled, was housed here. It was attacked by the Indian army in June 1984 as Sikh militants took shelter there.
Granth	A scriptural text.
Granthi	A ceremonial reader of the Guru Granth Sahib. Duties include arranging daily religious services, reading from the Sikh scripture, maintaining the gurdwara premises, and teaching and advising community members. A granthi is not equivalent to a minister as there are no such religious intermediaries in the Sikh religious tradition.
Gurbani	The revealed wisdom of the Sikh Gurus in their own words, found in the Guru Granth Sahib. The devotional songs of the Gurus.
Gurdwara	Literally “Home of the Guru.” Any building or room dedicated to housing the devotional songs of the Guru for the purpose of spiritual practice; a Khalsa training institution, open to anyone. Provides communication, food, and shelter to travelers and the needy.
Gurmatta	Consensus of Sikh community.
Gurubani	Verses of the Guru.
Janamsakhi	Hagiographies of the Gurus.
Jathedar	A leader of Sikh volunteers. Also refers to the appointed leader of one of the five Sikh takhats.
Kar Seva	Collective seva or service of the community.
Karah prashad	Sweet offerings served at the gurdwaras as Guru’s blessings.
Khalsa	Sikh followers who believe in the ten Gurus, beginning from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh and no other Living Guru other than these Gurus. Khalsa Sikhs also believe in the <i>Adi Granth</i> as the last Living Guru and wear five symbols of Khalsa, known as the 5 Ks.
Langar	Free community kitchen. The devotional meal eaten by the congregation as part of the religious service. Langar is free and open to all, regardless of religious background. It is an illustration of putting into practice the Sikh belief in the

	equality of all humanity, and the rejection of the Hindu caste system, which forbade people of different castes from eating together.
Morcha	Literally “to march.” In this dissertation, it implies a peaceful protest by marching.
Naam Simran	Remembering God’s name through meditation. This is a seminal form of worship for Sikhs. The continual remembrance of Naam.
Naam	Name. The divine name of God.
Nirmala	Literally “one without blemish,” a traditional Sikh order of scholar saints.
Nishan Sahib	Symbolic pole wrapped in saffron cloth placed in gurdwaras.
Nishkam	Without desire.
Panj Piare	“Five beloved ones”—five Amritdhari Sikhs. Often refers to the first five initiated Sikhs, during the Vaisakhi celebrations of 1699, who volunteered to give up their lives as a sign of their faith and love for their Guru. Currently, panj piare are necessary to perform baptisms, make important corporate decisions, and officiate over special occasions.
Panth	Literally “the Guru’s path or way.” Largely it means the Sikh community.
Pir	Sufi master.
Pothi	Scriptures or manuscript with religious texts.
Prachar	Exegesis of scriptures.
Rababi	Musician with a specific instrument called Rabab. Representative of Guru Nanak’s musical tradition.
Ragi	A musician who is trained in performing kirtan.
Rahit Maryada	Code of Conduct according to Khalsa Sikhs.
Samparadaya/ Samparda	Order, or a traditional school.
Sangat	Literally “community.” A Sikh congregation. Believed to be an essential aspect of living a spiritual and God-centred life. Also called Sadh Sangat, “holy congregation.”
Sant Sipahi	Literally “saint-soldiers.” Guru Hargobind decreed that Sikhs should be both devout followers of the teachings of the Gurus, while being prepared to take up arms for self-defence and defence of the oppressed.

Sant	Holy man/ Living Guru. A spiritually realized Sikh, often living as virakat.
Seva	Community service. A central aspect of Sikh theology, it is selfless service, which is believed to bring one closer to God.
Sevadar	Professional worker at the gurdwara.
Sevapanthi	One who takes the path of service. There is a traditional sampradaya called the Sevapanthis that was first formed in the seventeenth century.
Shabad	Literally “word.” A sacred Sikh hymn from the Sikh scriptures.
Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)	Established in 1920, this elected governance committee, located in Amritsar, is responsible for the administration of gurdwaras in Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh.
Shivling	Lord Shiva’s symbolic presence. Lord Shiva is a popular Hindu deity.
Sikh	Literally “student, disciple.” According to the Sikh Rehat Maryada, a Sikh is someone who believes in God, the ten Sikh Gurus, in the Guru Granth Sahib, in the importance of the Khalsa initiation, and in no other religion.
Singh	Literally “lion.” The name given to all male Sikhs.
Takhat	Literally “throne.” One of five centres of Sikh secular authority.
Tat Khalsa	Orthodox Sikhs also known as the Singh Sabha reformers.
Udasi	Detachment, one of the four traditional Sikh sampradaya.
Yatra	Travels, particularly religious pilgrimages.

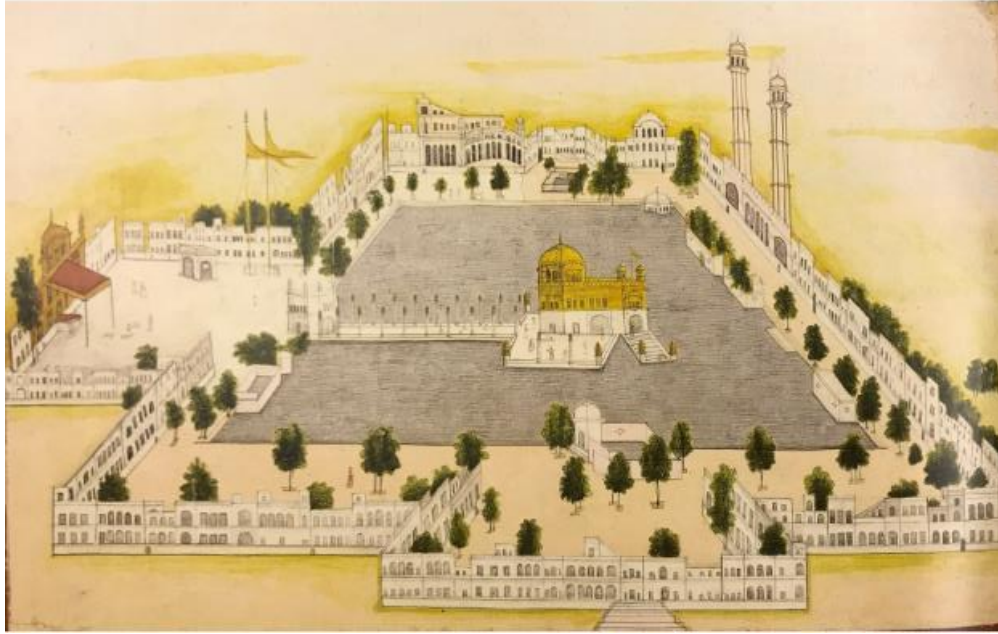


Figure 1: View of the Golden Temple and surrounding buildings, c. 1855–60 © Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh (acc. No. 3958)

This painting of the Golden Temple dates from the nineteenth century and gives us a holistic view of the complex before many changes were made in the twentieth century. For example, it shows the bungas (rest houses) along the perimeter, and there is no Victorian Clock Tower yet, so the painting must have been made before the 1860s.

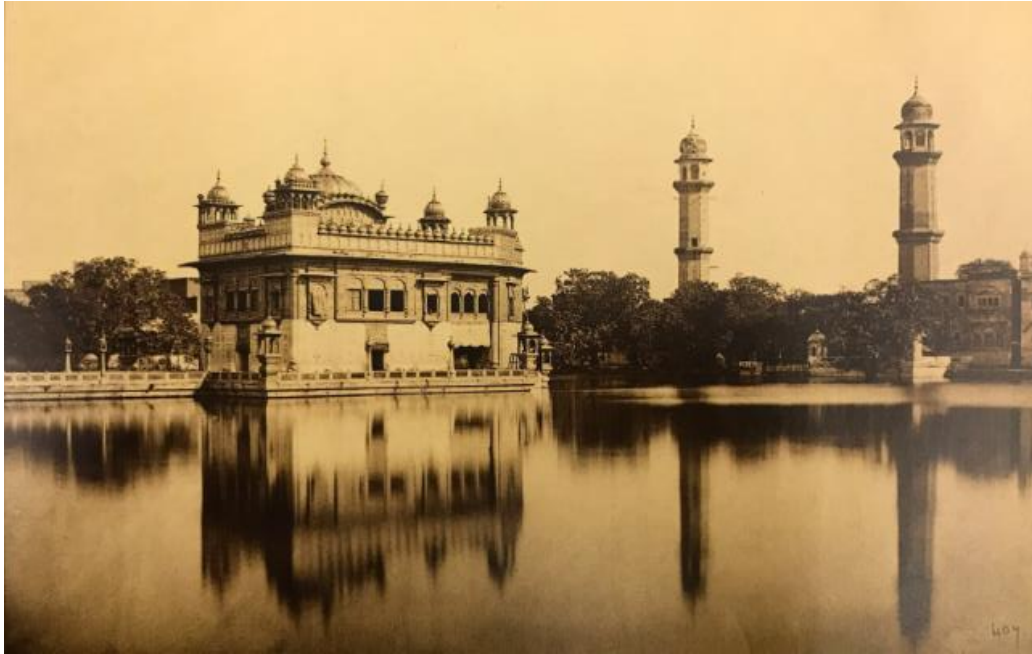


Figure 2: The Golden Temple, Umrtsar, 1864. Albumen print, Samuel Bourne © The British Library Board (Photo 222/(47))

In this picture, we see a sanctified image of the Golden Temple, as seen from the lens of an orientalist, Samuel Bourne, depicting the other-worldliness of this space. To be noted are the original towers next to the Ramgarhia Bunga, which were rebuilt after 1984 as they were destroyed during the army attack.



Figure 3: Aerial View of the Golden Temple (2012)

In contrast to the earlier painting, this aerial view of the Golden Temple that is easily available for purchase in Amritsar's shops shows the differences in the complex's structure. The bungas have been razed and a uniform-built structure stands in its place. The parikrama has been widened and the Ramgarhia towers have been rebuilt after the 1984 attack on the Golden Temple, when these towers were destroyed by the tanks brought in by the Indian Army.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the democratically elected religious body amongst the Sikh community since its formation in 1920 to the end of the twentieth century. The study begins by examining the ways in which the SGPC created its dominant practices and structured its organization based on Singh Sabha (religious reformist body 1885-1919) legacy but goes on to show how this “democratically” elected management body had to work hard to influence Sikhs within and beyond the Punjab over the twentieth century despite its lineage to the Singh Sabha. Scholars have viewed the SGPC as wielding influence and being a centralized body with a lot of power over the Sikh community globally, yet this dissertation shows that the SGPC has never had unanimous support and has *layered* authority which is decentralized and fragmented. By layered authority, this dissertation alludes to the multiples layers of authority associated with Sikh religion, which resides in living Gurus and babas (condemned by the Khalsa Sikhs and the SGPC), different scriptural exegeses of the *Adi Granth* and caste groups as well as regional groups amongst the Sikhs. The SGPC counts on these different sources of authority to wield its influence on the community. For instance, the SGPC organizes kar sevas (a specific type of voluntary community work) and invites sants and their deras (centres of influence including their followers) to lead these activities, usually including the building and rebuilding of gurdwaras. These sants and their deras are not new organizations but have been in existence since the pre-colonial

period, hence highlighting the continuing traditions and legacies of pre-colonial practices as opposed to the SGPC's claims of reformed and uniform Khalsa Sikh practices. There consistent involvement in the kar sevas highlights the layered nature of the SGPC, which needs to be supported by pre-colonial traditions to influence the larger Sikh community. The SGPC initially forbade deras but eventually incorporated them into its own structure. This incorporation was a ploy to gain legitimacy amongst wider Sikh followers but also impacted SGPC's practices, which watered down the initial drives to sanitize and institutionalize Sikh religion. The efforts of the SGPC, moreover, never went uncontested. In other words, a diversity of Sikh traditions and practices continues, even after the formation and the subsequent ascendance of the SGPC.

Chapter One: Introduction

On July 11, 2014, a small body of Sikhs met and formed the Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (HSGPC) that would manage historic *gurdwaras* (Sikh temples) in Haryana and would constitute a separate and independent body from the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). The latter was not pleased as it showed rifts within the SGPC leadership and regional plays for influence and power that had been seething for a long time but were not aired or even acknowledged publicly. The SGPC formed in the 1920 during the Gurdwara Reform Movement has aspired to manage gurdwaras all over India since its early forming years. This declaration of independence by the HSGPC from the SGPC led to near physical confrontations between the members of the two groups in gurdwaras all over Haryana, with members of the HSGPC “occupying” gurdwaras and refusing to leave until the state government of Haryana accepted their demands.¹ The state, as a result of increasing tension, enacted a Haryana

¹ Yogesh Snehi, “Vicissitudes of Gurdwara Politics”, in *Economic Political Weekly*, Volume XLIX, No. 34, (August 23, 2014), <http://www.epw.in/reports-states/vicissitudes-gurdwara-politics.html> and T.K. Rajalakshmi, “Sikhs vs Sikhs”, *Frontline*, (August 22, 2014), <https://www.frontline.in/the-nation/sikhs-vs-sikhs/article6279895.ece>, R. Sedhuraman, “Haryana gurdwaras: SC orders status quo”, *The Tribune* (Chandigarh, 8 August 2014), available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140808/main1.htm> accessed on 21 August 2018.

Sikh Gurdwara Act 2014, which allowed the creation of a new body of management for Haryana gurdwaras exclusively. The creation of the Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Act of 2014 led to further conflict and SGPC members in turn refused to vacate their positions of management in Haryana, resulting in a stand-off between the incumbents and the newly appointed managers of the gurdwaras in Haryana. Not only was the SGPC's power being fragmented but it was incurring a loss of territory and funds received from these gurdwaras.

This recent incident sheds light on several issues discussed in this dissertation. One, the study of the organizational structure of the SGPC, which is physically situated in Amritsar—its headquarters, but wields influence over the historic gurdwaras directly in the regions of Haryana and the Himachal Pradesh and indirectly on gurdwaras across India and globally. Second, the tactics and methods applied by the SGPC to wield this influence over the gurdwaras and the communities associated with these gurdwaras. For example, the “occupation” of gurdwaras in Haryana by the Sikh leaders is an old Akali tactic that was predominantly used during the Gurdwara Reform Movement and eventually led to the successful creation of the SGPC through a Sikh Gurdwara Act in 1925. Following the tactics applied by the SGPC, this dissertation traces the institutionalization of Sikh practices and authority in the space of the gurdwara. And finally, by placing the subject of this study in the very space of the gurdwara, this dissertation moves the subject of reformed and sanitized Sikh practices away from discourse to a layered and nuanced embodiment of Sikh institutional religious practices amongst the wider Sikh community.

The SGPC came into existence in opposition to the precolonial gurdwara management system in place, wherein traditional mahants (chief priest/head of temple) presided over and managed gurdwaras, since late seventeenth century. Gurdwara management had undergone significant changes within the precolonial period, especially under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign of 1799-1839 and continued under colonial rule when new structures and systems were put in place to manage gurdwaras in the Punjab, particularly historic gurdwaras that tended to receive larger number of visitors.² These systems trickled down to smaller gurdwaras across the region. The SGPC inherited the management system laid down in a document known as *Dastur al-' Amal*. *Dastur al-' Amal* literally means a revenue or administrative guide book and was created to stabilize the management of gurdwaras in the Punjab in 1859 under the orders of the British officials. There seems to have been some anxiety related to the religious management of the gurdwaras and the more mundane and administrative management of the gurdwaras. *Dastur al'-amal* laid out clearly the responsibilities of each functionary in the gurdwara and how it was to be managed, including which resources were available for which particular works. Sardar Sodhi Hazara Singh, writing in 1938 says that the motivation behind this document was for the British officials to gain better footing in the gurdwara management, for there were concerns that the gurdwaras could potentially become breeding grounds for dissent.³ Ian J. Kerr on the other hand suggests that the document was a way for the British to extricate themselves from the management of the gurdwaras, which after the 1857 rebellion

² Ganda Singh (ed.), *Dastur al-amal*, (1883); Ian J. Kerr, "The British and the Administration of the *Golden Temple* in 1859," *Panjab Past and Present*, Vol 10 (1976); Madanjit Kaur, *Golden temple: Past and Present*, (GNDU, 1983); Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Sikh Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition*, (OUP, 2012).

³ Sohi Hazara Singh, *A History and Guide to the Golden Temple, Amritsar to the Golden Temple, Amritsar*, (1938)

was to be avoided at all costs.⁴ Notwithstanding the intentions of the British officials, the document is detailed and provides clear guidelines, which informed SGPC's practices as well. For instance:

1. Guru Ram Das was the sole undisputed owner of these Gurdwaras. Everyone was equally entitled to serve him. The Pujaris in service were to work on fixed daily allowances according to their duties, as heretofore. 2. The Granthis and Pujaris could pass on their shares to their progeny or Chelas as they wished. 3. In addition to these allowances from the Golden Temple Treasury, they were also permitted to receive personal gifts from the visitors as well... 6. The manager was not to interfere in the questions relating to religion; he was to look after the character and conduct of the people in the temple, to supervise the payments made in his presence, to see that all works was carried out peacefully... The government would appoint the managers.⁵

The SGPC leadership fiercely contested some of these practices laid out in the document. For example, point 2, wherein Granthis could leave their progeny their jobs, any resources gathered and any "personal gifts" from the visitors. The leadership informed by the Singh Sabha period of Sikh reforms in the late nineteenth century saw all resources and gifts as belonging to the gurdwara only and not to any individuals. This was, in fact one of the key reasons that the SGPC was formed, to manage the resources of the gurdwara in a transparent way. In other words, the SGPC leadership inherited a structure for gurdwara management, but they reformed it to suit their own agendas and policies of Sikh practices in the gurdwaras, which were deeply influenced by the Singh Sabha reforms and reformers.

⁴ Ian J. Kerr, "British Relationships with the Golden Temple, 1849-90", *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 21, 2 (1984), pp. 139-151.

⁵ Sodhi Hazara Singh, *Ibid.*, p. 108-110.

Although the SGPC remains a powerful body and wields a lot of influence amongst the Sikh community, both in India and outside, there remain significant tensions and fissures, evident from the bid for independence of the Haryana SGPC. This dissertation focuses on the SGPC from its formation in 1920 and highlights the kinds of challenges it has faced and how it has evolved from its original structure and functioning to attaining a certain degree of authority. I begin by examining the dominant practices authorized by the SGPC and go on to show how this democratically elected management body had to work hard to gain influence over Sikhs within and beyond the Punjab.

The SGPC has never had unanimous support and has had to build this influence through different strategies. These strategies included, for example, organizing pilgrimages, doing *kar sevas* (a specific type of voluntary community work) and expanding the gurdwaras' perimeter by way of breaking down centuries-old *bungas* (rest houses). The SGPC attempted to sanitize Sikhism, an agenda it inherited from the Singh Sabha movement, but such an exercise was never complete. There are ten living Gurus according to Sikh religion. It is believed that the Guruship was challenged by several heretical leaders, mostly the sons or brothers of the presiding Guru, when this "light" and "learning" was passed to the next Guru. For example, the fourth Guru's son, Prithi Chand challenged the Guruship of the fifth Guru and his brother, Arjan and claimed his own Guruship. These "false" Gurus have been marked as *minas* (liars) in Sikh tradition and been left out in the canonized traditions of Sikhism. After the tenth Guru passed, he proclaimed that there will be no more human Gurus and the Guruship passed to the sacred scriptures, which was now understood to embody human elements. Despite canonizing the Sikh Gurus and the *Adi Granth* (sacred scripture which is thought to be a living being

by the Khalsa Sikhs) as the spiritual heads of the Sikh faith, several Living Gurus continued to have a large following among the Sikh community. Moreover, the efforts of the SGPC never went uncontested.

In other words, a diversity of Sikh traditions and practices continue, even after the formation and the subsequent rise of the SGPC. The dilemma of the SGPC, as this dissertation argues, was precisely this that even as the SGPC extended its control over the Sikh community through the management of the gurdwaras, it was neither able to stamp out existing rival traditions nor able to prevent the emergence of new opposition. On the contrary, the SGPC acquired the legitimacy and authority by incorporating and sanitizing some of the continuing traditions that could not be overcome, for example the tradition of saints and their deras. This dissertation calls this the “layered” authority of the SGPC. Following Tony Ballantyne, this dissertation suggests that alternative visions of Sikhness could not be stifled or done away with, and no one way of being Sikh predominated despite the many attempts made by Sikh reformers in the decades preceding the SGPC’s formation. Multiple identities continued to exist and be articulated that interacted and intermingled with issues of caste and region.⁶ This dissertation focuses on the SGPC from early 1920s to early 2000s and follows the different tactics deployed by the management body to resist challenges and survive as the predominant Sikh representative body.

The Origins of the SGPC

The SGPC came into existence in response to the Gurdwara Reform Movement from 1920 to 1925 and attended to the immediate issue of gurdwara ownership and

⁶ Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*, (Duke University Press, 2006), 166–7.

management. Following the earlier successes of Singh Sabha – a Sikh religious reformist body that had sanitized Sikh thoughts and institutions theoretically – the SGPC now took on the task to sanitize the practices in the gurdwara and challenged traditional individuals’ ownership of gurdwaras and argued that only the community could own gurdwara properties.⁷ Singh Sabha reformers preceding the SGPC focused on reforming Sikh practices, rituals, internal caste issues, education and the upkeep of gurdwara properties.⁸

Some scholars argue that the Singh Sabha reformers “constructed religious boundaries” in a landscape where religious identities and practices were fluid.⁹ Some scholars have even suggested that there was no Sikhism or Sikh identity before colonial rule or the reformist movement and that the British played a central role in creating an “orthodox” identity.¹⁰ More recently scholars like Arvind Mandair, Purnima Dhavan and Anne Murphy have argued that there was a strong pre-colonial Sikh identity but it was not manifest in the same ways as it came to be seen and practiced under colonial rule.¹¹ All these works broadly look at the scale of changes brought on by the advent of colonial rule, to understand how colonial forms of knowledge and information gathering impacted socio-religious associations and practices. Tony Ballantyne states that we need to

⁷ Tan Tai Yong, “Assuaging the Sikhs: Government Responses to the Akali Movement, 1920–1925” *Modern Asian Studies*, Issue 29, No. 3, (1995), pp. 655–703.

⁸ N.G. Barrier, *The Sikhs and their Literature*, (Delhi, Manohar Book Service, 1970); Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab*, (OUP, 2004); Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, (University of Chicago Press, 1994); Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, (OUP, 2014).

⁹ Harjot Oberoi, *ibid*, (1994).

¹⁰ Richard Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, (University of California Press, 1985).

¹¹ Arvind Mandair, *Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (Columbia University Press: 2010); Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior 1699-1799*; (OUP, 2011); Anne Murphy, *Materiality of the Sikh Past*; (OUP, 2012)

understand Sikh history and the reforms as a “complex interaction” between pre-colonial and colonial milieu. Calling it a “point of recognition”, Ballantyne says that we need to understand Sikh histories in broader terms that includes the experiences of travel, diaspora connections and cultural assumptions.¹² Following Ballantyne, this dissertation seeks to understand the organizational structure of the SGPC and its policies, organized events and subsumption of competitive ideas, in a broader context and wider webs of interactions and connections. For instance, in chapter 5, the kar sevas performed by the diasporic community is understood from the perspective of the sant traditions wherein the practice and the tradition emerged. By seeing it in continuity, albeit significant differences in resources, technology and public support, the cultural assumptions and intentions of the activity become clearer and are an evolution in present context.

Another area that scholars have debated in the study of Singh Sabha reforms is the areas that the reformers focused upon. For instance, some scholars suggest that the bulk of the reformist work was in women’s reforms, wherein women’s bodies now became the singular site upon which men’s honor and respect was transcribed.¹³ Other scholars had highlighted the embodiment of the reformers’ focus on Sikh rituals and symbolic practices that highlighted the differences between Khalsa ideology over Sanatan Sikhs.¹⁴ More specifically, Harjot Oberoi states that the Singh Sabha reformers focused their energies on the “G-trinity” their tenure.¹⁵ These were *Guru* (spiritual leader) of the Sikh

¹² Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*, (Duke University Press, 2006).

¹³ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*, (Hurst, 2001); Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab*, (OUP, 2004); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the late nineteenth century*, (Manchester University Press, 1995).

¹⁴ N.G. Barrier, op cit.

¹⁵ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, (University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 328.

community, *Granth* (sacred scriptures) and the last living Guru for the community, and the *Gurdwara* (Sikh temple) where the community congregated and created the Guru in the *sangat*. Oberoi writes,

Despite great ambiguity and diversity in this process of religious reaggregation, it is possible to provide a general account of religious systematization under the Tat Khalsa. Three core doctrines—Guru, Granth and Gurdwara (the three G's)—became the foci of Tat Khalsa praxis. These three G's became in fact the litmus test of authentic Sikhism... An interdiction on following living gurus was acceptable as a theological principle, but how were people to cope with the woes of mundane life?... The Tat Khalsa solution to this dilemma was simple and in line with an evolving theological principle: the *Adi Granth* as a sacred repository containing the writings of the Sikh gurus could perform all the functions not only of religious virtuosi but also of exorcists, medical personnel and other rural healers. In human emergency a person was now to turn to the *Granth*... From this point it was only a short step to the reconstitution of Sikh sacred space, for if the *Granth* was such a powerful device it could hardly be housed in any ordinary or (according to the Tat Khalsa) polluted space. The centrality of the Sikh gurus and the unrivalled status of the *Granth* had been intermittently mulled over in the pre-Singh Sabha period, though it had never before been on the agenda of any reformers, and perhaps this marked one of the most significant departures from existing conventions".¹⁶

The protestant ethic in this drive to sanitize and systematize religious practices, beliefs and spaces is evident in Oberoi's account of the reformist movement. Ballantyne draws upon this precise intersection or shared assumptions of protestant ethic, when he argues that Sikh reforms should be studied from a longer time, i.e. from 1850-1925 and with wider milieu in mind, i.e. the writings of Europeans on Sikh practices and identity coterminous with the Sikh writings on the colonial period as well as colonial officials. Such a reading, Ballantyne states will allow us to fully appreciate the points of recognition as well as a deeper understanding of how alliances were built. Drawing upon these studies as a source on mid to late nineteenth century developments, this dissertation finds continuities and changes in the SGPC leadership and the organizational makeup. The

¹⁶ Harjot Oberoi, *ibid*, pp. 317-320.

SGPC leaders continued the Singh Sabha's ideals of Sikh practice and thoughts, albeit in a different historical context, i.e. post- First World War era, but how did these traditions and institutions evolve in different historical contexts and what was their significance? By placing the SGPC's and the broader Sikh communities' activities in the space of the gurdwara, we can see the transformations in the SGPC over time.

More specifically SGPC's origins in 1920 can be alluded to a combination of events that necessitated the creation of a new leadership to represent political and religious interests of the Sikh community. One immediate trigger was the events surrounding the massacre of peacefully-protesting civilians by the British at Jallianwala Bagh, which was situated less than 50 meters from the Golden Temple gurdwara in Amritsar. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre was a devastating blow to the Sikh community, and the reaction of the gurdwara managers to this event created a furor. The events were as follows. On 13th April 1919, a large, unarmed congregation had gathered at Jallianwala Bagh to protest a recently-passed colonial legislation, the Rowlatt Act. This Act extended indefinitely the emergency measures adopted during the First World War against revolutionaries, allowing colonial officials to detain Indian subjects for an indefinite period without trial. The congregation gathered at the Jallianwala Bagh on the day of the spring festival of Baisakhi were trapped inside the park, which was enclosed by high walls and had only one exit. General Dyer, blocking that exit, ordered his troops to fire upon the crowd, resulting in the loss of countless lives.¹⁷ The events of 13th April 1919 at Jallianwala Bagh became a turning point in the history of the national movement in India,

¹⁷ Official sources claimed 379 dead and 1100 wounded while the Indian National Congress estimated 1500 wounded and 1000 dead. Savita Narain, *The historiography of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, 1919*; (New Delhi: Spantech and Lancer, 1998)

with an almost universal condemnation of General Dyer's actions by political and religious leaders of all stripes. Yet, shortly after the massacre, the mahants and the official clergy at the Golden Temple in Amritsar conferred the highest respect upon Colonel Dyer at the Golden Temple by placing a *siropa* (honorary scarf) on him.¹⁸ This enraged the Sikh community and led to widespread demands for the removal of mahants from gurdwaras and became a symbolic moment of the waywardness of the mahants.¹⁹

Another sphere of activity leading to the emergence of SGPC leadership was the mounting tensions in the space of the gurdwaras in Punjab and in Delhi. The Rikabganj affair in Delhi began way back in 1911, when Delhi became the new capital under British India. Shifting the state apparatus from Calcutta to Delhi meant an increase in the demand for colonial offices and an area was identified for this purpose – what came to be known as Lutyen's Delhi. Gurdwara Rikabganj, a historic gurdwara built in the memory of the ninth Guru's martyrdom, happened to be in this area and was identified as a desirable space for building the new seat of the government by the city planners. A wall on the southern end of the Gurdwara Rikabganj was razed at the orders of the District Commissioner. This demolition was a threat to Sikh gurdwaras and Sikhs mobilized to seek justice under the leadership of Sardul Singh Caveeshar, a well-known Singh Sabha reformer.²⁰

¹⁸ Bipan Chandra et al, *India's Struggle for Independence*, (Viking 1988); Derek Sayer, "British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre 1919–1920", *Past & Present*, (May 1991), Issue 131, pp 130–164; Savita Narain, *The historiography of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, 1919*; (New Delhi: Spantech and Lancer, 1998); Hugh Tinker, "India in the First World War and after", *Journal of Contemporary History* (Sage Publications, October 1968), Volume 3, No. 4.

¹⁹ Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening*, (Desh Sevak Book Agency, 1922).

²⁰ For more information, please see, Harjot Oberoi, "From Gurdwara Rikabganj to the Viceregal Palace: A Study of Religious Protest", *The Panjab Past and Present*, Vol. XIV, Issue I, (April, 1980), pp. 182-198 and Mrinalini Rajagopalan, *Building Histories: The Archival and Affective Lives of Monuments in Modern Delhi*, (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

While the movement was called off in 1914, as recommended by the leaders of the Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD was founded in 1902 and was a group of Sikh leaders who represented the Sikh community in issues of religion, political representation and education and were largely pro-British), to support Britain in the First World War, the movement resumed after the end of the war in 1918. The officials made a quick compromise in 1918, to put an end to this long affair. However, a certain note had been struck for the community vis-à-vis gurdwara management and preservation. The recommendation by the CKD was questioned later and their loyalist stand was found to be unacceptable by the community as a harder line of religious and political leadership emerged and questioned CKD leaders.

The Rikabganj affair and the Akali movement differ in two significant ways. One, the Rikabganj affair relied on print media as the principle means to inform and electrify the masses. The Akali movement, under the leadership of the SGPC, primarily used gurdwaras to gather a base and occupy them through non-violent methods. For example, the Akalis gained popularity by organizing the kar seva (cleaning of the water tank) in the Golden Temple in June 1923 (discussed in Chapter Five).

The second main difference between the Rikabganj affair and the Akali movement was the socio-economic base of the supporters. While the Rikabganj affair remained limited to upper-middle-class educated men, the Akali movement had a broader base within Punjab. Although initially SGPC leadership was drawn from a primarily urban and educated middle class, over the years there was a sustained change in the leadership's constituency to Jats and other agrarian communities. The Sikh Act of 1925 and the elected nature of SGPC's formation is one main reason for this diversity, which allowed

different communities to elect their leaders as representatives for their concerns. However, the SGPC continues to remain deeply stratified by caste with a clearly articulated hierarchy in its organizational structure. As this dissertation will examine, caste boundaries have never been eroded within the SGPC or the Sikh community at large, but there are ways in which alliances are made between different caste groups to create broader claims to power and authority (discussed in Chapter Five on *deras*).

The final push for gurdwara reforms happened in 1919 in an affair that came to be known as the Babe-di-Ber affair in Sialkot. The mahant of this gurdwara gave his son the gurdwara as part of his inheritance. While this was a common practice before, as allowed by the Dastur al'-amal described above, the precedence set by the Singh Sabha reformers and the post war context made such practices untenable. As a result, Sikhs in Sialkot questioned the mahant's family and protested in the popular press. These cases added up and created the context for the formation of an Akali group that became the pool from which the SGPC leadership first emerged.²¹

On 7th November 1921, the Akalis demanded the keys to the Golden Temple's treasury from the mahant. It was then discovered that the Deputy Commissioner had secretly taken the keys from the mahant of the gurdwara preempting the Akali demand. Seen as an attack on the Sikh community, this led to widespread protests by the Sikh community as their representatives were not allowed to hold on to the keys to one of their foremost institutions of worship.²² The outcome of the "Keys affair" led to the creation of

²¹ Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle: A Retrospect*, (Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1988).

²² Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Movement*, (Manohar, 1978), Opinderjit Kaur Thakar, *Sikh Identity: An Exploration of Groups Among Sikhs*, (Ashgate Publications, 2005) and Kashmir Singh, "Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee: An Overview", ed. Pashaura Singh and Louise, E. Fenech, *The*

a bigger representative body of the SGPC and laid the foundations for its organizational structure. It was in response to the “Keys affair” at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, when leaders of the Akali group called upon a general assembly of Sikhs in front of the Akal Takhat to elect a management body for the gurdwara.²³

The British officials tried still other means to stifle the Akali demand. They preempted the making of a representative body and before an exclusive Akali committee could be formed, some British officials with the aid of local nobility, like the Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh, created an advisory committee. This committee included Sikh leaders who were respected by the community and held milder views on gurdwara management and the role of the British therein. The leaders of this committee included the likes of Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, Sunder Singh Ramgarhia and Harbans Singh Attari and so on, who were known for treading the middle path between the British officials and hard lined Sikh reformers and leaders.

The committee created under the British officials’ auspices was not well received by the Akalis, who then demanded the creation of a truer representative Sikh committee. A committee of 175 members was thus created and was named the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee or the SGPC. This newly formed committee also incorporated the 36-member committee that was formed earlier under British approval and encouragement. A smaller body of 72 members was formed within the SGPC that was to draft new rules and regulations for the administration of the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies, (OUP, 2014), pp. 328-338, Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab*, (Sage Publications, 2005).

²³ The Akal Takhat is considered to be the supreme seat of authority in Sikhism. Literally meaning seat of authority, it was built by the sixth Guru, Hargobind in the seventeenth century.

Scholars writing about the SGPC have seen it as a very powerful institution because of its elected base and as a political body holding powers akin to the state. For instance, Mohinder Singh writes:

Since its inception in 1920 the SGPC has been wielding tremendous power and influence in the Sikh religious affairs. Called a ‘mini-parliament of the Sikhs’ ... an annual budget of nearly 12 crores of rupees, the SGPC provides a unique model of management of religious places wherein the Sikh democratically elect their supreme body to look after the management of the historic Sikh shrines.²⁴

Yet, a reference to the original Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 shows that the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee was initially conceived as a federating institution, with only a supervisory role over the local committees managing the Sikh shrines in exercise of local autonomy. Originally, only two shrines were to be directly administered by the SGPC namely Shri Akal Takhat Sahib, Amritsar, and Shri Takhat Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib. All other shrines, either clubbed together according to the city they were in or individually, were to be administered by local committees. Similarly, the funds available for the functioning of the SGPC were to be provided from one-tenth of the savings of these committees. This situation, with the authority and the resources of a popularly elected body being severely restricted, generated a desire for expansion, originally jurisdictional and later functional as well. The committee, described by some as the “parliament of the Sikhs”, with its executive committee, perceiving itself as the “religious government,” pursued relentlessly the demand for extension of its direct authority to cover as many gurdwaras as possible.²⁵ With the amendment of the Sikh Act

²⁴ Mohinder Singh, “Shiroman Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee: Its Origin and Development”, *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, Volume 5, No. 2, pp. 139-153, (1986).

²⁵ Stanley Tambiah, *Levelling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*, (1997); Harish K. Puri, “Akali Politics: Emerging Compulsions,” *Punjab Journal of Politics* 5 (Jan.—June 1981): 33–51; Harish K. Puri, “Religion and Politics in Punjab,” in *Religion, State, and Politics*

in 1945, the local committee of the Golden Temple was abolished and the management of the whole Golden Temple complex was transferred to direct control of the SGPC. From then on, this process has continued so unrelentingly that under an ordinance issued by the Governor of Punjab in November in 1986, even the gurdwaras with an annual income as low as Rs. 25,000 (less than \$2,000 U.S.) were transferred to the direct control of the SGPC. Exercising direct control over hundreds of gurdwaras now within the present Indian states of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, the SGPC has virtually transformed them into its field operational centers. In addition to providing direct access to the funds of all the gurdwaras, this arrangement also placed vast patronage in the hands of the SGPC by way of recruiting the sevadars (all classes of professional service providers, ranging from scripture readers to cleaners) in the gurdwaras, thereby giving it the visible character of a state within a state.

The stakes involved in gurdwara management were always high, as these institutions collected big donations and, more importantly, wielded significant influence amongst the Sikh community. The jurisdiction of the newly formed gurdwara committee in Haryana in 2014, for instance, included eight historic gurdwaras.²⁶ The collections from these gurdwaras alone were estimated at Rs. 200–300 crores annually, or US\$28 million annually.²⁷ The annual budget passed by the SGPC in 2017 was Rs. 1,100 crores, which was to be spent on education, cultural affairs, religious festivals and events,

in India, ed. Moin Shakir, (1989); Gobinder Singh, *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*, 1986; Kashmir Singh, *Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation: All India Perspective*, (1991).

²⁶ Gurdwara Chhevin and Nauvin Paatshahi at Ghula Cheeka (Kaithal), Neem Sahib (Kaithal), Dasvin Patshahi (Pehowa), Jheevan Heri (Yamunanagar), Banni Badarpur (Ladwa), and Dodi Sahib (Taslempur).

²⁷ T. K. Rajalakshmi, "Sikhs vs. Sikhs", *Frontline* (August 22, 2014) <https://frontline.thehindu.com/the-nation/sikhs-vs-sikhs/article6279895.ece>

management of gurdwaras inside and outside India, and for the publicity bureau.²⁸ The SGPC had to work hard to gather this kind of influence and power amongst the Sikh community.

The SGPC and its Leadership

The Akali group consisted of members with a wide spectrum of opinions and concerns, ranging from nationalist leaders who were members of the Indian National Congress to conservative religious reformers who pushed for independent Sikh representation rather than a nationalist cause. The issue of gurdwara management was heating up in 1919–1920 and the Akali leaders reacted to this momentum by gathering support and popularity by using print media, doing rounds of villages, and hosting popular events especially in historic gurdwaras.²⁹ Unlike other Sikh organizations like the Chief Khalsa Diwan, which were now synonymous with a loyalist stance, the Akalis took a unique stand on the management of the gurdwara affairs: they created an elected management body to represent the Sikh community and its interests.

The SGPC continued to use print media to inform the masses on their views and agendas for the management committee. Many of the leaders who had founded these papers went on to influence the SGPC in significant ways. For example, Mohan Singh Vaid, a popular Singh Sabha reformer, who founded the *Dukh Nivaran* and wrote extensively about women's education and methods of purifying religious ceremonies,

²⁸ "SGPC passes Rs 1159 Cror Annual Budget", *Business Standard*, (30 March, 2018) https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/sgpc-passes-rs-1159-crore-annual-budget-118033000766_1.html

²⁹ Mohinder Singh, "Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee: Its Origin and Development," *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion* 5, no. 2 (1986): 139–153.

also influenced the SGPC. He went on to play an important part in the *yatras* (pilgrimage) formation under the SGPC, as discussed in Chapter Three. He was also the Municipal Commissioner of Tarn Taran, city close to Amritsar and known for the historic gurdwara, Darbar Sahib, Tarn Taran. Mohan Singh Vaid is a well-known figure, known for his contributions to the Singh Sabha movement and his extensive inputs to the women's reformist movement.³⁰ He continued to be heavily involved in the SGPC's activities, although in an unofficial capacity.

Another leader, Sunder Singh Lyallpuri, who founded the *Hindustan Times* in 1924 is also known as the founder of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD is the political wing of the SGPC and was founded in 1920) in the Punjab.³¹ While Lyallpuri was heavily involved in the Akali movement, he was also inspired by the larger nationalist movement and Gandhian tactics of non-cooperation and "occupying" spaces as a form of passive resistance. Lyallpuri belonged to the other end of the spectrum from Mohan Singh Vaid in terms of their objectives set out for the Akali movement. Other leaders in charge of the *Hindustan Times* paper were Sardar Mangal Singh Gill (Tesildar) and Sardar Chanchal Singh (Jandiala, Jalandhar), both were influential leaders amongst the Sikh community and played an important role in the early formative years of the SGPC, where the agenda was clearly to manage gurdwaras all over India through a new and transparent management body. Close associations of the Akali leaders were Madan Mohan Malviya and K.S. Panikkar, who was also the first editor of the *Hindustan Times*. Madan

³⁰ Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste, and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab*, (OUP, 2004).

³¹ S. Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian Da Itihaas* (Aarsi Publications, 1977); S. Sohan Singh Josh, "Shiromani Committee da Janam te Isde Pradhan", *Qaumi Ekta*, (June 1975), S. Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Lehir da Sanchalak, Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri*, (S Kirpal Singh publishers, 1980).

Mohan Malviya and K.S. Pannikar's involvement with the paper in its formative years had a lasting impact on the Akalis' methods of protesting and connected the movement to the larger national cause.

Sardar Sunder Singh Lyallpuri, along with Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshur and Sardar Teja Singh Samundri, also played a significant role in the Rikabganj affair. Sunder Singh Lyallpuri wrote extensively on the matter in *The Akali*, a Punjabi daily that influenced colonial officials in making a quick compromise in 1919–1920 regarding the Gurdwara Rikabganj affair.³² Mangal Singh Gill, then the editor of the newspaper, wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Delhi. He says, “On our part we make bold to emphatically remind the government that the Sikhs would no longer tolerate any kind of interference whatsoever in the religious temples on the part of the government.”³³ The leaders of the Rikabganj affair later influenced the creation of the Akali group and the Akali movement. Even during the Rikabganj affairs movement, print media was very important in influencing public opinions and was a singular channel to mobilize the Sikh community.

SGPC's leadership, in other words, was not a uniform body. There were different ideas, agendas and commitments amongst the leadership and this is evident in the decisions made by the SGPC.

Dominant Narratives in Historiography

The structure of the SGPC, along with its functionality and organizational composition, are distinctive in comparison with other religious management groups in

³² S. Kirpal Singh, *Akali Lehir Da Sanchalik, Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri*, (S Kirpal Singh publishers 1972).

³³ Quoted in Harjot Oberoi, “From Gurdwara Rikabganj to the Viceregal Palace.”

South Asia and beyond. The SGPC emerged in a milieu of socio-religious reform movements in South Asia (late nineteenth and early twentieth century), a theme that has received substantial scholarly attention. The issue of religious politics and its legitimacy has been debated since the Partition of India and Pakistan in numerous forms, chiefly around debates of communalism, secularism, and separatism/religious nationalism.³⁴ While this dissertation is informed by frameworks of communal identities and discourse, secularism and its ambiguity in South Asia and separatist/religious nationalist movements in South Asia, it contributes specifically to the continuities and changes in the SGPC's organizational structure and functions. More recently, scholars like Giorgio Shani, Gurharpal Singh and Tony Ballantyne have suggested that studies on the Sikh past are essentially "community-centric" and "internalist" and are not informed by wider contexts, events or connections with the outside world.³⁵ They suggest either taking a broader theoretical understanding of terms like "nationalism" to understand Sikh nationalism in the case of Shani, or broadening the scope of Sikh history in terms of time and space, i.e. to study Sikh events in longer duration than popularly accepted timeframes of Singh Sabha movement ranging from 1880-1920 and wider spatial networks between India and Britain. This dissertation closely follows Balantyne's suggestion of broadening the historical scope of study as well as spatial networks but differs in one significant way.

³⁴ Sarjit Singh Bal, *Political Parties and Growth of Communalism in Punjab, 1920-47* (Chandigarh, India: Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, 1989); K. N. Panikkar, *Communalism in India: History, Politics and Culture* (South Asia Books, 1991); Gopal Singh, *Punjab Today* (Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1987); T. N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Amalendu De, *Religious Fundamentalism and Secularism in India* (Calcutta, 1996); Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (University of California Press, 1994); Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890-1950* (Indian University Press, 2008); Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, ed., *The Crisis of Secularism in India* (Duke University Press, 2007).

³⁵ Giorgio Shani and Gurharpal Singh, "Rethinking Sikh Nationalism in the Twenty-First Century", *Sikh Formations*, 11:3 (2015), pp. 271-282; Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*, (Duke University Press, 2006).

This dissertation also limits the study to the Golden Temple, although it moves to other gurdwaras as a theme demands further exploration. The study is limited to the study of one Sikh gurdwara to fully excavate the instances in which the SGPC acted or reacted in a particular way and left a significant mark on its own structure.

The Akali movement and the SGPC have been the subject of many works that can be largely categorized into three groups. The first considers the question of whether the SGPC is inherently political. Prime examples of this scholarship are Gobinder Singh, Attar Singh, and Paul Brass.³⁶ The second group is loosely concerned with narrating an event-based history of the Punjab, seeking an understanding of how these events might be related to each other. The second group sees the events in relation to causality. Examples of this work are authors Rajiv Kapur, Harnik Deol, and Veena Das.³⁷ The final group of works seeks to understand the SGPC, the Singh Sabha movement, and the larger reformist/activist history of the Punjab through a socio-cultural lens. Examples of this scholarship are Harjot Oberoi, Anne Murphy, and Tony Ballantyne.³⁸ This dissertation is

³⁶ Gobinder Singh, "Pressure Group Politics in Punjab: The Case of the SGPC", in *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab*, ed. Paul Wallace and Surendra Chopra (South Asia Books, 1988); Gobinder Singh, "Profiles of the SGPC Members: A Study in Socio-Economic Background," *Punjab Past and Present* 16, no. 2 (October 1982): 454–66; Attar Singh, "Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and Politicization of the Sikhs," in *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joseph T. O'Connell et al. (Toronto : University of Toronto, Centre for South Asian Studies, 1988): 226–32; Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge University Press, 1974).

³⁷ Rajiv A. Kapur, "'Khalistan': India's Punjab Problem," *Third World Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (October 1987): 1206–1224; Rajiv A. Kapur, "Sikhism and Politics," *Sikh Review* 19, no. 213 (August 1971): 38–51; Rajiv A. Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of the Punjab* (London: Routledge, 2000); Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Oxford University Press, 1995); Robin Jeffery, "Grappling with the Past: Sikh Politicians and the Past," *Pacific Affairs* 60 (1987).

³⁸ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*; Anne Murphy, *Materiality of the Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World* (Duke University Press, 2006).

largely influenced by all these works but straddles a different position on understanding the SGPC and the ways in which this body maintains its status and power.

Beginning with the first group of studies that seeks to understand the underlying characteristic of the SGPC as primarily a political body, Gobinder Singh argues that the SGPC is inherently political. He says:

The reason why the SGPC has been strongly emphasizing Sikh cultural demands might be to strengthen the socio-cultural solidarity of the Sikh community vis-à-vis other communal groups in the society. One of the purposes of this solidarity might be the religious-cultural interests of the Sikhs. *But beneath these grounds it is not difficult to locate the political inter-connections of these demands.* By articulating the cultural demands of the Sikhs, the SGPC not only seeks to promote the socio-cultural solidarity of the Sikhs but also enhances certain religious-cultural symbols by focusing on some ‘crisis’ of the symbols. Incidentally, these are the very same symbols which also are populistically championed by the SAD (Shiromani Akali Dal).³⁹

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) was formed at the same time as the SGPC and may very well be its co-creator. The Akali group formed two wings: one was the SGPC, for gurdwara management, and the other was SAD, its political part. The two organizations have separate agendas and functions and they work in conjunction with each other. Gobinder Singh’s works are based on the SGPC’s own admission of the inseparability of religion and politics for the Sikh community. Taking examples of the creation of the Akal Takhat by the sixth Guru, wherein the Guru took on the dual role of spiritual head and secular authority, SGPC leaders have continuously supported an ambiguity when it comes to clearly defining its realm of work. However, the two organizations differ in name and form. Many members of the SGPC eventually have joined the SAD and represented the Sikh community on the formal political stage. But the SGPC is a religious body for all

³⁹ Gobinder Singh, “Pressure Group Politics in Punjab,” 152; Gobinder Singh, “Profiles of the SGPC Members.” Emphasis added.

forms and purposes. To see this organization as a political body tends to conflate religion and politics, taking away the nuance of both the terms. We need to understand the SGPC as primarily a religious body, with aims and agenda to establish its control over gurdwaras and missionizing role across the globe.

Paul Brass says, “The SGPC has been described as ‘A government within the government’ of the Punjab and as an alternative to the formal government as a source of the legitimacy and authority for the Sikh community. It has been argued, in effect, that the Punjab has a dual political system and a dual political arena, one secular and multi-communal, the other religious and confined to the Sikhs.”⁴⁰ This statement overstates the powers and authority of the SGPC. Even though the SGPC has vast resources available to it, the body cannot function like the government. This is evident from the joint projects run by the SGPC and the Punjab State, discussed in the epilogue, which highlights the SGPC’s need to bolster its own power and authority with the governments.

Notwithstanding the intersections between religion and politics, in the case of the SGPC and the SAD, the two organizations differ in their functions, objectives and in their thinking and actions. While the SAD is a Punjab-based political party that aims to win state elections, the SGPC is still largely governed by the concerns of institutionalization of the Sikh religion, and desires to manage gurdwaras all over India. The two organizations have supported each other’s agendas at various points in time, but this is not always the case, as moments of tensions have come to light recently. For instance, in 2008 Jathedar Joginder Vedanti refused to exonerate dera chief Gurmit Singh Ram Rahim, who was a key ally for the SAD to win Punjab elections. Gurmit Singh Ram

⁴⁰ Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, 313.

Rahim is the head of Sacha Sauda dera and wields an influence over hundreds of thousands of voters in the Punjab. Having his support in the Punjab elections would have swayed the votes in favor of the SAD. However, the jathedar of the Golden Temple refused to cooperate and give the SAD what was needed in the moment.⁴¹ Following this incident, Jathedar Vedanti's days were numbered, but in not exonerating the dera chief, the Jathedar believes he performed his duty.⁴² While this group of scholarship understands the SGPC as inherently political, this dissertation understand the SGPC as more religious than political and attempts to understand how the religious body casts its influence on political allies and its competitors. The intersection of the two organizations becomes even more apparent when we look at Punjab's history in the twentieth century through an events perspective.

The second group of historiographies connects different events in Punjabi history and finds continuities as an answer to the power situation in the Punjab. The central question they are answering is, what caused the rise of Sikh militancy in the 1980s and 1990s and what were the movement's key attributes? Academic analysis of separatist concerns has led to a historical search that has tied every political event to separatists' latter-day demands. For example, Harnik Deol connects the ethno-nationalist demand of the 1980s to earlier socio-historical roots of increasing consciousness about religion and community, which took Punjab to be the "natural" homeland of the Sikhs.⁴³ He says that there was a neat mapping of Sikhism to a well-defined territorial homeland in the Punjab, especially as the state of Punjab was redrawn on two occasions—in 1947 and then in

⁴¹ "Akhal Takhat head resigns", *India Today*, (5th August, 2008). <https://www.indiatoday.in/latest-headlines/story/akal-Takhat-head-resigns-28003-2008-08-05>

⁴² Personal conversations with Jathedar Vedanti, October 2013.

⁴³ Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of the Punjab* (Sage Publications, 2002).

1966. The latter border change contracted the physical boundaries of the state in such a way that Sikhs became a majority in it. Similarly, Gurharpal Singh has highlighted the roots of modern Sikh identity to be “remarkably cohesive” to the Jat Punjabi ethnicity, concretized in the “sacred text and religious tradition dating from Guru Nanak.”⁴⁴

A sacred language and the presence of gurdwaras dotting the Punjabi state seemingly tie the community together. When seen in this light, it seems that the Sikhs are a coherent and cohesive ethnicity with many factors that unite them and seemingly translate to a modern nation. Veena Das, for example, highlights the ways in which the Khalistani movement made easy connections between the past scenarios of torment and isolation of the eighteenth century to the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁵ Contrary to such seeming historicity of the separatist movement, Harjot Oberoi questioned this implicit connection between the Khalistani demand for a Sikh homeland and the myths, symbols, and physical connections between the Punjab and the Sikh community.⁴⁶ He commented on this singular reading of Sikh events, past, and narratives that allowed the assumption that the Sikhs belonged to the Punjab. The logical and historical connection between gurdwaras and the assertion of Sikh territory, whether in the form of the Punjabi Suba or the separatist state of Khalistan, dismisses the voices of dissent and difference within the Sikh community that had different visions for the gurdwara in connection with the *sangat* (holy congregation) or did not think of gurdwaras as political spaces. Additionally, as discussed in this dissertation, the SGPC did not wish to manage gurdwaras in the Punjab alone, but had ambitions to have direct control over all historic gurdwaras all over India.

⁴⁴ Gurharpal Singh, *Ethnic Conflict in India: A Case-Study of Punjab* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000).

⁴⁵ Veena Das, *Critical Events*.

⁴⁶ Harjot Oberoi, “From Punjab to ‘Khalistan’: Territoriality and Metacommentary,” *Pacific Affairs* 60, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 26–41.

Out of the five takhats- supreme seats of authority, two are still outside the Punjab and act as important voices in making decisions that concerns Sikh community at large. Further, as discussed in chapter three on pilgrimages, the SGPC authorized and funded “discovery” trips for pilgrims to find gurdwaras in distant parts of India. This would not have been the case if the SGPC always wished to define state boundaries according to the gurdwaras locations.

While this group of scholars looks for continuities in the Sikh past, there is a key difference in their search for continuities based on events from this dissertations’ focus on continuities in the SGPC’s functions and practices. This dissertation traces the pre-colonial to colonial to post-colonial influences on the SGPC’s structure and its tactics to widen its popularity amongst the Sikh community, without looking for causality of events or actions.

More recently, scholars have moved away from essentializing accounts that conflate place with community, to understand why such associations emerge and why they are so popular? Anne Murphy says, “the discourse of Gurdwara Reform... *was deeply rooted in the writing of this history*, tying the past of the Sikh community to place in a fundamental sense, within the conceptualization of private property inflected in a new way during the Raj... *The politics of community formation were then, and in many ways continue to be, tied to the writing of history.*”⁴⁷ This quote represents this third group of scholars that privileges socio-cultural understanding of Sikh history, events and practices. For scholars like Murphy and Purnima Dhavan, history writing, and historical representations are more

⁴⁷ Anne Murphy, “Representation of Sikh History”, *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, (OUP, 2014), 94-108, emphasis added.

than a source of information.⁴⁸ These textual representations are models for Sikhs to replicate in the present and this deeply impacts the future vision as well. In other words, it was the fact of “history” that tied the community to the territory and that this history was represented in texts and in objects. The important thing for Murphy is the proof and not the end goal/ objective itself. She constructs her understanding of Sikh events on a socio-cultural reading of the North Indian region, beginning her analysis in pre-colonial textual representations to colonial period.

Anne Murphy focuses on why historical objects and historical sites function differently over time in Sikh constructions of the past. Murphy describes material objects, like Sikh gurus’ relics and sites like places associated with the events in the gurus’ lives, as “technologies of memory and authority” that “bridge the gap between past and present,” thereby constituting the Sikh community.⁴⁹ The process of establishing community ownership was important because it necessitated a new definition of what qualified a person as Sikh. Murphy explains the association of Sikhs with historic gurdwaras as a product of a specific historical moment and an outcome of the colonial regime of property relations. She says that this territorializing of gurdwaras was less a product of later Sikh nationalist demands and more the effects of colonial rule on Sikh practices and thoughts, specifically the ways in which Sikh history was recorded and represented.

Murphy claims that the community’s historical awareness, its use of material artifacts, its construction projects and museums are all motivated by the impulse of

⁴⁸ Purnima Dhavan, “Redemptive Pasts and Imperiled Futures: The Writing of a Sikh History”, *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia*, ed. Anne Murphy, (Routledge, 2011), 40-54.

⁴⁹ Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Past*.

“memories”—of its past glory, courage, and martyrdom. She argues, “The historical gurdwara landscape thus structures memory, and in so doing helps to constitute Sikh religious experience and its ongoing engagement with the past in the present. Through it, visual culture, architecture, and material culture come together with the history of the tradition.”⁵⁰ While it is interesting to note that Murphy draws upon concerns with historical thoughts and needs to preserve Sikh history in material objects, her analysis does not adequately map the way these memories are transmitted to, contested by, or appropriated by historical incidents or practices.

Also, Murphy includes the perspectives of the elite and common people on community memory without attending to the differences between their relative power and authority. In this dissertation, I understand religious practices vis-à-vis the management body but from different angles, i.e. both from the SGPC’s viewpoint and from the community’s, which is also fragmented into competing opinions and narratives.

While Murphy argues that Sikh religion was already undergoing important transformations under Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s time and these changes were only accelerated by the colonial regime, Harjot Oberoi argues that Sikh religion was recast and reconfigured because of colonial rule. Both Murphy and Oberoi provide interesting perspectives on how and why gurdwaras became important in the twentieth century, and how relations and values changed after the advent of colonial rule. However, Oberoi focuses on the new boundaries between religions, while Murphy focuses on a larger economic and socio-cultural context. Murphy suggests that there was already a distinctive

⁵⁰ Anne Murphy, “Sikh Material Culture,” in *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Sikh identity before colonial rule, although there were instances of shared cultural and social milieu, which meant a productive exchange between different religious groups. While Oberoi focuses on print culture within the Sikh community in the Punjab, Murphy focuses more broadly on the North Indian context and traces broader shifts in the region. Notwithstanding the differences in these works, there are similar assumption in this group of writings. First, they tend to overstate the successes of the Singh Sabha and the SGPC in reforming Sikh religion and practices. Second, both the works do not consider the caste, region and class divisions of their subjects and suggest that the changes brought on by the Singh Sabha and then the SGPC impacted the Sikh community in the same way. And finally, these works do not trace global relations, networks or impact on each other.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to Sikh historiography by addressing the issues stated above. By looking at the ways in which the SGPC instituted reforms and the challenges it met with, this dissertation understands the layered authority of the SGPC, which is seen as a purely religious body. Second, by looking at the different caste components of the Sikh community, this dissertation understands Sikh identity as one amongst many others that are inflected with other identities of region, caste and class. This is specifically addressed in chapters four and five. And finally, this dissertation seeks to draw closer connections between global sevak bodies and the local/ regional ones that carry out kar sevas in the Punjab. This is addressed in chapter five.

This dissertation will demonstrate the ways in which many of the projects were deeply contested and how the SGPC has tried to tame, with mixed success, conflicting practices. Finally, I examine the ways in which the community has been tied very closely to its built structures by performing and participating in a new form of engagement with

its own history and built structures. The most important contribution this dissertation seeks to make is in moving the study of Sikh past from a focus on historical representations, specifically historical writings to actual practices that discipline, embody and reinstate SGPC's understanding of Sikhism. As anthropological studies by Bourdieu have shown, in practice, transformations occur. Similarly, in studying Sikh practices in the gurdwaras, this dissertation seeks to understand the SGPC's ambition to reform and institutionalize Sikhism and the ways in which such a project can never be complete.

Why the Golden Temple?



Figure 4: The Golden Temple and its surroundings in 1930s–40s

Courtesy Professor Anurag Singh (Ludhiana) housed in the Punjab Digital Library, Chandigarh. This view of Darshan Deori show the bungas in the background as well as the relatively narrow *parikrama* (pathway around the Golden Temple). The Jhanda Bunga is a simple building.



Figure 5: Historic Jhanda (Flag) Bunga

The simple structure of the Jhanda Bunga is telling of the style of buildings in the nineteenth century. The relative importance of this building is highlighted in its height and wide opening. The Jhanda Bunga signifies the temporal and the spiritual authority of this arena, as it hosts two *nishan sahibs* (flags of Khalsa) here.



Figure 6: Walking Past the Jhanda Bunga (1930s)

The Golden Temple is the holiest Sikh shrine and receives tens of thousands of devotees and tourists daily. Although originally built in the mid-sixteenth to early seventeenth century by the fifth Guru, Arjan, the history of this area and the *Amrit sarovar* (sacred pool of water) dates to prehistoric times.⁵¹ It was believed that the pool and the area has magical properties and various spiritual seekers in history considered it sacred, such as Buddha, Rama and other saints, who sent disciples to it. These stories underpin the popularity of the Golden Temple, which the Sikh community reveres not

⁵¹ P. S. Arshi, *Sikh Architecture in Punjab* (1986), Madanjit Kaur, *The Golden Temple: Past and Present* (1983), Narinderjit Singh, *Around the Golden Temple*, (1994).

only for its influence on Sikh history but also on other religious groups who visit the Golden Temple regularly, especially during religious festivals that are set to agricultural calendars.

The large volume of visitors to the gurdwara has been a key reason for the various changes to its structure. But this is just one reason among many for the structural changes to the gurdwara. The remarkable differences in the structure of the Golden Temple complex between the earlier part of the twentieth century and its close mirrors the changes within the community that claims ownership and its stewardship. I am focusing on the Golden Temple to understand this engagement and commitment of the community in preserving, renovating and building different parts of the gurdwara over the twentieth century. The Golden Temple serves as a significant case study because of its popularity in regions across the Punjab and for the wide-ranging changes that we can trace and examine in the built structure.

There are three reasons that I have chosen to work on the Golden Temple. First, the Golden Temple has become increasingly the single most important pilgrimage destination for Sikhs in the twentieth century. Other gurdwaras like the Nankana Sahib gurdwara (now in Pakistan), Anandpur Sahib gurdwara (in Anandpur, Punjab) or Nanded gurdwara (in Maharashtra) may have been equally important as the Golden Temple at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, the Golden Temple has commanded an increasingly central place in Sikh thought over the course of the twentieth century. One reason for this is aftermath of the partition of India in 1947. As India was divided into two nation-states, Punjab was divided into the East and the West wherein the West went to Pakistan. Nankana Sahib and other historically important Sikh gurdwaras now came

under Pakistan's territory and the Sikh community's access to these spaces became highly limited. Because of this, the Golden Temple became one of the prominent gurdwaras for the Sikhs in India. Second reason for this is that the SGPC functions from the Golden Temple Complex and has its office there. This has meant an increase in publications, events and attention placed on the Golden Temple Complex, since the founding of the SGPC. For example, to vote for the SGPC elections, all Keshdhari Sikhs can vote, in so far as they are in Amritsar.⁵² By locating all SGPC's functions and offices in Amritsar and in the Golden Temple Complex, a lot more development and attention has been laid on this particular gurdwara.

A third reason for the ascent of the Golden Temple Complex on the global map, if not only for the Sikh community, is because it became the location and even the symbol of a separatist movement from the 1970s to 1990s. The separatist movement, led by a small group of hardline Sikhs demanded the creation of a Sikh homeland in the Punjab, which culminated in the storming of the gurdwara by the Indian National Army in 1984. Hardening religious lines between the Sikhs and the Hindus under Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's leadership—a religious leader who was trained at the Damdami Taksal, which is a religious training center for preachers, led to a period of intense terror and violence in the Punjab.

This dissertation argues that the increasing centrality of the Golden Temple in Sikh imaginary and sacred geography was one of the many consequences of the Sikh community's engagement in the gurdwara events. As more events were organized in the Golden Temple to restore, develop and expand the gurdwara, Sikhs living in and outside

⁵² Harbans Singh, "Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee", in *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, (1971).

Punjab responded in overwhelming numbers. These responses were instrumental in making the Golden Temple one of the most important pilgrimage centers for the Sikhs.

While I focus on the Golden Temple, I do not suggest in any way that the Golden Temple is an isolated or a unique case. The Golden Temple is a suitable case study because it highlights several characteristics that are important to understand the multiple views and practices. First, the Golden Temple is an example of the “global circulation” of ideas and practices, as a religious and political symbol amongst diaspora Sikhs that has a wide purchase on their minds and resources.⁵³ Second, the Golden Temple has historically been at the confluence of various socio-cultural, economic and political trends as a hub for education, spiritual practices, and artistic productions including literature, publishing and paintings.⁵⁴ The Golden Temple’s long history in relation to the region and the increasing global context are important for us to understand how autonomy was created and preserved in face of socio-cultural and economic changes.

Method and Sources

To understand the changing social and cultural context of the twentieth century for the Sikh community, this dissertation draws upon written historical materials along with physical changes of the gurdwara. In this endeavor, the SGPC played a major role, as they were the custodians of Sikh gurdwaras. Accordingly, this dissertation begins by analyzing the first instances in which historical gurdwaras were officially required to submit their “historical accounts” to the SGPC, to be published in the *Gurdwara Gazette*.⁵⁵ SGPC

⁵³ Brian K. Axel, *The Nation’s Tortured Body: Violence, Representation and the Formation of a Sikh ‘Diaspora’*, Duke University Press, (2001).

⁵⁴ Madanjit Kaur, “Contribution of the Bungas to the Education of the Punjab”, Punjab History Proceedings, Punjabi University, (1979).

⁵⁵ Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925.

publishes two monthly journals, the *Gurdwara Gazette* and *Gurmat Prakash*. The *Gurdwara Gazette* publishes the proceedings from the general body meetings of the SGPC, and other managerial, political, and historical information. It is a major source for this dissertation and allowed the author to form a basic understanding of the evolution of the SGPC through the years. Unfortunately, some gazettes from this series are not available because they were housed at the Sikh Reference Library which was destroyed during the siege of the Golden Temple in 1984. Attempts were made to find alternative sources to match the missing years. The *Gurmat Prakash*, on the other hand, publishes religious sermons and essays, and it was consulted for cultural concerns.

The historical accounts published in the Gazette formed the first moment in which the SGPC first expressed a concern for the built structure of the gurdwara in an organized and structured way. The SGPC published histories of various gurdwaras in the *Gurdwara Gazette* over the years and organized pilgrimage tours to these gurdwaras as part of their management. These written representations, along with visitors' experiences at the gurdwaras, encouraged the community to perceive the gurdwaras as needing help and to support the SGPC's desire and commitment to renew gurdwara structures. In some cases, this renewal meant incorporating older structures into newer ones,⁵⁶ while in some others it meant creating entirely new structures. The result notwithstanding, this process indicates an emergence of a bureaucratic framework. These decisions and practices vis-à-vis the built structure were not ephemeral, whether this meant building, renovating, or razing the structures entirely. They impacted future generations in meaningful ways.

⁵⁶ William Glover, "Shiny New Buildings, Rebuilding Historic Sikh Gurdwaras in Indian Punjab," *Future Anterior* IX, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 32–47.

Therefore, a study of these activities, practices, and events allows us to uncover socio-political and cultural currents in a community, especially when it involves the community's physical, monetary, and political resources.

Other sources for this dissertation include newspapers and journal articles. These documents shed light on the intellectual concerns of the committee and the Sikh public at large. They provide us with a rare glimpse into the minds of the people at that time, as they supported or tacitly disagreed with the committee in some ways. These newspapers are critical to understanding the resistance met by the SGPC over the years. Added to this mine of information was a lucky find of legal papers on the bungas. What was luckier was finding Tarlochan Singh's private papers (the Bungai family's remaining documents). Colonel Iqbal Singh (Tarlochan Singh's son) was more than willing to speak of his memories of living in the Ramgarhia Bunga, upon which the chapter about bungas is based. Finally, some wonderful pictures and paintings of the Golden Temple at the Punjab Digital Archive in Chandigarh and the V&A Museum were extremely useful guides on the physical transformations of the Golden Temple gurdwara.

Understanding these changes in the built structure of the Golden Temple allowed me to conceptualize this space as a network of thoughts, knowledge, practices, visions, and narratives that are all connected (see Chapter Three). This place does not have one singular place-identity but multiple identities that depend on the time and location of its observers (see Chapter Four). And it helps that the Sikh community is a historically aware community. This awareness and interest are equally visible in historical buildings, where efforts were made to build and renovate memorials, to engrave names and deeds of people and groups on marble in gurdwaras, and in some cases, to erase certain structures

and build new ones. The impact of such an investment in the physical form of Sikh gurdwaras has been interpreted as “destructive” and “damaging” to the historical structures. However, there are different readings to this practice. This dissertation sees it as a battlefield for authority and legitimacy.

Chapter Plan

To understand how the SGPC established its authority, this dissertation begins by looking at the processes whereby the SGPC established itself at the apex of gurdwara management after its establishment in 1920. The SGPC is a religious group that manages the Golden Temple and other historic gurdwaras in the Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh. It administers the upkeep and maintenance of these gurdwaras and their various functions, including the training and recruiting of the managers, head priests, and so on. As an elected body, it is both subject to political negotiations and has a large influence on the religiously minded Sikh community.

The SGPC also has a more explicitly political wing in the form of the political party- Shiromani Akali Dal (Akali Dal), which generally receives an endorsement from the SGPC during elections to the state legislature. The SGPC developed its platform first in the Punjab, and then expanded its authority indirectly all over India and around the world. To gain supremacy over any other Sikh community body, the SGPC began a distinct process of institutionalizing itself and the programs it implemented. By establishing simple protocols for different functions like the preparation and dispersal of *karah prashad* (food offerings by devotees that are blessed and returned) and the delivery of religious sermons and practices, the SGPC gained wider authority and quickly established these as precedents. Administering the Golden Temple was one such avenue

that granted significant authority to the SGPC. The chapter also looks at the projects to build parts of the gurdwara as new orders of sacred routes were established. Here we also see alternative and competing voices against the management's decisions, as certain structures that were earmarked for demolition were not only kept intact but were expanded through the building projects.

Chapter Three takes the newly structured and organized SGPC to understand how this body expanded its control over gurdwaras in other regions outside the Punjab. This chapter examines how the SGPC, in collaboration with community leaders in different parts of India, began *yatras* (pilgrimages) that were standardized and organized to take large numbers of people to distant pilgrimage centers. These *yatras* fed back information to the people who stayed behind in their regions and hometowns but made them nonetheless aware of the condition of historically important gurdwaras, creating waves of interest in renovating and rebuilding gurdwaras. I argue that this was the pivotal moment at which the community became aware of the condition of historical gurdwaras and began contributing en masse to their renovation and rebuilding. As the SGPC gained more traction with the wider Sikh community, it also started making bolder assertions and decisions. The Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 established a government ordained Gurdwara Tribunal to rule on what constituted a gurdwara and who could claim legal ownership. Multiple cases helped define the meaning of ownership over gurdwaras over time. The SGPC further formalized the everyday practices to be followed in the gurdwara. There was little to no ambiguity in these processes. As time passed, the SGPC refined and enforced them more stringently, and local obedience to them circuitously became the basis of declaring whether an institution met the requirements of a gurdwara or not. Such

practices often provoked disputes, and in the following chapter, I take up the case of such Tribunal cases.

As gurdwara properties became open to dispute, so did the land surrounding them. This land had historically been granted to the gurdwara for expenses and other functional needs like rest houses and schools—the Golden Temple is a prime example of such land grants. Over time, buildings around the gurdwara were built to serve the needs of the pilgrims and followers, called bungas. There were eighty-four such bungas around the Golden Temple according to reliable historical chronicles.⁵⁷ These bungas belonged to different sub-sections of the Sikh community and housed a variety of functions, including patronizing poets and historians as well as scientific research such as surgery and other educational initiatives. Chapter Four of this dissertation traces the fate met by the bungas around the Golden Temple—only four bungas out of the original eighty-four remain today.

Chapter four examines the establishment of the Tribunal and how ownership was disputed in its court sessions. Examining the cases of three different bungas, I analyze why the bungas were razed and how this has impacted the heritage values and ideas of the Sikh community. The paradox of these bungas is that they are still memorialized every day in the *ardas* prayers. How then does the Sikh community justify the destruction of these structures? What does it signify for the community in terms of heritage preservation and the renovation works that are carried out with the help of the community? And what do we understand of the management's objectives in removing these buildings from the

⁵⁷ Gyani Gyan Singh, *Twarikh-i Amritsar* originally published, 1874, (Pub. Kendri Singh Sabha Committee, 1979); Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Prakash* (Khalsa Samachar Pub., Amritsar, 1962).

periphery of the gurdwara? This chapter attempts to excavate the objectives and implications of removing a certain type of historical structure from the periphery of the gurdwara to allow the SGPC to take ownership of the entire landscape.

The official argument made by the SGPC in razing the bungas was that the number of pilgrims was increasing to unmanageable levels, making the *parikrama* (walkway around the amrit sarovar), which connects precincts at the Golden Temple, crowded and unsafe. Because of this increase of people visiting the gurdwara, the SGPC brought down surrounding buildings that were encroaching on the *parikrama* and built a wider *parikrama*.

Chapter Five follows from the previous chapter on the bungas to the concept of the *kar seva*—serving with honor and pride for the community’s benefit. In this chapter I look at the different meanings of the term *kar seva* and how it evolved from the 1920s to the 1990s. Tracing the different meanings and implications of the term and the kind of services included in the religious commitment of the community, I examine the ways in which *sant sampradayas* (schools of learnings) , that were discredited under the Gurdwara Reform Movement and with the foundation of the SGPC, now became part of the authoritative discourse.

I conclude this dissertation with a brief epilogue on the layered authority of the SGPC and the SGPC’s interactions with the Punjab State. By looking at the galliara project, initiated after the 1984 attack on the gurdwara, this conclusion looks at the different agents in the Punjab that contextualizes the layered authority of the SGPC.

Chapter Two: SGPC's Rise to Power: Institutionalizing Gurdwaras by Routinizing Functions

Various scholars have highlighted the impact of colonialism on the religious and social formations in India.¹ One such impact of colonial rule was the emergence of religious reformist movements across India by using new tools introduced by colonial rule, to disseminate reformist agendas. For instance, using printing presses, religious-reformists increased the circulation of reformist texts and sacred scriptures, which also highlighted the issues of variations in sacred scriptures that were earlier written by hand.² As the SGPC became the representative body of the Sikhs according to the Sikh Act of 1925, one of its agendas was to disseminate a standard understanding of Sikhism and to this end, the management body took over the publication of the Guru Granth Sahib (sacred scriptures of the Sikhs). As Tony Ballantyne states, “history writing became a crucial tool for community leaders who crafted epic poems, polemic pamphlets, and commentaries on “scripture” in the hope that by clearly defining the community’s past they would be able to cement their own vision of the community’s present and future”.³ In this event of wanting to publish the sacred scriptures, the SGPC was confronted by pre-existing printing presses that had established their authority and monopoly within the

¹ Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments* (Princeton University, 1993); Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* (University of Chicago Press, 1994); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind* (Princeton University Press, 2011); Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case* (Orient Longman, 1981).

² N. G. Barrier, *Sikhs and their Literature: A Guide to Tracts, Books and Periodicals, 1849–1919* (Manohar, 1970).

³ Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*, (Duke University Press, 2006), 5

Sikh community by publishing the sacred scriptures over fifty years before the SGPC entered the arena.

The first printing press was introduced in Lahore in the 1850s and moved to Amritsar in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In Amritsar, the Wazir Hind Press and Chattar Singh Jeevan Singh became the most popular printing presses within the Sikh community, with the former taking over socio-religious reformist texts and the latter printing the Guru Granth Sahib and the rahit maryada. While the SGPC intended to centralize the publication of religious texts, to educate the larger Sikh public and deliver a standardized vision of the Sikh past, it was confronted with these pre-existing publishing houses that had established their reputation amongst the Sikh community.

This example of the printing presses and the scriptural publications highlights a key conflict in the SGPC's goal of standardizing and institutionalizing Sikh practices and the contests it met from within the Sikh community.⁴ While it is believed that the SGPC had unanimous support from the Sikh community in the 1920s, this chapter traces the measures and policies adopted by the SGPC to establish their control over different domains of Sikh thought, practice, and religious spaces.⁵ By doing so, the SGPC established its autonomy over gurdwara maintenance and resources, and by extension of this, over Sikh practices in the gurdwara space and beyond. This chapter traces the different ways in which the SGPC institutionalized new practices for the Sikh community, following the "invention of traditions" under the Singh Sabha reformers.⁶

⁴ Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 121–136.

⁵ Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Sikh Past* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Mohinder Singh, "Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee: Its Origin and Development," *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion* 5, no. 2 (October 1986): 139–53.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (CUP, 1983).

While the SGPC prevailed as a dominant body, the contests shown in this chapter were significant in forming the organizational structure of the SGPC. This chapter focuses on the strategies adopted by the SGPC to establish its authority. From establishing schools for training the gurdwara dignitaries and officiants, to standardizing building constructions and materials, the SGPC worked towards centralizing all gurdwara functions and activities. By doing so, the leaders of the SGPC believed that they were ending any dilution of their message of Sikhism and creating stronger community ties.

While the Sikh Act of 1925 named the SGPC the official caretakers of gurdwaras, the definition of the term gurdwara was open to question. Moreover, the question remained as to which religious spaces would now be considered Sikh gurdwaras and which would be Hindu thakurdwaras. It was only after the SGPC entered many litigations over gurdwara properties did the initial number of gurdwaras under its control increase. Starting with 241 gurdwaras in 1925, the SGPC eventually gained management over 761 gurdwaras in the Punjab over the next 20 years.⁷ Different claimants to the rights over gurdwaras alleged their own traditional legal and moral rights to manage these properties. For instance, the Hindu priests' association through a series of published pamphlets recounted historic events that led to Udasi sants (ascetic order started by first Sikh Guru's son) coming to manage gurdwaras in the seventeenth century. These pamphlets spoke about Sikhs being hunted down by the Mughals when Udasi sants managed the gurdwaras as well as the religious service therein.⁸ The pujaris challenged the SGPC's authority over

⁷ Kashmir Singh, *Sikh Gurdwara Legislation: All India Perspective* (Singh Bros., 1991).

⁸ Pujari Association Sri Amritsar, *Sri Darbar Sahib ji de sankhep haal* (1922).

gurdwaras in the 1920s and reminded the SGPC leaders that it was Mata Sundari's (the last Living Guru's wife) wish that the pujaris manage the gurdwaras in perpetuity.

SGPC and Singh Sabha leaders on the other hand claimed that the mahants/ pujaris had been misusing gurdwara funds, and although history was important to them, it was also time to take ownership of distinctly Sikh practices. Sikh leaders claimed that the mahants had been amassing the wealth given to gurdwaras as donations for their own personal expenses. Sodhi Hazara Singh writes that under British rule it was ordained for "the pujaris to behave well as their forefathers did and not to come drunk to the Temple. They were not to steal the offerings. They were entitled to their share, so long as they behaved well, otherwise they were to forfeit it."⁹

The ill sentiments towards the pujaris and other Sikh sects were already evident by the turn of the twentieth century, because of Singh Sabha leaders' prolific writings against the newly drawn boundaries between Sikhism and Hinduism.¹⁰ Singh Sabha's continued disgruntlement with Hindu mahants and pujaris along with the angst from post-First World War conditions led to open confrontations between the two groups. And it was the events at Gurdwara Babe-di-Bir in Sialkot that sparked the Gurdwara Reform Movement and became, according to Sikh scholars, the first event that finally led to the passing of the Sikh Act of 1925.¹¹

The Udasi mahant at Gurdwara Babe-di-Bir, just before his passing, had left the gurdwara to his son as an inheritance. This practice, of mahants inheriting gurdwaras as

⁹ Sodhi Hazara Singh, B.A. (vice-President Shri Guru Singh Sabha), *History and Guide to the Golden Temple* (Prakash Singh Publication, 1938).

¹⁰ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*; N. G. Barrier, *Sikhs and their Literature*; Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, *Hum Hindu Nahin* (Wazir Hind Press, 1898).

¹¹ Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Movement* (Macmillan, 1978).

care-takers, was common even in the 1920s and was not different from other religious functionaries training their sons to take on future responsibilities; for example, rababis trained their sons to take their positions when they could no longer perform the duties. The concept of inheritance was not tied to the notion of personal property as much as it was to the idea of providing a certain service, which was done in perpetuity within the same family.

The school for caretakers and mahants was under the Udasi *sampradayas* (traditions of learning) until late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These schools of religious practice were different from those of Khalsa Sikhs, which had become, very recently in the nineteenth century, the new orthodoxy under the Singh Sabha reformers and had gathered a wider following. Tat Khalsa and the Singh Sabha reformers had vilified Udasis and other sant traditions in the last three decades of the nineteenth century for being deviant from the orthodox traditions and practices.

The SGPC, following on from the Singh Sabha, was re-ordering much of the Sikh past while creating new standards on how gurdwaras should be managed and what practices were to be allowed and which were now forbidden. Master Tara Singh, a popular leader of the Gurdwara Reform Movement, introduced the primary objective of the SGPC as a body that would “utilize the property and income of the gurdwaras for the *purposes for which they were founded*.”¹² In creating these new standards and going back to “the purpose for which they were founded,” the pujari’s practices did not measure well and became an easy example of how not to manage the gurdwara.

¹² *Punjab Legislative Council Debates* (7th and 8th May 1925), Vol. III, no. 22, p. 1105. Emphasis added.

The SGPC was not, however, turning a completely new page. Many of the practices, functions, and standards that the SGPC officialised were in practice in some way or form. Many of these seemingly new ideas and practices in gurdwara management existed before SGPC's formation; the SGPC merely reinforced certain practices over others, discarding some and adapting others. By cultivating this new, albeit traditional manifestation of the gurdwara, the SGPC gradually initiated and established control over the gurdwara and the community and formalized many practices for the Sikh community. The significance of these new traditions and their institutionalization is that they became central to Sikhism since their emergence only a century and a half ago. Introductions to Sikhism in books and classes associate Sikhism with these core practices and institutions which were only formalized in the twentieth century, beginning with the Gurdwara Reform Movement (1920–25).¹³

The Sikh Act of 1925 marked a turning point for the management of the gurdwaras and Sikh historical thinking. The Act was created to ensure the preservation of gurdwaras, their further development, and protection and began a new phase of institutionalizing gurdwara management. Singh Sabha reformers and the leaders of the SGPC, who at many times were the same people continuing their reformist agendas, had similar ideals of Sikhism and formalized these through Sikh practices. This need to formalize and institutionalize practices and ideas emerged with the advent of colonial rule, whence Singh Sabha reformers attempted to enumerate, catalogue, and preserve the past. These new practices and the reconfiguration of the gurdwara were measures to adapt

¹³ Eleanor Nesbitt, *A Very Short Introduction to Sikhism* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Vishesh Kumar Gupta, *The Sikhs and the Gurdwara System* (Amol Publications, 1998).

pre-colonial practices to a different political, socio-cultural, and economic context, while asserting SGPC's autonomy in representing the Sikh community, not just in the Punjab, but globally.

Gurdwara management was always evolving, as noted by scholars like Ganda Singha, Ian J. Kerr, and Anne Murphy, especially under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early nineteenth century. Although there remain scholarly disagreements on the kinds of changes and their impact on gurdwara management and the Sikh community, there is consensus on the evolving nature of gurdwara affairs.¹⁴ Gurdwara management was divided into religious functionaries and non-religious functionaries under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The management of the non-religious affairs came into a single individual's hands, and Ian J. Kerr mentions the name of Desa Singh Majithia, who in turn left it for his successor, Sundar Singh Majithia, being the last in line of such management before the SGPC was formed. The responsibility of this individual was purely in matters of financial management of the gurdwara property and its associated jagirs (land grant). Other scholars like Madanjit Kaur argue that no individual managers assumed the control of the gurdwaras until the advent of colonial rule in the Punjab; rather, groups of Sikhs managed each gurdwara, and having individual managers was a colonial invention.¹⁵

It is evident that the SGPC did not invent posts like the head granthi or head rababi and inherited this division of duties in the gurdwara. Ganda Singh and Ian J. Kerr identify different managers and heads for both non-religious and religious activities, like

¹⁴ Ganda Singh, ed., *Dastur al-amal* (1883); Ian J. Kerr, "The British and the Administration of the Golden Temple in 1859," *Panjab Past and Present* 10 (1976); Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Sikh Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Madanjit Kaur, *Golden Temple: Past and Present* (GNLU, 1983).

grounds keeping, repairs, and security management in the Golden Temple in Amritsar.¹⁶ The head *granthi*'s office supervised religious affairs and personnel issues, such as salaries for the rababis (musicians in line of Guru Nanak's hymns). Other granthis managed tasks related to religious matters like prayers, training, and management of people. The rest of the tasks were done on a voluntary *seva* or 'service' basis by *deras* or religious schools/groups that were structured on a central *guru-chela* (teacher-disciple) relationship. These activities included cleaning the gurdwara, giving tours to visitors, managing pilgrim lodgings, and preparing *langar* (free meals for the pilgrims and devotees). Finally, there was a last segment of workers who helped in the preparation of *karah prashad* (ritual offering of sweet foods). This had traditionally been the responsibility of *halwais* (sweet shop owners) and shopkeepers in the bazaars around the Golden Temple, where pilgrims and visitors could buy prashad to donate to the gurdwara, and the gurdwara purchased a certain amount to distribute to the visitors. These shopkeepers also accepted money orders to deliver prashad for "absentee pilgrims." The SGPC took over these functions in 1926–7 and converted these roles into employable positions.¹⁷ In other words, while offices to handle different functions had been created long before the SGPC, the management body redefined these roles and created new offices to control the management of the gurdwara in different and improved ways. But in redefining these offices and assigning them specific tasks, it was creating a process to

¹⁶ Ganda Singh, ed., *Dastur al-amal*; Ian Kerr, "The British and the Administration of the Golden Temple in 1859."

¹⁷ *Gurdwara Kanun, Niyam-Upniyam* (Omkar Press, 1925); Gurdwara Annual Report (SGPC Publisher, 1926); *Gurdwara Gazette* "Sriomani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee De Aelan," (August 1927); No author, *Sri Darbar Sahib Ji De Gunje Bhed: Arthat Darbar Sahib de intezam diyen andruni kharabian*, (Punjab Commercial Press, 1927).

manage gurdwara affairs in a specific way. This process created a standardized format for the management of all gurdwaras, regardless of the gurdwara's scale.

However, this attempt met with several difficulties, for different gurdwaras struggled to meet a standard categorization or even a definition. Gurdwaras first had to be ordered within a system before they could be managed in this way. The initial problem in creating the categorization of the gurdwara was in defining a space as a gurdwara and determining who could perform which kinds of religious practices within this space. The Gurdwara Act of 1925 resolved some of these initial concerns, as it defined a legal process by which Sikhs could claim certain properties as gurdwaras.¹⁸ A gurdwara was defined as:

- i. (it) was established by or in memory of any of the ten Sikh Gurus, or in commemoration of any incident in the life of any of the ten Sikh Gurus and is used for public worship by Sikhs;
- ii. Owing to some traditions connected with one of the ten Sikh Gurus, and is used for public worship by Sikhs;
- iii. Was established for use by the Sikhs for the purpose of public worship and is used for such worship by Sikhs;
- iv. Was established in memory of a Sikh martyr, saint, or historical person and is used for public worship by Sikhs; and
- v. Owing to some incident connected with Sikh religion, is used for public worship predominantly by Sikhs.

Legal definitions aside, there remained other problems in defining gurdwaras and their proper management. For instance, historic gurdwaras were categorized first, but there was no clarity on how this categorization worked. Were historic gurdwaras categorized by the year in which they were built or were they gurdwaras that were historically associated with the Gurus? The other register for the gurdwaras was size—big gurdwaras needed more resources compared to small gurdwaras. However, some of

¹⁸ Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925, Chapter One, quoted in Surjit Singh Gandhi, *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation* (Atlantic Publishers, 1993): 130.

the historic gurdwaras were smaller, even though they had many pilgrims and visitors daily.

The problem with creating standardized models for managing gurdwaras was in the resources allocated for their preservation and upkeep. A classification of gurdwaras had to be created that attended to all these issues and allocated resources accountably. The SGPC had to create a way to define gurdwaras by importance, size, and number of visitors to establish how they could be managed. SGPC thereby created a scale of importance, and historical gurdwaras—defined by scale and number of visitors—ranked first in this scale for management, followed closely by newly discovered areas where gurdwaras should have been built.

I explore this “discovery” of gurdwaras in Chapter Three, wherein I discuss the community’s enablement of the SGPC. These scales were determined by the visibility the SGPC would gain in their efforts to missionize and lead the Sikh community in the right direction. While such scales and hierarchies had previously existed in gurdwara management, the difference now was in the creation of central funds by the SGPC and the rationale deployed in the management of gurdwaras. As the Golden Temple rose to the top of this hierarchy, greater funds were assigned to the upkeep of the Golden Temple at the peril of other historic gurdwaras, even near the Golden Temple in Amritsar. For example, gurdwaras like Shaheedan Gurdwara, Mata Kaulsar Gurdwara, and others received less funding and attention from the SGPC, despite being close to the Golden Temple and receiving many visitors. It is also for this reason that this dissertation and this chapter focus on the first project at institutionalizing the management and processes of managing the gurdwara space at the Golden Temple.

Such an assertion of managerial autonomy and control over gurdwaras expressed in the 1925 Act was not unique to Sikhs nor to Punjab. Such efforts can also be seen in other areas and other religious establishments at different times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Kama Maclean, for instance, explains the process by which the Prayagval Brahmins established their supremacy in handling all religious rituals and affairs for the Kumbh Mela, becoming the focal persons for any clarification and organization of the Mela (fair) for the colonial government.¹⁹ Similarly, Brahmins at Jagannath Puri seized control from the Orriya king and took over all matters of organizing the Jagannath Puri festival, establishing a clear hierarchy of priests and officiates.

To understand this institutionalizing process, this chapter begins with an investigation of the writings and representations of the Golden Temple complex from 1920s onwards which establish new standards of orderliness and cleanliness in the Golden Temple. This first section traces the measures by which the SGPC curtailed popular practices in the Golden Temple to institute new acceptable practices, rules, and guidelines of being in the gurdwara. The second section examines the creation of offices and the streamlining of roles and functions of these officials, who were now tasked with maintaining the abovementioned orderliness and cleanliness. And finally, this chapter assesses the effect of these changes on the building projects in the Golden Temple area.

Although it may seem that these were linear developments many of these events were happening simultaneously and impacted the process of institutionalizing gurdwara management concurrently. For example, as the function of making the karah prashad was

¹⁹ Kama Maclean, *Pilgrimage and Power: The Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, 1765–1954* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

taken over by the SGPC from traditional *halwais*, a consequent project was to create rest houses for the pilgrims who came to visit the Golden Temple. This was because the *halwais* used to also manage the rest houses.²⁰ To build these rest houses, external parts of the Golden Temple boundaries had to be reordered to make space. In this way, taking on one project meant a wider set of changes for the community. This chapter traces these changes and the creation of Sikh institutional practices.

Setting New Standards: Cleanliness and Orderliness in the Golden Temple

The Singh Sabha reformers had early on understood the importance of print media in communicating their message on reformed *Sikhi*, publishing newspapers, pamphlets, historical works, fictional writings, and magazines; scholars like N.G. Barrier have highlighted just how important print media was to the spread of the reformists' agendas.²¹ Indicative of the increase in print media and the existent interest in the Golden Temple is the sixty-four-page list of books on or around the Golden Temple at the Guru Nanak Dev University (Amritsar) library.²² The SGPC inherited this practice of promoting its vision through written media, but this was just one form to embed religious standards.

More important were the new practices and norms created by the new leadership, especially in the first decade after its formation. Each SGPC meeting in Amritsar, when a quorum was formed, passed an order or a resolution. These resolutions ranged from centralizing resources to creating new schools to train religious functionaries or to dispel

²⁰ No author, *Sri Darbar Sahib Ji De Gunje Bhed: Arthat Darbar Sahib de Intezam Diyan Andruni Kharabian*, (Punjab Commercial Press, 1927).

²¹ N. G. Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature* (Manohar, 1970); Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²² There were 64 pages in 2014, when the fieldwork was done for this dissertation.

erstwhile acceptable vendors and merchants of flowers and sacred books from the gurdwara parikrama.²³

The need for protocols and clearly ordered and defined space seems to have emerged first in historic gurdwaras, which had also been regional hubs of trade, education, and social and cultural activities. Because of these different functions, it was felt by the SGPC leadership that the gurdwara space had to be streamlined and their focus made clear for all visitors alike. The Golden Temple Complex, for instance, had been at the centre of many kinds of activities, including medical research and experiments in Bhai Wasti Ram's Bunga, for schools, as training grounds for *gatka* (Sikh martial arts) for the Akalis, as well as an organizing and mobilizing centre for the Akalis during the Gurdwara Reform Movement. These activities had been the mainstay of the gurdwara until the SGPC started to ban such activities. By the mid-1930s, the SGPC was largely successful in doing away with activities like reading texts, especially if they were not Sikh scriptures, conducting meetings or organizing any event unless patronized by the SGPC, discussing anything other than religious works or selling any kind of wares in the gurdwara.²⁴ Other forbidden things included the "accidental" entry of animals or birds, bringing in large bags or luggage, and putting the ashes of a loved one in the sarovar (water tank).²⁵

²³ Gurmat Gurbani Pracharak Jatha, *Chetavani Pattar No. 5, Sriomani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee ate Gurdwara Committee Sri Darbar Sahib de membrane de dhyaan yogi* (1936); *Khalsa Samachar*, "Hosh di dawa," January 1928, 3; *Khalsa Samachar*, "Aman di Nagri," February 1931, 5; *Report Sri Amritsar* (1929, 1930), *Karvawiyani*, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Sri Amritsar, 1921-1938, copied by Harbans Singh Sevak (available at Khalsa College, Amritsar).

²⁴ *Gurdwara Gazette*, "Monthly Meeting Notes," (1928–1940); Gurmat Gurbani Pracharak Jatha, *Chetavani Pattar No. 5*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 7: "Hindu Priest of Guru in the Golden Temple reading from his Sacred Book, Guru Granth Sahib," 1903, Glass Lantern Slide, James Ricalton, New York State Archive, A0345, printed in Amardeep Mandra's The Golden Temple of Amritsar: Reflections of the Past (1808–1959)



Figure 8: "The Pavement, Amritsar," December 1905, H.E. Prevost Battersby, printed in Amandeep Mandra, The Golden Temple of Amritsar: Reflections of the Past (1808–1959)



Figure 9: Hawkers selling their wares in the Golden Temple Complex c. 1920, courtesy, Punjab Digital Library

The management body had to create a new sensibility of place, not just through the written representations, which were important, but also by enforcing new practices and norms. New signboards were put up in the Golden Temple that informed the visitors on how to conduct themselves. Rules regarding bathing before entering the sarovar (sacred pool of water), where to drink water, and how to enter the gurdwara became standard rules, starting from the Golden Temple and adopted in all other gurdwaras.²⁶

While it was one thing to order the space within the gurdwara, the SGPC leadership was also keen on organizing the space outside the gurdwara, specifically the entrances and the exits. Popularizing the vision of the Golden Temple as a living symbol of spirituality, the management body highlighted the frescos, pietra dura, and *minakari* on the walls inside the Golden Temple that seemingly took the visitor on a transcendental experience; outside the Golden Temple was the secular experience of the historical

²⁶ Gurmat Gurbani Pracharak Jatha, *Chetavani Pattar No. 5*.

bustling markets. It was important for the SGPC to make the experience of entering the Golden Temple clean, pure, and spiritual, since outside the gurdwara one was exposed to continual chaos. The Golden Temple had many entrances that led to the inner parikrama. Karam Singh Historian remarks that there were as many entrances, if not more, as there were bungas; there were eighty-eight bungas, and each bunga had an entrance into the parikrama. Additionally, there were narrow alleyways and streets that opened into the parikrama as well, for example, the narrow street between Akhara Braham Butta and Ramgarhia Bunga and Bunga Sodiyan and Ghanta Ghar.²⁷ These narrow streets caused great distress to the SGPC leaders for it was much harder to keep the parikrama clean and controlled, specifically from animals in these areas. Apart from these narrow entrances were the four main gates of the Golden Temple—Ghanta Ghar (referencing the Victorian Clock Tower), Baba Atal, Saraiwala, and Thada Saheb that open out from the parikrama to the flourishing markets of the walled city, or *Katras*. The SGPC made plans to close off the smaller passages and eventually only have the four main entrances.²⁸

²⁷ Karam Singh Historian, *Twarikh Amritsar* (Sikh History Society, 1936).

²⁸ Amritsar Development Authority, *Master Plan of Amritsar*, An Introduction, (2016).



Figure 10: Street leading to Golden Temple in Amritsar, c. 1857-58. Felice Beato, printed in Amandeep Madra & Parmjit Singh, ed., The Golden Temple of Amritsar: Reflections of the Past (1808-1959) Kashi House, 2014.



Figure 11: Passageways in the Golden Temple Outer Boundary © Amarjeet Singh, Amritsar.

One of the passages that were later enclosed by the management committee with a small gate in the 1960s. The corner area led to the *Atta Mandi*, which by 2014 had been properly enclosed by a wall and water cell known as *chabeel*.

The SGPC synthesized different representations inside and outside the gurdwara by advocating a certain meaning and value of the gurdwara and found suitable historical works and representations to support their desired meaning. One effect of such a representation was the removal of all temporal functions outside the gurdwara. For example, the educational classes that had been held in the Golden Temple in the nineteenth century were no longer permissible as non-religious information no longer had a place in the gurdwara. Such views on the division of sacred and non-sacred functions also created boundaries within the larger Golden Temple complex. A clear boundary had to be established, and so the SGPC demolished the *bungas* (historical rest houses) surrounding the Golden Temple, as I discuss in the fourth chapter.

The use of value-laden representations and the management-sponsored building activities ordered the physical space of the gurdwara in clear terms. They created a

bounded object that had previously extended into the bazaars of Amritsar in a more organic way. The very meaning of the act of entering the gurdwara changed under SGPC's management. Passages between bungas and other open-ended paths had led to the Guru-ka-bagh at one end and Baba Atal Rai gurdwara at the other. These passages and open areas were carefully and slowly enclosed, beginning in the 1930s and ending in 1990, for the fear of walking in with dirty feet was aired many times in pamphlets and newspapers.

Moreover, *langar* (congregational and free meal), which was earlier held in the Guru-ka-bagh area, was now placed in an enclosed area as new structures were constructed in the garden in 1956. The organization of *langar* was placed in the hands of management employees rather than those of the volunteers. This way the management took over a function that was earlier carried out by volunteers and streamlined the special process for the preparation and distribution of the food.

In streamlining the purpose of the gurdwara and the use of its place, the SGPC created distinct circuits of sacred sites that were to be visited by the pilgrims. By paving the path between gurdwaras that were near the Golden Temple, a ranking order of gurdwaras was established. For example, the path to gurdwara Atal Rai was paved and clear signs were placed that distinguished the Golden Temple Complex from this gurdwara, and another behind Atal Rai Gurdwara, known as Mata Kaulsar Gurdwara. This created a track of sacred sites that included Atal Rai Gurdwara, Mata Kaulsar Gurdwara and the Golden Temple Complex, showing a loosely held sacred history and its meaning for the believers but also made clear that they were not the Golden Temple.²⁹

²⁹ Gurmat Gurbani Pracharak Jatha, *Chetavani Pattar*, 1936, 12–13.

Another reason was to keep the spaces clean and hygienic. A letter in 1936, for instance, demanded that marble be laid between the gurdwaras to connect them because until then, people going to the two gurdwaras had to walk through Guru-ka-Bagh and on open streets that were filthy.³⁰

A final push to establish the gurdwara space as sacred in opposition to the secular space outside was made with the demolition of the bungas, which had been an integral part of the gurdwara until the beginning of the twentieth century. The SGPC argued that bungas, apart from being dens of wrongdoing, were also incongruous to the beauty and tranquillity of the Golden Temple and gave the gurdwara a haphazard look. Some bungas were two levels high, and some were six. Further, these bungas had been divided into personal family homes and were leased to shopkeepers, bringing the secular functions too close to the parikrama. The SGPC and newspapers like *the Akali* sought to delegitimize this activity in the gurdwara. As a result, poems like *Sri Darbar Sahib Amrtisar da din raat britant*, published in 1907, which extolled the virtues of the bungas, were removed from print. Instead, works like *Sri Amrtisar Gurdham Deedar*, published in 1929, had nine print runs, which extolled the virtues of the management body and its building projects in the form of kar seva.³¹ While discipline and orderliness became important facets of managing the gurdwara, it also became evident to the SGPC that proper training of the sevadars was needed. The next section investigates this undertaking by the SGPC.

³⁰ Gurmat Gurbani Pracharak Jatha, *Chetavani Pattar No. 5, Sriomani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee ate Gurdwara Committee Sri Darbar Sahib de membrane de dhyaan yogi* (1936), 5.

³¹ *Sri Darbar Sahib Amrtisar ji de din raat britant*, 7th edition (Gurmat Press, Amritsar, 1907); *Sri Amrtisar Gurdham Deedar Arthat Gurdham Darpan Rachit* (1929).

Professionalizing the Cadres: Driving Accountability and Standardization across Gurdwaras

The new practices of orderliness and cleanliness were critical to the process of creating an ideal gurdwara space for believers. This ideal aimed at ordering and defining the sacred space and assigning meanings to specific areas. But, to maintain this order, a professional cadre had to be established that would represent the authority and discipline of the newly created SGPC. This cadre of new professionals represented the SGPC's inherent objective towards the Sikh community—to guide and discipline. The management body saw its role as not just managing the financial matters that the erstwhile non-religious manager of the Golden Temple upheld. They saw an extension in their responsibilities, which included the hiring, training, and upkeep of a professional class of people in the gurdwara. This professional class ranged from the sevadars to rababis and kirtankaris, trades and positions that were traditionally passed on within families as inheritance. The SGPC altered this landscape and democratized the professional class in the gurdwara. The sevadars had to fulfil certain criteria to be hired and were to be trained according to new rules for managing the gurdwara. The most important shift in this creation of new offices and duties was to change the role of volunteer work wherein untrained and regular pilgrims performed duties in the gurdwara as a form of service, also known as *seva*, into a salaried job, which required structure, authority, and accountability. It is not that *seva* as a concept was done away with in its entirety, but it transformed along with the new responsibilities of the sevadar, where the person who does *seva* (*seva+dar*) was to be employed. In this way, the management body established an institutional system and process to manage the gurdwara by introducing a “professional” class to the gurdwara.

While voluntary services allowed believers from any caste, creed, or religion to participate in the gurdwaras, the professional class of sevadars could only be hired if they were Amritdhari or baptised Sikhs. This meant that the sevadars had to undergo the baptismal ceremony, if they had not already. The impact of seeing Amritdhari Sikhs patrolling the gurdwara, guiding and disciplining visitors and pilgrims alike, created a regimented and stricter view of Sikhism that came to life in practice from Singh Sabha reformist texts. The SGPC established what the Singh Sabha reformers had been writing over the last thirty-forty decades. A consequence of sevadars controlling activities in the parikrama, as discussed in the last section, was the eventual demise of alternative religious practices that were common in the parikrama until the 1930s, as evident from the pictures available from the time.³²

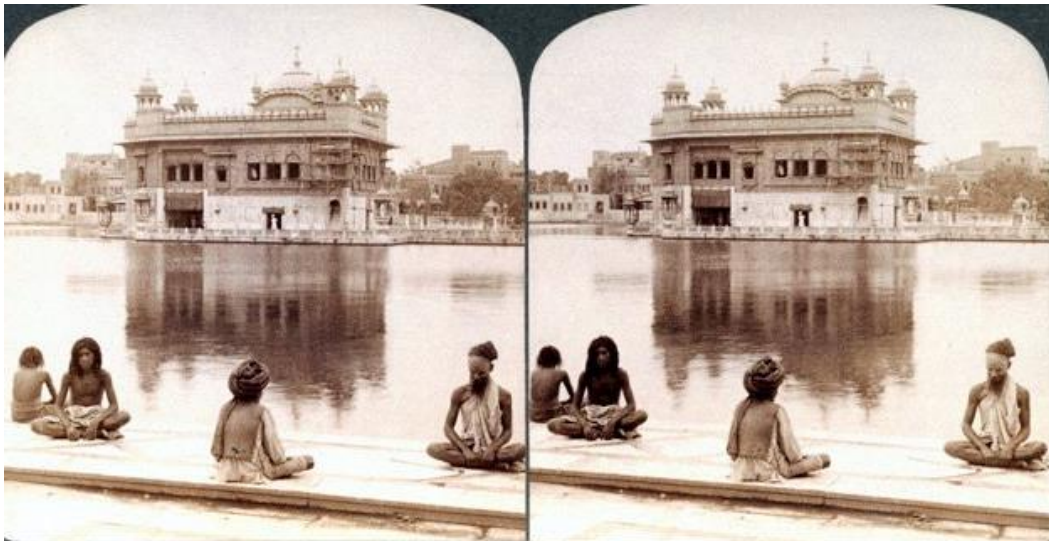


Figure 12: Udasis and Ascetics Meditating at the Amrit Sarovar in the Golden Temple Complex, courtesy Punjab Digital Library

³² Amandeep Madra, *The Golden Temple of Amritsar: Reflections of the Past; 1808-1959*, (Kashi House, 2014).

However, it was not just the alternative religious practices and texts that came under scrutiny. Even Sikh practices and religious readings now had to be ordered, to ensure proper observation. No scriptures could be read in the parikrama, even if they were the approved Sikh texts. Scriptures could only be read in designated spaces as the management claimed that such activity blocked the narrow path for other visitors. The same applied to sermons. Before the formation of the SGPC, any sant or baba could sermonize in any part of the gurdwara; after the creation of the professional class, only a few people were permitted to give sermons, as they were trained in schools. Also, by employing more *granthis* (scripture readers) for the increased number of sermons requested, voluntary agents were no longer needed. Sermons could be given by SGPC trained *pracharaks* (preachers) only, and to train them a school was opened in 1927—the Shaheed Sikh Missionary College.

The Chief Khalsa Diwan began the practice of training *pracharaks*, *kirtanis* (hymn singers), and *granthis* in specific schools, which continued to receive royal patronage by the princely states, as was the practice before colonial rule.³³ The SGPC expanded this training and opened the profession of *rababis* and *kirtanis* to the masses. Previously, it had been a hereditary profession, with sons learning from their fathers and belonging to certain *gharanas* (method and school of training) of music.³⁴ Virinder Singh Kalra says, “The advent of modern music education came to the *kirtanis* in 1927, with the opening of the Shaheed (martyrs) Sikh Missionary College. This was an institution that was central to breaking the monopoly the *rababis* held in imparting musical education

³³ Bob van der Linden, “Sikh Sacred Music: Identity, Aesthetics and Historical Change,” *Music and Empire in Britain and India: Identity, Internationalism and Cross-Cultural Communication* (Palgrave, 2013), 132.

³⁴ Virinder Singh Kalra, *Sacred and Secular Musics: A Postcolonial Approach* (Bloomsbury, 2015), 88–90.

through oral tradition. Sikh reformists founded the college with the express aim of training people to work in the newly taken-over gurdwaras... These mechanisms serve to illustrate the extent to which the training of the kirtan musician shifted in the twentieth century from hereditary to standardized knowledge.”

The SGPC took over the process by opening more colleges, setting a uniform syllabus, and providing regular funds for training schools and its patrons. The curriculum for the Shaheed Sikh Missionary College “...offer(ed) accredited courses in Gurmat Sangeet (religious music), and a certificate was issued upon completion of what is the equivalent of a degree in music.”³⁵ The students were trained in Sikh history, exegesis, philosophy, ethics, and practical training in a gurdwara before they were granted a certificate and then employment in a gurdwara.³⁶ The institutionalization of traditional roles like rababis, *kirtanis*, *granthis*, and *pracharaks* was a significant move for the management body, which was exercising a new form of enrolment and employment policy. These roles had previously been handed down within families, leaving little scope for the public to get involved other than through voluntary seva. The management body claimed that such nepotism was only harming the management of the gurdwara and that the selection needed to be based on merit.³⁷ However, it was not just a requirement for skilled workers to be trained. It became a requirement for all employees in the gurdwara, including the sevadars. It was decided that all sevadars had to fulfil certain criteria before they could be employed, and their duties had to be clearly defined for efficient gurdwara

³⁵ Virinder Singh Kalra, *Sacred and Secular Musics*.

³⁶ Harbans Singh, *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, (Hemkunt Press, 1998); Kristina Myrvold, “Translating the Guru’s Words to Local and Global Contexts: Katha for Contemporary Sikh Communities,” in *Sikh Diaspora: Theory, Agency and Experience*, ed. Michael Hawley (Brill, 2013).

³⁷ “Sevadar Kiven Chune Jan?”, *Gurdwara Gazette*, August 1929, p.8.

management. Various articles in the *Khalsa Samachar* and the *Gurdwara Gazette* mentioned and frowned upon sevadars that were rude and unpleasant to visitors in the gurdwara. It was believed that the sevadar had to be pleasant but firm attendants, who guided the visitors and pilgrims but disciplined them when it was needed. For this purpose, sevadars had to be sufficiently educated; they had to be proficient in reading Gurmukhi and speaking Punjabi, needed some training in religious scriptures and texts, and were expected to exhibit a good disposition and have a friendly personality.³⁸

To further control all issues related to religious missionizing, religious publications, and organizing Sikh events, the SGPC founded a new department called Dharam Prachar Committee. The roles were now divided between the SGPC and this new committee which took over all aspects of religious observation, informing and enforcing the Code of Conduct and religious publications, while the SGPC handled all managerial affairs of the gurdwaras. The two publications of the departments clearly signalled this division of labor: the *Gurdwara Gazette* was run by the SGPC and published monthly meetings and resolutions, while the Dharam Prachar Committee published *Gurmat Prakash*, for the dissemination of Sikh histories, religious sermons, and special issues on religious observations and events.

The Shaheed Sikh Missionary College was given over to the Dharam Prachar Committee for management.³⁹ The Missionary College was funded by the SGPC but the biggest contributor to its funds was voluntary donations made by the community at large.

³⁸ The writer says, "Parikrama vich eh sevadar rakhe jan jo yatri nal narmi, mithat ate piyar nal gal bat karn, jo koi sawal puhe ate hamdardi nal javab de, navakif nun koi gal samajhani hoe ate sabhyata nal sikhiaye," in *Khalsa Samachar*, "Sevadar da charitra," June 1926, 3; *Khalsa Samachar*, "Sevadar da charitra- bhag 2," September 1926, 2; (December 1926), p. 4.; *Gurdwara Gazette*, January 1930, 12.

³⁹ Harbans Singh, *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, (Hemkunt Press, 1998).

Donations became a prominent way for the community to engage with the projects undertaken by the SGPC, highlighting the support and consent of the community to certain projects or plans. Although physical labour in building gurdwaras and charitable establishments continued to be an important form of performing seva, donating money became a new form of seva. This became particularly popular amongst the Sikh diaspora, who chose to send in materials like marble and food for the gurdwaras.⁴⁰ The SGPC, in other words, did not do away with the traditional practice of performing seva or contributing to the gurdwara, but shifted and narrowed the focus of such contributions while streamlining the official processes of managing, building, and developing gurdwara properties. Because the SGPC is officially headquartered in the Golden Temple precinct, it therefore became the first gurdwara to undergo this streamlining and distribution of professional labour.

In the process of reform, the SGPC assumed direct management of services once provided by shop owners. Prashad is an obligatory part of visiting a gurdwara. After offering prayers, all visitors are given prashad before they leave. Visitors can offer prashad as a form of donation and seva, as mentioned above. There are two ways of making this donation. Visitors may bring materials for the prashad, namely sugar, wheat, and oil. Alternatively, they may buy the prashad readymade from the shopkeepers outside the gurdwara and offer it inside. These shopkeepers held one more very important function, along with controlling the quality and sale of prashad for the gurdwara. Prashad shopkeepers traditionally controlled the rest houses and lodging for visitors coming to the

⁴⁰ In recent times, an online portal asks for *bheta* or donations as seva on the official website for SGPC, which is called 'online seva system.' For more, see: SGPC, "Send Bheta," <http://new.sgpc.net/send-bheta/>.

Golden Temple. They would go to the railway station twice a day, when trains would pull into the station, and pick up passengers who had come to visit the gurdwara. These shopkeepers arranged for their lodging, food, and prashad donations, and were generally responsible for the visitors' overall experience.⁴¹

After the SGPC's formation, it was believed that the shopkeepers provided poor standards of prashad and cheated visitors with bad lodging facilities.⁴² Upon further investigations, in 1927–1928, the SGPC decided to centralize the prashad facilities, and to build sarais (rest houses) to provide free accommodation to visitors for up to three nights.⁴³ These decisions were not well-received by the shopkeepers, as the shopkeepers would lose their traditional roles, and valuable business. This decision to build rest houses and to control the prashad service meant that the SGPC was not only attempting to control the functions and ensure quality within the gurdwara, but also outside it. The gurdwara management, in other words, expanded outside the walls of the gurdwara. The shopkeepers lost their right to make prashad and fix the rates for lodges and rest houses, and they now had to compete harder for visitors. By creating these institutional processes and departments, the SGPC impacted functions and management outside the gurdwara as well as the people that had been associated with it, remarkably changing the experience of visiting the gurdwara.

⁴¹ *Khalsa Samachar*, "Yatruan de Aaram Lai," May 1932, 8.

⁴² No Author, *Sri Harimandir Sahib de Gunje Bhed: Arthat Darbar Sahib de Intezam Diyan Andruni Kharabian*, (Punjab Commercial Press, 1927). This pamphlet directly accuses halwais for their corrupt nature. The author says that the halwais had expanded their duties from providing prashad to also renting properties around the Golden Temple as lodging for the visitors. They thus entrap the visitors and force them to pay high rents as well as high fees for the prashad, which is also of poor quality. The author asks the SGPC to build its own rest houses to control the visitors' experience as well as to take over the function of halwais.

⁴³ *Gurdwara Gazette*, Meeting notes, 1928–1936.

The new officials and functionaries, along with standardized processes of training, were successful in placing the resources in the SGPC's hands. However, as this dissertation highlights, there were also other institutions under SGPC, but they differed in certain practices and traditions of Sikhism. Taksals, like the Damdami Taksal, have played a very important role in Sikh history and politics in the twentieth century.⁴⁴ More recently, the Damdami Taksal has become known for its leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale, and for its role in supporting the separatist movement. However, traditionally, the taksals were known for producing a professional class of granthis (readers), ragis (Sikh musicians), and kathakars (exegetes). Additionally, they were known to have their own traditions in leading kar sevas in the Punjab. In this way, institutional practices of Sikhism that are approved by the SGPC blend with the *deras* and the sant traditions. While some *deras* do challenge the dominant discourse of a cohesive Sikh panth that are representative of an orthodox view, many practices and even professional training of the sevadars are done at these very *deras* and taksals. Eventually, a professional cadre of Sikh religious functionaries emerged and became the new standard for managing gurdwaras. To control the training received in taksals and *deras*, the SGPC created uniform syllabi and enforced them through examinations and a rigorous interviewing process for all job postings. As professional classes became standardized and democratized, the job listings also had to become more transparent, as stated in monthly meetings of the SGPC.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Paramjit Singh Judge, "Taksals, Akharas, Nihang Deras," in *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis Fenech (Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴⁵ *Gurdwara Gazette*, Monthly meeting minutes, August 1958.

Building Projects: Power, Expansion, and Routinization of the New Norms

The routinization of religious and non-religious functions in the gurdwara in their apposite places necessitated new building projects. For instance, Guru-ka-Bagh (Guru's garden) was used for multiple activities like the organization of *kathas* or sermons based on historical events, religious fairs, school classes for students in Gurmukhi religious learning, and special classes for women. However, these activities were no longer permitted in the garden space as it was considered outside the sacred boundaries of the gurdwara. This space now became a chosen spot for the new rest house for pilgrims, which the management found necessary to provide as the *halwais*, who would also offer lodging to visitors, were now seen to be corrupt.⁴⁶ When demarcating areas and assigning meaning for activities, the SGPC was in effect clearing the space of its precolonial meanings and associations.

New standards and protocols of being in the gurdwara, the new division of labour between Dharam Prachar Committee and the SGPC, and new building projects all had the effect of institutionalizing the genius loci or the spirit of place that was being collectively yet gradually crafted by the SGPC leaders. This form was not, however pre-decided or premeditated, but evolved gradually, with each new development and plan impacting the overall picture. In this sense, no small change or project was insignificant. Every decision impacted something; for instance, the SGPC assuming the prashad function meant that new rest houses had to be constructed that would allow pilgrims and visitors to find lodging without much difficulty.

⁴⁶ *Gurdwara Gazette*, Meeting notes of the SGPC, September 1928; *Khalsa Samachar*, "Updates," August 1928, 3.

The SGPC attempted to create a unified vision of the gurdwara as a sacred place in its entirety, evident to visitors as soon as they entered the precincts. For this purpose, many travel guides were published and an official position called the information officer was created in 1930.⁴⁷ The Golden Temple, like other historic gurdwaras, comprises various ‘sacred’ locations associated with different religious events, miracles, and people, which includes Gurus, *bhakts*, and soldiers/martyrs.⁴⁸ These sites continue to be thought of in a variety of ways, wherein different individuals may consider certain sites to be more sacred than others. The information officer would guide pilgrims and visitors coming to the Golden Temple Complex following carefully designed guidelines by SGPC to express legitimacy. This meant not only observing the conventions of being in a gurdwara, i.e. to not wear shoes or socks, to dress modestly, and to not carry intoxicants, but also to not carry big bags and umbrellas into the gurdwara. The information officers also required a ‘historical’ tour of the religious sites in the gurdwara, beginning with the Dukh Bhajan Beri because it existed before the water tank was dug or the gurdwara was built. The circuit then led to the raised platform near Dukh Bhajan Beri, known as the Ath Sath Teerath, which is believed to be the spot from where Guru Arjan would watch the work being done on the main sanctum sanctorum. The trail was historically determined, from the oldest sites to the most recent addition to the gurdwara—the rest house made by

⁴⁷ *Gurdwara Gazette*, June 1930. Travel guides are published annually, where the SGPC spends an annual budget to publish pictures and histories of the gurdwara. For more see, <http://www.goldentemple.org/amritsar-travel-guide,-golden-temple-amritsar-tourist-guide.php>

⁴⁸ For instance, other prominent historic gurdwaras like Anandpur Sahib and Patna Sahib consist of various sacred sites associated with the memory and historical events from the life of the Guru. Unlike the Golden Temple, however, these sites have not been ordered within one gurdwara, although attempts to create circuits and ordering pilgrims to visit gurdwaras in an order have been made by the management committee. Anne Murphy, *Materiality of the Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

the SGPC in the 1930s outside the Golden Temple Complex.⁴⁹ The work of the information officer was made easier in 1956, when more signs explaining the histories of sacred sites were put up in the gurdwara.⁵⁰ Around the same time, the Central Sikh Museum was opened to the public, putting into practice a concern that was deeply embedded in Sikh ideas of good management and progress, i.e. “historical awareness.”⁵¹

In this section, I will consider two building projects that impacted the overall Golden Temple Complex as well as its management. These transformations in turn impacted the ways in which the Sikh community came to experience the gurdwara in the twentieth century. The two projects that I discuss are the building of Guru Ram Das Sarai and the widening of the parikrama—a project that was forty years in the making. These projects highlight the ways in which the SGPC managed the gurdwara within and without, and how a certain sense of place formed regarding the built structure.

While the SGPC worked towards standardizing the look and feel of the gurdwara, there were location-specific gurdwaras that were incorporated within the larger Golden Temple Complex. The leadership faced a paradox in its effort to both standardize the look and feel of the gurdwaras while also maintaining the original structures of the gurdwaras to their scale, size, and form, especially in larger gurdwara complexes like the Golden Temple. It was in this conundrum that the SGPC’s policies took shape, in the contradictory desires to standardize and yet keep the particularity of the place intact.

⁴⁹ Sodhi Hazara Singh, *A History and Guide to the Golden Temple* (Prakash Singh Publication, 1938); Jagdeep Singh, *The Durbar* (no pub, 1928).

⁵⁰ “Aelan”, *Gurdwara Gazette*, July 1956.

⁵¹ I use the term “historical awareness” to suggest that Sikhs at large may not have read various historical accounts written or endorsed by the SGPC, but they had become historically aware through the sermons (*prachars* and *kathas*) and annual pilgrimage tours of historical gurdwaras. I borrow the term from Christopher Bayly’s “literacy awareness.”

Most conservation scholars on Sikh architecture have highlighted the SGPC's practice of breaking down historically valuable gurdwaras to construct bigger and more modern structures.⁵² While this concern is valid, William Glover has recently demonstrated how older structures were incorporated within newer constructions. Taking the example of the gurdwara in Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur, Glover suggests that although the SGPC has been driven by its concern for bigger and shinier buildings, they have in some places retained the older structures.⁵³ Similarly, the attempt to shadow the design and form of the main sanctum sanctorum in the Golden Temple Complex in other gurdwaras, Glover suggests, signals the desire to make them closer to historical structures than to modernize these buildings. Following Glover, we can read the streamlining of the gurdwaras' functions and responsibilities and the assignment of particular places for certain activities as not driven merely by concerns of modernity but as deeply conflicted reactions to the preservation and treatment of historical structures.

Guru Ram Das Sarai was a rest house built by the SGPC in the Golden Temple Complex. The earliest discussions on the plans for building the Sarai revolved around issues of the size of the building, its outlook, application of modern facilities like electricity, sewage, toilets, and library, and the outer façade of the building, which had to reflect that it was a gurdwara-managed rest house. While some managers felt that the rest house should be compact and utilitarian with a set number of rooms and storage facility, others felt that the rest house had to provide for more than just rooms for lodging.⁵⁴ A call

⁵² Gurmeet Rai and Kavita Singh, *Brick by Sacred Brick: Architectural Projects of Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind* (Marg Publications, 2003); Patwant Singh, *Golden Temple* (South Asia Books, 1989).

⁵³ William J. Glover, "Shiny New Buildings: Rebuilding Historic Sikh Gurdwaras in Indian Punjab," *Future Anterior* 9, no. 1 (2012): 32–47.

⁵⁴ *Gurdwara Gazette*, Meeting minutes, 1928–1932; *Chitha Amdan Report Imarat* (Amritsar, 1931).

for blueprints was made to the wider Sikh public in the leading newspapers, asking for Sikh engineers to keep in mind the community's needs.⁵⁵ This call for blueprints resembles the contemporary tender system, where the SGPC makes a call for architects, constructors, and engineers to send in plans and designs along with the estimated cost of a project. The process of choosing architectural and building contractors was first set in the 1930s, when the Guru Ram Das Sarai was constructed. From a pool of blueprints, the managing committee made several choices for the rest house, deciding upon the aesthetic and functional experience of staying in a rest house behind the gurdwara. The choice for the location was significant, because the SGPC had acquired larger tracks of lands and property to build similar sized or even bigger rest houses elsewhere. The committee found it important to keep the rest house close to the gurdwara to allow visitors to listen to the *kirtan* and sermons through the day.

The experience of being in a distinctive religious rest house began from the entrance and the outer façade of the building. The use of a dome, big arched windows, and floral embellishments gave a stylistic feeling of entering a gurdwara and not a rest house.⁵⁶ As one entered the rest house, there was a wide and open courtyard, usually full of activity and noise. But as one proceeded towards the inner area, it was much quieter and cooler with the use of bricks, light blue and white paint, and covered areas leading to the rooms and storage area. This style of open courtyard leading to a quiet area is common to many gurdwaras, especially those that have been rebuilt by the SGPC over the years. Many gurdwaras from the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries were single-

⁵⁵ *Khalsa Samachar*, "Invitations to Design: A Series," (1929–30).

⁵⁶ P. S. Arshi has categorized the different plans of gurdwaras and identified the distinctive stylistic features like pillars, arches, domes, and kiosks. For more, see: P. S. Arshi, *Sikh Architecture* (Intellectual Publishing House, 1986).

story structures, with a single room for the granthi to perform religious duties while the congregation met outside this single story, and at times single-roomed, gurdwara.⁵⁷ Many such gurdwaras have now been converted into bigger plots of land and bigger structures with multiple rooms and different functional areas. The rest house followed a similar pattern and plan for the building, where the outer façade and the inner courtyard gave the sense of entering a gurdwara. However, the similarities ended there, for the adoption of modern facilities were made more easily in the rest house than in the main gurdwaras.

The use of electricity remained a controversial subject in the Golden Temple Complex. The outer area in the gurdwara, mainly the parikrama, received electric lights and wiring in 1898, after prolonged and controversial arguments between two blocs within the Sikh community. The mahants and granthis opposed the use of electricity in the gurdwara, claiming that the gurdwara should be managed in the same way as it was by the Gurus. Whereas reformed Sikhs, led by Sundar Singh Majithia, insisted that the gurdwara be managed with the current times in mind that used the advances made in the fields of scientific invention.⁵⁸ The inner sanctum sanctorum received electricity in 1931, around the same time as the rest house.⁵⁹ Other facilities, such as toilets with modern equipment like flushes, taps, and a modern sewage system that would take the waste from the rest house outside the walled city were significant choices in the early 1930s. These

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ No Author, *Bijili Bidaran*. Amritsar (1897); Sant Khalsa Dyal Singh, *Sri Darbar-Sahib Amritsar vich bijli di roshni nal beadbi* (Amritsar, 1897); Harbans Singh, "Polemic over the Electrification of the Golden Temple," *Sikh Courier* 8, no. 4 (1976), 21–22.

⁵⁹ Kartar Singh, *History of Golden Temple* (Amritsar, 1978).

facilities, it seems, were not easily available to the larger masses who could come and stay at the rest house for free for up to three days.⁶⁰

Visitor experiences collected through visitors' books were used to further expand the rest houses' facilities and provide for visitors' comforts, a concern that had become more pressing in the management body's affairs. Official posts like that of the information officer or of sevadars accountable for the comforts of the pilgrims and visitors alike, both in the gurdwara and the rest house, signal the new management's concerns in producing a certain experience of visiting the gurdwara. The creation of this experience aligned with the expectations of observing a certain decorum in this space, as discussed before. These experiences were recorded, circulated, and published to further fuel the development of other SGPC-led projects.

Guru Ram Das Sarai was completed in 1934 with contributions from the community for building the rest house, and the remaining resources were supplied from the excess of funds from karah prashad donations in the gurdwara. The future of rest houses was also drawn up, as the number of pilgrims increased due to annually sponsored pilgrimages organized by local gurdwara committees and the SGPC.

The plans to widen the parikrama were first made in the early 1930s, when it was decided that the thirty-foot wide pathway around the amrit sarovar would be widened to a sixty-foot perimeter. The SGPC argued that there had been an increase in the number of pilgrims to the Golden Temple which cramped the walkways. The only solution was to break the uneven structures surrounding the Golden Temple and widen the parikrama.

⁶⁰ Santokh Singh BSc. SGPC's, *Report Sri Darbar Sahib* (SGPC Pub., 1933–34).

The demolition of bungas and the clearing of space along the path of smaller gurdwaras were all part of this project of widening the parikrama, which ended in 1970. In the process of widening, many sacred spots were highlighted, with their historic and religious significance receiving renewed reinforcement from the SGPC. Smaller gurdwaras, included the Shahid Bunga, one of the three that survived and was owned by the SGPC.⁶¹ The parikrama, much like other parts of the gurdwara, held significance for the community and the management body intended to institutionalize this part of the gurdwara as much as the others. This included building smaller shrines according to a standardized format of gurdwaras, paving the path and laying marble, setting rules and schedules for its cleaning, hiring a parikrama officer who oversaw the cleaning and order, and observing proper decorum and ritualized prayers every morning and evening.

The parikrama holds a deep meaning for the Sikh community and the believers; it is not simply a pathway around the amrit sarovar. Hence, the SGPC's control over it is significant. The parikrama was the place where once had lain the heads of the martyrs who died defending the Golden Temple on the many occasions it was attacked. It is believed that the parikrama is in fact a *samadhi*—a commemoration built for these martyrs. During my fieldwork, this analogy came up in various unexpected places and conversations, including a televised show on Sikh prayers. A frequent appeal made to pilgrims and visitors alike is “walk gently, there are martyrs resting beneath this floor.”⁶² This idea of becoming a martyr for the honour of the gurdwara is extended to the valour of soldiers for their regiment and their nation. A common sight in the gurdwara is a

⁶¹ The other two bungas were Akal Bunga—also known as Akal Takhat, the seat of temporal authority for the Sikhs—and Jhanda Bunga.

⁶² Personal conversations with Balbir Singh, Sevadar (August 12, 2013) and Bibi Jagwinder Kaur (December 4, 2013), who pointed me to the televised show.

marble engraving dedicated to individuals and battalions that have donated money or marble to commemorate their losses for the cause of the nation.



Figure 13: Marble Memorials in the Golden Temple Complex, taken during field work in 2013

The parikrama unites all these values—defending its sacred spaces against enemies, courage in the face of death, and masculine notions of standing up for your right—and embodies them in this physical space. Its institutionalization by the SGPC popularized and regularized these values and ideas for the entire community. These values of valour, aspiring to martyrdom for a cause greater than the self, and being commemorated and decorated on the walls of the parikrama, are tied to the community’s connection with the gurdwara and its built environment. The spatial ideal that extends from individual to the built structure is made stronger with such practices and beliefs.

The stories and the values regarding the parikrama can be traced to the written histories of the Golden Temple, which highlight its unique resilience in the face of enemy attacks—the Temple was attacked at least seven times by the infamous Afghan invaders

Ahmad Shah Abdali and Nadir Shah in the eighteenth century.⁶³ Some historical narratives have suggested that this was already prophesized by the fifth Guru, when a mason had misplaced the foundation brick. The Guru had then said that there would be a time when the religion would need to be defended, for this structure would be brought down and built from the ground up once again. The prophecy included a call for courageous Sikhs who would lay down their lives to protect the gurdwara and their religion, which were understood to be the same thing. The valorisation of martyrs, particularly Baba Dip Singh, in this regard comes from this spatial imagination. And the legends associated with his death and his *samadhi* (commemoration building) are tied to the parikrama in the Golden Temple. This resilience of place in turn depicts the resilience of the community in the form of the martyrs' presence in the parikrama.

The project to widen the parikrama was accompanied by plans to pave the path and lay marble. Previously, only the area in front of the Akal Takhat leading to the main sanctum sanctorum had been paved with marble using the donations from Ranjit Singh and his son Sher Singh.⁶⁴ This marble was sourced from Rajasthan and had traditional patterns. The new marble laid on the parikrama imitates the patterns in some areas, but it is largely plain in the rest of the parikrama. The SGPC bought a workshop to make its own marble in 1934, along the Guru-ka-Bagh and the SGPC office. The gurmat resolution states the setting of this workshop and explains that the increased orders and

⁶³ There are various fictional and non-fictional accounts on this episode of Sikh history, which deeply impacts the ways Sikhs view the Golden Temple and tie their own identities and histories to this place. For more, see Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Abdali* (Bombay, Asia House, 1959).

⁶⁴ Madanjit Kaur, *The Golden Temple, Past and Present* (Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983).

need for marble for the building activities necessitated the standardization and quality control of this marble.⁶⁵

The use of marble has been criticized by architectural conservationists as an ahistorical material and not the Guru's aesthetic choice for building materials; the Gurus largely used *Nanakshahi* bricks and not marble.⁶⁶ However, marble carried a certain symbolism and meaning for people, which the SGPC capitalized on.⁶⁷ Its meaning was associated with purity, royalty, and a coolness to the touch, and this meaning was bundled to create and embody a vision of supreme authority—both spiritual and temporal. An aesthetic transformation was made possible through a materiality that physically distinguished the calm spirituality inside the complex from the hustle bustle in the market area outside.

As the processes and accounting/auditing became better defined and institutionalized, so did the records and documentation around gurdwara management. Annual published records highlighted expenses, revenues, and ongoing projects in the gurdwaras, publishing audit reports, income, expenditure, and savings for future projects. These records were also organized according to the initiatives taken by the SGPC, such as building activity, processions, education and so on. Although many records from this time have not survived, there remain some that reveal how gurdwaras were renovated and constructed immediately after the SGPC came into existence. Initially, records from 1929–1930 suggest that materials like marble, gold, and other construction materials were

⁶⁵ Santokh Singh B.Sc., *Sri Report Sri Darbar Sahib*, (SGPC pub., 1933-34), *Gurdwara Gazette*, Member meeting notes, 1934.

⁶⁶ Gurmeet Rai and Kavita Singh, *Brick by Sacred Brick*.

⁶⁷ Webb Keane, "Signs Are Not a Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things," in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

donated and supplied by the community as a form of service. The gurdwara management in Amritsar and elsewhere would take these materials and store them. During building projects, if such materials fell in short supply, the management would send out an appeal for the materials or for monetary supplements to complete the task at hand.⁶⁸

Increasingly, the management committee extended its control over the materials and opened factories and workshops to centralize the production of materials like marble and stone work, to ensure that all gurdwaras had standardized inlay work.⁶⁹ The reproduction of certain styles and materials gave authenticity and authority to these structures, rather than emphasize the longevity of the building and the materials used. Questions like safety, access, and facilities eventually became more important to the management committee and to the Sikh public in thinking about the old and the new gurdwara structures, and these were addressed in the design of the gurdwara.

Of the many concerns regarding safety in the 1920s, one was the issue of the danger the sarovar posed to children and non-swimmers. Newspapers reported multiple incidents of children drowning in the sarovar because there was nothing to hold on to if someone slipped into the water.⁷⁰ The kar seva of the amrit sarovar in 1923 was an opportunity to make some amends to the structure of the sarovar and add some safety features. Requests for ideas and design options were sent out in regional newspapers, especially *Khalsa Samachar* and *Khalsa Advocate*. Engineers and architects from the Sikh community were welcomed to send in their designs and thoughts on how to best make the sarovar safe, while maintaining the essence of the gurdwara's design.

⁶⁸ SGPC, *Annual Report*, (Amritsar, SGPC pub. 1931–32, 1933).

⁶⁹ SGPC, *Report Chitha Amdan Kharach Imarat* (Amritsar, SGPC pub. 1939–1940, 1941).

⁷⁰ *Khalsa Samachar*, "Sri Amrit Sarovar ate Bachiya da Dubhna," June 22, 1922, 5.

A wide variety of ideas came in because of the advertisement. The chief difference in the design was the structure and materials offered to prevent drowning. One article in the *Khalsa Samachar* expanded upon the request for the synchronized materiality of the design for the sarovar to a bigger but separate issue: that of the Victorian Clock Tower. The writer says, “The Victorian clock tower... imposed itself on the Golden Temple since early 1870s. What we need now is an understanding of an ‘oriental design’ and how to maintain this ‘oriental essence’ of the Golden Temple that had already been compromised with the Victorian clock tower.”⁷¹ This Clock Tower had been built in the 1870s, after the Revolt of 1857, by demolishing Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s Bunga. In this, it served as a marker of British authority over the Punjab.⁷² The proximity of this structure to the Golden Temple was not lost on the Sikh community, which had strongly opposed this structure until it was demolished in 1947–1948. The Gothic design was an “eyesore” not just to the Sikh public, but to the European and British officers who visited the site as well. The colors of the Victorian Clock Tower were dark in direct contrast to the Golden Temple, as the article highlighted, and their aesthetics expressed two starkly different worldviews. The writer appealed to the better judgment of the SGPC and the community, and the author asked for designs and building models that could be displayed at the gurdwara before a decision could be made. The *jangla*, or the railing for the sarovar, was built after such a building model was placed in the SGPC office and a certain period had passed during which anybody could register complaints about the building plans.⁷³

⁷¹ Ibid.; *Khalsa Samachar*, “Ik Namuna Purabi Sundarta da,” editorial article, May 1923, 5.

⁷² B. H. Baden Powell, *Handbook of the Manufactures and Arts of the Punjab*, vol. II (Lahore, Punjab Feinting Company, 1872).

⁷³ *Khalsa Samachar*, “Ik Namuna Purabi Sundarta da”, June 22, 1922, 5; and “Jangla kiven banen?” *Khalsa Samachar*, June 7, 1923, 2.

Competing Ideas of Building Projects: Objecting to SGPC's Narrative

There are three bers or trees in the Golden Temple complex. These three sites are the *Illachi ber*, *Dukh Bhajani* and Baba Budha's ber tree. These three sites are highly revered by pilgrims for their sacred and miraculous powers. *Dukh Bhajani*, literally translated as the 'end of miseries', is believed to have magical powers. Legends state that this place is blessed to cure medical issues, especially related to leprosy as a leper was cured here when he accidentally fell in the water in the sixteenth century. Since then, the Guru blessed the water around the tree to cure all illnesses as well as end the miseries of believers who come to pray here.

Harjot Oberoi has pointed out that the worship of trees, particularly the pipal tree was a common practice in the pre-colonial period and was part of an "enchanted universe". He says, "The *pipal* (*Ficus religiosa*) and the *bar* (*Bengalensis*) trees were commonly venerated, and only under dire circumstances like famine were their leaves cut to feed the cattle...".⁷⁴ In other words, worshipping trees and plants was part of the enchanted universe and were given as high a rank as any Gurus, scriptures or sants. This practice of worshipping plants and trees, Oberoi says, came under attack under the Singh Sabha reforms and were eventually discarded by the community as the Guru, Granth and Gurdwara became the only sites of belief for them. The continued support for the *Dukh bhajini* amongst the Sikh community however suggests the exception to this rule of the three G's and the support of the community in maintaining the *ber* tree in the Golden Temple. The example of the *Dukh bhajini ber* highlights similar efforts made by the

⁷⁴ Harjot Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 169.

SGPC to do away with the worship of trees and the continued support given to the tree by the community, in defiance of what the SGPC desired.

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was nothing here but a tree along the parikrama (pathway around the amrit sarovar).⁷⁵ Sometime in the 1930s, the SGPC floated the thought to demolish this small structure to expand the parikrama. The Sikh public questioned the rationale behind the demolition of older gurdwaras and memorials for new projects like parikrama expansion.⁷⁶ The SGPC claimed that the narrow parikrama and the bottlenecks around various entries and structures prevented the easy transit of an ever-increasing volume of pilgrims. Such plans lent themselves to further conversations over which structures to keep in the Golden Temple and which ones to be removed. While certain structures did not raise much concern, like when the *shivling* (Lord Shiva's symbolic presence)⁷⁷ placed on a raised platform in the parikrama suddenly disappeared, there were debates on other structures that held greater value for the Sikhs. In an article entitled, "Should gurdwaras be Built or Demolished in the Golden Temple" in the *Khalsa Samachar*,⁷⁸ an anonymous author highlighted the risks involved in widening the parikrama at the expense of Sikh heritage and losing out on useful and functional spaces to make the path wider. The writer asks what would be the purpose of coming to a site that no longer had the sacred and memorial elements that were so deeply tied to the Sikh past and faith? The writer claimed that he had it on good authority that

⁷⁵ There are pictures that attest to the simplicity of the spot in the early twentieth century. For more, see: Amandeep Singh Madra and Parmjit Singh, ed., *The Golden Temple of Amritsar: Reflections of the Past, 1808–1959* (Kashi House, 2014).

⁷⁶ *Khalsa Samachar*, "Sri Darbar Sahib ji di Parikrama vich Gurdware Dhae Jan ya Banae Jaan?" February 11, 1932, 8.

⁷⁷ *Khalsa Samachar*, "Sri Darbar Sahib di Parikrama vich Ek Ascharaj Ghatna," April 19, 1923, 2.

⁷⁸ *Khalsa Samachar*, "Sri Darbar Sahib ji di Parikrama vich Gurdware Dhae Jan ya Banae Jaan?"

Gurdwara Dukh Bhajani and Ath Sath Teerath (mentioned above), two prominent sites for the Sikh community, were to be demolished for the widening of the parikrama.

The demolition of these two structures would be unimaginable as they held vast influence among the believers who came to these sites for special *darshan* (to be in the presence of the divine). These voices of dissent questioned the hasty decisions to demolish the existing structures and instead suggested ways to reinforce and rebuild the old structures to maintain the heritage of the community. Both the Dukh Bhajani and Ath Sath Teerath have therefore been renovated over the years under the stewardship of the *kar seva* sants.

By the 1940s, the site had received a lot more attention in an increased number of books and pamphlets highlighting its history and its attachment to the fourth and the fifth Guru. Eventually, a *Gurdwara Gazette* report in 1942 stated that plans to construct a small gurdwara to receive the increased number of pilgrims who wished to take a dip and to do *akhand path* (continuous reading of scriptures for forty-eight hours) here.⁷⁹ As a result of the increased attention and focus on the gurdwara and an even higher number of followers coming for a dip, an enclosed space for women was also constructed to allow them access to the waters of Dukh Bhajan Beri, along with an expanded structure and support for the tree. In other words, an increase in published representations had a very tangible outcome on the built structure. The SGPC averted a scandal by ceding to the community's demands and building a structure in a place recognized to have miraculous powers by the community at large.

⁷⁹ "Aelan", *Gurdwara Gazette*, July 1942, 21.

By the 1970s, it was found that the Dukh Bhajani tree had weakened considerably despite efforts to support and conserve it and the SGPC had to act to ensure that the community was not irked. The roots had been impacted because of the widening of the parikrama and the laying of marble, a project that was begun in the 1940s and ended in the 1970s. The roots, which earlier had enough ground to spread and grow, were now severely restricted by the buildings. The tree had to be saved from these constructions. Although the SGPC made plans to conserve the built structures and the significant trees around the gurdwara, some of the practices that ensued were more complex than they had envisioned. These became learning exercises for the management body, which started creating processes to prevent past mistakes, forming institutional memory as well as stronger institutional preservation practices.



Figure 14: New Structure of Gurdwara Dukh Bhajani Beri in 2014

Various projects have been undertaken since the 1970s to protect the Dukh Bhanjani Beri because of its historic and religious status for the Sikhs. Many conservation architects have been hired to devise plans to protect this site. Most recently, in 2011 a project to clone the tree was undertaken by D.S. Jaspal. A graft of the tree was planted in a heritage garden in Chandigarh, thereby saving this sacred tree for the Sikhs in a freer and uninhibited environment.⁸⁰

A hierarchy of sorts emerged in terms of the gurdwaras or spots deemed the most sacred and historically meaningful to the community. As demolitions and renovations of gurdwaras gathered speed, so did the contribution of the community in directly engaging with such projects. The emergent process on how the community could contribute to this increased and intensified building activity became critical as the activities raised questions of what was historically important to the Sikh community.

In the 1920s, the community was also engaged over the status of the *samadhis*, tombs for the martyred soldiers who had lost their lives while protecting the gurdwara in the last few centuries. The *samadhis* under consideration were those of Sardar Gurbaksh Singh and Baba Deep Singh. While the Shahid Bunga is an important memorial site that continues to exist, it is only one of the many *samadhis* that had once been in the gurdwara.⁸¹ Bringing these *samadhis* down in the late 1920s posed a threat to the memory of these warriors and was a purposeful choice in the vision of the gurdwara and Sikhism at large.

⁸⁰ Chandigarh Nature and Health Society, "Museum of Trees: Sacred Gardens," http://www.museumoftrees.org/sacred_garden.php (accessed November 19, 2018).

⁸¹ *Khalsa Samachar*, "Baba Atal ji ate Samadhan," May 3, 1923, 2.

The SGPC made a conscious move to make Sikhism less aggressive and haunted by the memories of the sant sipahis (literally “saint-soldiers,” or Sikhs who had fought for the community) who fought these battles—a vision that the Nihangis still maintain. However, memories of certain critical figures were sustained, for example Baba Deep Singh. Other martyrs were revered in other gurdwaras outside the Golden Temple. Destroying physical embodiments of the values essential to the community that were even more recent in the minds of the community because of print culture, created an environment where Sikhs expressed their discontent and disagreement with the plans.

By examining editorial articles, we can piece together these conversations, which expressed the opinions that then informed the plans and processes to preserve the Sikh past in the form of monuments and memorials. On the issue of the samadhis, one of the op-ed articles argued that it was understandable that the management body needed to cater to the increasing number of pilgrims at the Golden Temple and that the conditions there were getting out of hand. However, an alternative solution to this problem would be to create even bigger samadhis in an area not far from the original samadhi. This article ends with five recommendations on this specific issue of memorials for sant sipahi. First, no more samadhis should be removed from their original location. But also, no samadhis should be worshipped. Instead, they should be treated as important memorials. Second, the names of all martyrs should be engraved on stones and placed in the Golden Temple. Third, a big hall or memorial like Westminster Abbey should be constructed that would serve as a reminder of the martyrs. Additionally, historical works should be written, and a library should be created that would hold the references for the Sikh past. Fourth, the committee should ensure that no one ever dares to demolish important Sikh structures

again. Finally, the committee should commit to protecting the structures that remained in the parikrama.⁸² In other words, built structures and projects were not just directed by the SGPC but were also informed by the community at large. The community participated in these conversations through select media and participated in the building activities by making contributions towards the building materials and building activities. The typographies of Sikh gurdwaras, as studied and recorded by Pradeep Singh Arshi, came to life in this period, when the typical square and rectangular gurdwaras were built along with the archetypical domes and *jharokhas* (overhanging enclosed balcony), reminiscent of the Golden Temple.⁸³

In this chapter, I have looked at the professionalization of the SGPC—its offices, managers and workers and the institutionalization of gurdwara management in tandem with building/ construction activities. By looking at the three aspects in relation to each other, I argue that the SGPC was not merely innovating on a modern sense of Sikhism or summarily taking on projects as problems seemed to occur. On the contrary, these representations speak of a larger vision, to preserve the past and create a new sense of being Sikh according to the *rahit maryadas* that the Singh Sabha and the SGPC leaders agreed upon. The SGPC and its attendant officers gained legitimacy by creating standardized and accountable systems and records. Finally, despite SGPC’s efforts to control all functions and the ways in which people visited the gurdwara, this proved to be difficult to control. The Golden Temple had various associations in relation to specific places for different people, and to rebuild or renew those areas required a larger vision

⁸² *Khalsa Samachar*, “Baba Atal ji ate Samadhan.”

⁸³ P. S. Arshi, *Sikh Architecture*; William Glover, “Shiny New Buildings: Rebuilding Historic Sikh Gurdwaras in Indian Punjab,” *Future Anterior* 9, no. 1 (Summer, 2012).

that would have to convince most, if not all, Sikhs. In executing this vision, the SGPC also acquired authority and autonomy in making decisions for the built structures as well as the management of these places.

Chapter Three: Discovering Our Roots—Performance, Pilgrimage, and Locating

Histories

It was common convention among Sikhs in the countryside, alongside Hindus and Muslims, to frequent *khanqahs* (major shrines of Muslim pirs), *pirkhanas* (minor shrines of Muslim pirs), *jatheras* (cremation sites of village ancestors), *mazars* (Muslim tombs), *kabars* (graves) and *samadhis* (tombs associated with Sikh and Hindu holy men). These visits were undertaken to heal illness, procure a son, cure the cattle of disease, and quite often make propitiatory village rites. The ancestral shrines located on the boundaries of Punjab villages were seen to protect them from malignant spirits and other evil forces.¹

Harjot Oberoi's study of the pre-colonial "enchanted universe" highlights multiple pilgrimage sites visited by the Punjabi community before the Sikh reformist movement in 1880s. These communities included Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims who visited the shrines as per their needs. For example, a tomb known to cure an illness would be visited for that specific purpose, regardless of the persons' subscription to a religious community or identity. In other words, pilgrimages were done based on individual needs for wishes and desires and not determined by one's religious faith. This, Oberoi explains, changed in 1880 with the Singh Sabha reformist movement, when a "powerful campaign for Sikh withdrawal from popular religion" was launched. Oberoi says, "The entire project of modern Sikhism—which entailed scripture as a channel of communication between man and God, the reordering of sacred space and pilgrimage destinations, a new religious

¹ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 198.

calendar (negating agrarian rhythms and their accompanying celebrations), the disciplining of the body, the purging of the ludic, the cultivation of a Protestant ethic and its attendant rationality.”² The ordering of pilgrimages was one such form through which this new Sikh identity was created and sustained.

The Singh Sabha reformers ran a successful campaign in eliminating “popular religious” sites like the tombs of saints and religious sites associated with other communities, with concerted efforts to demonize shared and popular places of worship. While it is difficult to capture the exact success of this campaign, and we know that community members continued to visit other shrines,³ gurdwaras became central to religious practice. Following from the Singh Sabha reform movement, the SGPC also captured the imagination of many Sikhs, who believed that gurdwaras had to be maintained in specific ways, as discussed in chapter two. From appointing the officials to secure and organize the gurdwaras’ routine functions, to using certain construction materials to standardize gurdwaras iconic representations, the SGPC ordered the gurdwaras in a particular format. Pilgrimage groups were organized to further ensure that the SGPC defined order and standard was maintained in all the gurdwaras, regardless of their location or size. This chapter explores such organized pilgrimages that took the SGPC’s influence to distant gurdwaras and enabled SGPC’s vision of Sikhism to flourish in these locations.

The SGPC was formally and legally recognized as the Sikh representative body after the Gurdwara Reform Movement in 1920-1925. The immediate consequence of this

² Ibid., p.141.

³ Anna Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred: Practicing Pluralism in Muslim North India* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

law was the creation of a gurdwara management committee that would form the apex and would have several smaller local management committees in the gurdwaras. The apex committee was meant to be a federating institution, wherein the local committees would report to the larger/ central body on the affairs annually. However, the central body gained more authority and power over time, thereby standardizing gurdwara functions, form and practices. While the local gurdwara committees organized annual pilgrimages to various gurdwaras closer to them, the SGPC took over the organization of pilgrimages when the scale was bigger, for example, pilgrimages to gurdwaras in Pakistan. One distinction this chapter makes in studying pilgrimages is that it recognizes the historicity of pilgrimages and contextualizes the pilgrimages in their specific moment and with their specific objectives. These exploratory and collective pilgrimages served specific historical moments in which they were organized while impacting the concept of pilgrimage at large for the Sikh community. For example, when the first all-India pilgrimage was organized in 1930, the SGPC was establishing its authority over gurdwaras all over India. This pilgrimage helped establish the committee's authority if not direct control over the gurdwaras outside the Punjab.

Pilgrimages are important events, especially when they are organized by the management body and studying these events allows us insights into the institutions' objectives, concerns and challenges. For example, the first mass pilgrimage to the Golden Temple was organized by the SGPC in the 1920s, when it was gaining wider popularity. This pilgrimage led to the first *kar seva* (cleaning the silt from the water tank in the gurdwara) in 1923, when thousands of Sikhs flocked to Amritsar to participate in this service. This event is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter and sheds light on the

impact of pre-colonial Sikh lineages and sants on the SGPC. While the next chapter highlights the continuities between the pre-colonial practices and the current practices, this chapter highlights the transformations of pre-colonial Sikh religious practices under the SGPC. A study of pilgrimages allows us such an opportunity.

Harjot Oberoi writes that pilgrimages were common practice amongst the different communities in the Punjab. However, these communities were not restricted to visit pilgrimages associated with any one religious tradition but had a shared milieu in which they would visit the deity associated with the problem. This changed under the Singh Sabha where religious pilgrimages increased in numbers and were also specific to religious identities. For instance, Sikhs would now only go to pilgrimages associated with Sikh Gurus and martyrs. The motivation to visit gurdwaras also increased as more historical narratives about these gurdwaras became easily available.⁴ While visiting local gurdwaras was good on a regular basis, it also became important to go on pilgrimages that were historically significant. One had to make pilgrimages to sites associated with historical events in the Sikh past. This was further enabled by increased mobility under colonial rule, as access to trains and roadways improved.

Under the formative years of the SGPC, between 1925- 1940s, pilgrimages had two main purposes. One was to explore and locate the specific places where the gurdwaras should have been, according to recorded historical works on the Sikh past. Pilgrimages became first an exercise in locating gurdwaras and secondly, in building gurdwaras, where building activities now became part of the *kar sevas* (community service which

⁴ Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Past* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 170–179.

broadened from cleansing the water tank in 1923 to building gurdwaras through community service), as discussed in the next chapter. Thus, pilgrimages took on a distinct meaning and were organized on a new scale and frequency to discover and build these gurdwaras. There was a need to “upgrade” the gurdwaras, especially such gurdwaras that were historically important, like the *Chevin Patshahi*’s (6th Gurus) gurdwara in Gwalior, discussed further. The importance of pilgrimages was further in disciplining individual behaviour and practices. By standardizing rituals in all gurdwaras, particularly by encouraging pilgrims to report on deviant behaviour, the SGPC streamlined Sikh practices.

Sikh sermons or *prachars* are full of historical and legendary tales of courage and heroism, where acts of valour are tied to physical places. One criterion for proclaiming a place to be a Sikh gurdwara amongst others, according to the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, was the occurrence of a significant historical event associated with Sikh history or a Sikh Guru in that place.⁵ Following the passing of this Act, efforts were made to claim various places as Sikh gurdwaras and increased efforts were made in searching for physical grounds where Sikh historical and legendary events were believed to have taken place. The pilgrimages at this time were organized around such motives of discovering the places attached to legends. These pilgrimages were followed by extensive publicity, where reports on the journey and the discovery of these sites were published for the larger Sikh community.⁶ These written materials were sold at the local gurdwaras and at times given out for free. The pamphlets and newsletters aimed to publicize the efforts and the

⁵ Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925, Section II, Punjab Legislative Department.

⁶ *Hindustan de prasidh gurdwarian di yatra di hazuri special gaddi di report lekhak: Sarab hind gurteerath yatra di publicity sub-committee sodhik* (Lahore, 1930).

successes of the local gurdwara committee and to circulate the official histories of the gurdwaras that had been visited. Sometimes this literature was followed by appeals for resources as *kar seva*—both monetary donations and donations of physical strength and skills from people to help build gurdwaras at these historical sites. In other words, the making (and sometimes the repairs) of gurdwaras, and even the knowledge of their existence at times, were made after the pilgrimages had been organized by the local gurdwaras. Efforts were made to familiarize the Sikh community with the places and names mentioned in the *janamsakhis* (hagiographies on the lives of the Gurus) and *gurubani* (verses of the Guru) in the *Adi Granth*. For instance, Master Mehtab Singh's *Navan ate Thavan da Mahankosh*, an encyclopaedia of the names and places in the *gurubani*, informed the public, particularly the *sangat* (Sikh community of believers), about the gurdwaras—the events they were associated with and the person that had performed a miraculous event in this place, whether Guru, *sant* (saint) or *sant sipahi* (saint-soldier). The *sangat* may have heard of these places in different ways, but an encyclopaedia on the names and places made this information easily available in one place.⁷

This chapter looks at how the process of pilgrimage led to a rethinking of historical gurdwaras, beginning with a search for some gurdwaras and construction or repair of others. It seeks to understand how pilgrimages become the focal point of social, cultural, and political action and looks to historicise the pilgrimages, especially when new practices were initiated. Scholarly works on pilgrimages seem to understand these events

⁷ Master Mehtab Singh, *Navan ate Thavan da Mahankosh* (1933) republished (Amritsar, Singh Bros., 1991).

as fully formed and unchanging events. Ritualistic studies on pilgrimages assume these sites to be fully formed in the minds of the believers, who tend to be the subjects of such studies.⁸ By focusing on the sites for pilgrimages and the act of organizing them, we can uncover the historical circumstances and implications of institutional support to select spaces. This allows us to understand how certain pilgrimage sites become more important over others. In other words, pilgrimage sites are not natural sites that pre-exist in the minds of the believers but are historical places that came to be managed by someone at some point of time. Even when historians have studied the changes in the management and religious practices of sacred places, they have implicitly accepted the locations' sacred character for the pilgrims and for themselves alike.⁹ However, pilgrimages and these sacred sites do change over time, in form and in meaning, as newer stories emerge, and myths are created. They undergo various material and non-material transformations, and one way to examine this transformation is by paying attention to how their (official) histories are imagined and portrayed. These histories are further tied to their material make-up.

By focusing on pilgrimages, it will become clear that communities or socio-cultural groups are not just maintained by common pasts or experiences in the present, but, more importantly, by working towards a collective future that has a semblance of structure and standardization. It is not just the shared past, which is important in binding the group to a common origin story but in working together in the vision for the future. It is for this reason that exploring and discovering the roots for gurdwaras was just the first

⁸ Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys: The Ways of Rajasthani Pilgrims* (University of California Press, 1987).

⁹ Ishita Banerjee-Dube, *Divine Affairs: Religion, Pilgrimage and the State in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, (IIAS, 2001).

step, but in building these sites with magnificent gurdwaras, a stronger bond was built. The SGPC gained authority through such activities, which germinated from pilgrimages. These pilgrimages were also very important in disciplining practices and bodies through rituals acts that were carried through pilgrimages to other centres of Sikhism.

Explorations: Discovering Our Roots

The Panj Takhat train run by the Indian Railways courses through India, starting from Amritsar making its way to Anandpur and Bhatinda in the Punjab, Patna in Bihar, and Nanded in Maharashtra. Picking up passengers throughout the length of its journey, the train route offers pilgrims a chance to visit and offer their prayers to the five seats of Sikh authority, called *Takhats*, that hold special significance for the Sikh community. This pilgrimage route is a shorter version of an earlier pilgrimage that began in 1930 from Lahore. Pronouncing itself to be the first ever “Annual All-India Gurdwara Pilgrimage,” the organizers had planned a pilgrimage journey starting from Lahore to Calcutta in the east and from Delhi to Nanded in the south. This annual pilgrimage tour had enlisted the Railways to organize the pilgrimage for the first time, changing the very nature of pilgrimages in the process by reaching further distances in short amounts of time and being able to cater to many Sikh congregates together.

The first all-India gurdwara pilgrimage was organized in the year 1930, starting from Lahore and moving towards Delhi. This pilgrimage took its inspiration from smaller pilgrimages that were organized by local gurdwaras in different regions. Harjot Oberoi mentions that the ritual of traveling together in small groups to pilgrimages was a pre-colonial practice. It is possible that this practice continued under the SGPC but was formalized with structure and resources. One reason behind the collective pilgrimages

organized by the SGPC was to ‘discover’ the places that Sikh history was associated with, now commonly found in historical texts and pamphlets that were readily available to the Sikh masses. It was these sites that the SGPC had fought so hard to gain rights to in the Gurdwara tribunals, therefore it made sense to now physically identify what were notional Sikh historical sites. The sangat may have heard of some gurdwaras and known their significance in Sikh history, but were unlikely to have traveled to these places.

What started as a weekend group exercise during the Gurdwara Reform Movement, where small groups of the sangat would travel to gurdwaras in the vicinity (within the districts), finally expanded into longer pilgrimage trips to greater distances (much longer distances that required either road travel or railway travel). The sangat at a local gurdwara would plan the sites to be visited in advance, inform the gurdwara managers that they would be coming as pilgrims, and collect funds to make the journey. The rules for participating and being in the group evolved over time as the scale of these journeys expanded. For example, Bhai Teja Singh, the head *granthi* (reader of sacred scriptures) at Dehra Sahib in Lahore, organized the sangat to visit gurdwaras, stating that the purpose of these journeys was “to make explicit the place of the gurdwara in every Sikh’s life,” and that “gurdwaras are at the center of every Sikhs’ principles, thoughts, reforms and liberation.”¹⁰ Note, the author does not suggest that pilgrimages allow Sikhs to relieve their pains or seek cures, but that they are centered in their lives and purpose by visiting the gurdwara. This is a significant shift in the meaning and purpose of making pilgrimages in the twentieth century.

¹⁰ No author, *Gurteerath darshan ate hazuri yatra sambandhi zaruri benati prakashak sarb hind guru teerath yatra committee Lahore* (Lahore, 1930).

These smaller pilgrimages gave way to the formation of a bigger body called the *Sarb-Hind Gurteerath Yatra Committee*, or All-India Gurteerath Pilgrimage Committee, in 1927. This body had three divisions. The first was the committee's core that decided on organizational matters. These included communicating and planning with the North-western Railways department in organizing a special train that would carry the pilgrims on the planned route, assigning a coach to the Guru Granth Sahib, and making any necessary arrangements concerning the railways, like organizing food etc. They also planned where pilgrims would meet, how many pilgrims could be taken, and other day-to-day affairs. The second division was the publicity department, which handled the advertisements for the pilgrimage, letters and publication of books, information guides and rulebooks for future pilgrimages, and accounts of previous pilgrimages.¹¹ The third division, the treasury, handled the expenses and accounts for organizing the pilgrimage and its publicity. At the end of the pilgrimage an audit report was filed, and at times published as well. It was an enormous undertaking that required much planning and organization by a committee of influential people.

Beginning in Lahore, this pilgrimage went to places like Amritsar, Anandpur, Delhi, Patna, Calcutta, Gwalior, Bombay, Nanded, etc. The pilgrimage lasted about a month and a half and carried seven hundred people on the train, although they had set out to organize for five hundred people.¹² Although touching upon all the well-known and

¹¹ No author, *Gurteerath darshan ate hazuri yatra sambandhi zaruri benati prakashak sarb hind guru teerath yatra committee Lahore* (Lahore, 1930). A shorter version on the 1930 pilgrimage trip. Secy Sardar Arur Singh ji Taeb journalist and owner of Heera Company Lahore.

¹² "There were some young men from opposition parties that continuously gave trouble in the *yatra* affairs, who only apologized in the end of the *yatra*, but throughout the time they continuously misbehaved and challenged plans." *Hindustan de prasidh gurdwarian di yatra di hazuri special gaddi di report lekhak: sarab hind gurteerath yatra di publicity sub-committee sodhik* (Lahore, 1930), 9.

perhaps well-travelled-to places, its aim was to familiarize the sangat with places where major Sikh events had unfolded. Travelers who explored areas around major sites discovered many new gurdwaras on these pilgrimages. These journeys made possible a new kind of exploration and a search for something that the travelers had heard of or read somewhere but not been to themselves. The expectations from such travels, in journeying to mythical places to find real gurdwaras and real congregations, were undoubtedly enormous. But they were not always met with satisfying conditions.

The pilgrimage reports drew important links between the congregations' devotion and commitment and the condition of these gurdwaras. One of the reports commissioned by the All-India Gurteerath Pilgrimage Committee mentioned the 'benefits' of going on such pilgrimages. These were:

- i. Gurdwaras, the pujaris' and sevadars need our careful attention and it is now our duty to keep ourselves informed on their work.
- ii. We also need to understand the shortcomings in gurdwara management after having visited these places to improve it through our own seva, whatever that may require.
- iii. To spread the message of Khalsa through the gurdwaras. This also requires that other communities see us taking care of *our* gurdwaras.
- iv. To keep in touch with the brothers who live outside of Punjab.¹³

Future pilgrimages organized by the same committee thus stated their goal as: "[to] keep a check on the management of gurdwaras" and inspire the congregation in distant places by sending more and frequently organized pilgrims. The reports also mention the need to uphold gurdwaras to institutional standards in managing the gurdwaras and *Sikhi* (correct way of being Sikh) at large. These institutional standards, as discussed in Chapter Two, directed the way the building should look: for example, *nishan sahib*, a long pole

¹³ Hukam Singh Raees Kalyan Montgomery, *Roznamcha arthat ji Sarab Hind Gurteerath Yatra* (Lahore, 1930).

with a saffron-colour cloth wrapped on it, became a characteristic sign that people would recognize and know that a gurdwara is around. The nishan sahib was to be placed outside the gurdwara and was to be tall enough to be seen from a distance. Nishan literally means mark and this was the mark or signal that Sikhs were residing here. While the tradition of the nishan sahib was introduced by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, it was not always found in the gurdwaras. As the pilgrimage organized in 1930 found, there were many gurdwaras that were missing the nishan sahib. An injunction to ensure that a nishan sahib was placed in all gurdwaras was consequently passed in the *Gurdwara Gazette* in 1934, indicating an intricate web of information and influence between gurdwara committees and the centrally organized management committee in Amritsar.¹⁴

The physical space of these gurdwaras was standardized to fit a certain ideal of commitment to the faith. For instance, the use of marble and white washed walls became common adaptations to most gurdwaras all over India, a practice that has received the ire of various Sikh scholars and conservation architects.¹⁵ Pilgrimages then were important in spreading these standards to distant gurdwaras, where the pilgrims may have found different conditions from their expectations.

The organizers of the annual reports and similar gurdwara pilgrimage reports claimed that even when the report was published in 1930s, there were gurdwaras that were heard of but were nowhere to be found. This meant that these gurdwaras were

¹⁴ “Sriomani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee da Aelan: Aelan no. 43”, *Gurdwara Gazette*, (June, 1934), 4.

¹⁵ Gurmeet Rai, “Abode of Bliss: Historiography of Anandpur Sahib”, *Nishaan* 1/1, (1999), 14–27; Gurmeet Rai and Kavita Singh, “Brick by Sacred Brick: Architectural Projects of Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind”, in Kavita Singh (ed.) *New Insights into Sikh Art*, (Marg, 2003), 32-49; Patwant Singh and Gurmeet Rai, “Marble and Memory”, *Indian Express*, (23 December, 1998).

neither marked with a building, nor did they have a functioning management or an active congregation. The pilgrimage made attempts to recover and revive gurdwaras that were documented in works like *Navan ate Thavan da Mahankosh* and other such encyclopaedias and gurdwara guides that were widely published and circulated since the beginning of the twentieth century under Singh Sabha reforms.

Anne Murphy makes a similar point on the transition of gurdwaras from the romantic notion of places that the Gurus had visited or had performed miracles in to gurdwaras as built structures commemorating the memory of the Gurus and Sikh history in a physical and territorial way. She says that as a result of colonial rule, there was a shift in how gurdwaras were perceived in Sikh thought and practice, which required the ownership of the property of the gurdwaras both in the name of the community and in the nexus between community, history, and territory.¹⁶ Pilgrimages like the Sarb-Hind Gurteerath Yatra and similar travels by other individual pilgrims aimed to fill this gap by finding places, pointing them out to the authorities to build appropriate gurdwara structures, and assigning managers and staff for these places. For example, the first pilgrimage organized by the Sarb-Hind Gurteerath Yatra claimed to have found the following gurdwaras in and around Lahore: Gurdwara Nanakgarh, Sahidganj Singhnian, Shahidganj Bhai Dharam Singh ji, Shahidi Khun, and Gurdwara Baba Buddha.¹⁷

The reports describe how the pilgrims discovered the gurdwaras in exploring the areas believed to be associated with these legendary stories. The pilgrims would

¹⁶ Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Past*, 156–170.

¹⁷ The report mentions the names of the explorers: Sardar Arur Singh ji Taib, the secretary of the organizing committee, Gyani Kartar Singh ji Hitkari and Bhai Atma Singh ji, all of whom were well-known Sikh leaders of Lahore and had been on the Board to organize this pilgrimage.

undertake a historical approach, looking for signs that could point to a past use and asking local people for stories and myths of the past. The story of Dhuni Chand, for example, is well known in Sikh legend as that of a rich man who gave up amassing wealth and turned to the work of charity and *nam* (Guru's name) after meeting Guru Nanak. The pilgrims believed that Gurdwara Nanakgarh was the place where Guru Nanak had met Dhuni Chand and showed him the right path to liberation. The report claims that the pilgrims found a house here, but neither was there a Sikh caretaker, nor was the Guru Granth Sahib placed. What was found instead was a non-Sikh caretaker who claimed to be taking care of this important Sikh shrine as it was handed to his family for generations. The story seemed to have been a popular one in the area, and the locals attested to this being the place where Dhuni Chand had met Guru Nanak. The pilgrims wrote reports and sent it to the SGPC, demanding a proper gurdwara be constructed in this place.

The report does not mention how the house was bought or converted into a gurdwara, and it does not indicate any resistance from the caretakers that had stayed here for generations. It does, however, assert that the gurdwara had been discovered and the authorities were alerted to its existence. The report mentions many other sites that were discovered to either be occupied by non-Sikh people and in need of conversion into gurdwaras or be places that were already gurdwaras, but in very bad shape. Some of these gurdwaras had been leased as mere property to members of other communities. For instance, Gurdwara Baoli Sahib, constructed in the memory of the fifth Guru, was found to be in disrepair. What seems to have made the situation more alarming is that it was not an insignificant and unheard of gurdwara. It is believed that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had constructed a large pond here to add to the beauty of this gurdwara and had also granted

landed property of several thousand rupees to aid in the caretaking of the gurdwara and its attendant mahants. However, because of its disuse, the report claims, the property had been rented out to shopkeepers, and houses had been constructed over time.

The gurdwara came under SGPC's domain but the Kartarpur Sodhis, claiming their inheritance from the fifth Guru, disputed the SGPC's control. The SGPC was already amid property disputes between allegedly private property versus public grounds of worship and community-owned religious property in the bungas issue, discussed in Chapter Four. The Sodhis wanted to keep their own management style and wanted their authority to continue, whereas the SGPC desired to bring the gurdwara under its own control by setting up a local gurdwara committee that was ultimately accountable to the SGPC. The question, however, was not that of management alone, but one of the sangat owning and indirectly controlling the gurdwara property over individual families' claims and inheritance rights, discussed in Chapter Four. The higher moral ground claimed by the sangat forced these individuals to reconsider their own position as gurdwara owners and managers, and eventually to give up all claims to these properties. However, this was not an easy battle. Many legal cases were fought, and moral arguments were made to slowly convince various people opposing or resisting the management committee's plans for gurdwara construction and expansion to go through.

As the collective pilgrimages discovered older places associated with Sikh Gurus' lives and places where gurdwaras could be constructed, the SGPC started sending individual explorers out to discover more gurdwaras. Individuals could lead a more intensive and yet widespread survey of the areas to search for gurdwaras. Also, given the historical moment when gurdwaras had become the main drivers behind any kind of

social, political, and religious act, individual explorations bore fruit in ways that collective pilgrimages could not. For example, Pardhuman Singh Senior, the “gurdwara historian,”¹⁸ wrote a book called *Gurdham Deedar arthat Gurdham Darpan*, published in 1929.¹⁹ The work followed the common genre of the period with brief historical descriptions of each gurdwara, classified according to regions, districts, and sometimes villages within these districts. The author provides information on how to get to these gurdwaras, which trains to take, which places to stay at, and the condition of these gurdwaras. Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha used Pardhuman Singh’s discoveries and research to compile the *Gurshabad Mahankosh* in 1931, which is the most authoritative encyclopaedia on Sikhism. Pardhuman Singh says that he was encouraged by Bhai Kahn Singh (better known for his treatise *Hum Hindu Nahini*, which is believed to have driven the final barrier between Hindus and Sikhs according to scholars like N.G. Barrier and Kenneth Jones) to undertake such an exploration and pilgrimage of the gurdwaras, as it was increasingly felt that not enough was known on the condition of the gurdwaras in far-out places.

The SGPC gave Pardhuman Singh letters of introduction to conduct what seems like an official inquiry into the gurdwaras in different parts of the country in 1926. However, it was the Prince of Nabha that provided stipends to sustain these efforts. Pardhuman Singh visited some seven to eight hundred gurdwaras in three years and

¹⁸ The Sikh Historical Research Board hires historians and other scholars who work from the Sikh Reference Library, attached to the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Their duties include doing research, conserving manuscripts, and publishing official histories and religious works according to the SGPC’s official line.

¹⁹ Pardhuman Singh Senior, *Gurdham Deedar arthat Gurdham Darpan* (Lala Devi Das Janki Das Printers, Amritsar, May 22, 1929).

emphasized that he had not accumulated information by hearsay but had visited every one of these gurdwaras. He complained that many gurdwaras were in terrible neglect, but that renovation work had begun in some of them.

In a more uncompromising mood, Pardhuman Singh launched a new complaint, one that got to the root of this exercise and its significance for the entire community. Citing examples of a few gurdwaras, he chastised the community for forgetting and not recognizing the actual historical events in relation to the physical landscape. For example, he claimed that the gurdwara in Patna was not just associated with the tenth Guru but with his father. He says that the community had highlighted the gurdwaras where Guru Gobind Singh grew up and played but had easily let go of the memories of the place where the ninth Guru, Teghbahadur, decided to fight the Mughal emperor for his intolerance to other religions. Although Pardhuman Singh's claims did not change the dominant narrative of Guru Gobind Singh's childhood gurdwaras in Patna, it is telling of the attempts to reorder historical memories and associations to Sikh sacred places.

A more significant contribution of his work was in discovering gurdwaras. Pardhuman Singh's aim was not just to travel to gurdwaras and record their conditions but also to find those gurdwaras that were known of and had been recorded in the list of gurdwaras. Pardhuman Singh said that some gurdwaras were alleged to be places and associated with events in the lives of the Gurus but were nowhere to be found when he visited these sites. He wished to give maps of all the sites he had visited but would do so in subsequent publications. Pardhuman Singh only wanted to create a list of gurdwaras that were to be found credibly in the places that the compilations attested they would but gave no suggestions on what could be done where gurdwaras were not found, according

to janamsakhis or other literary material. However, the individual quest to find gurdwaras and report on them continued, and through institutional and official support, other scholars resolved this issue over time. Shamsheer Singh Ashok, a well-known Sikh scholar and the Director of the Sikh Research Board in Amritsar, furthered and used Pardhuman Singh's list of gurdwaras to compile a bigger list, covering more areas, to create a credible list of gurdwaras that would come under the SGPC's control in 1952.

Ashok was also more decisive in suggesting an outcome for such searches that yielded no results. He suggested that a group of researchers should go through all the written material there was within Sikhism with a fine toothcomb, compile the names of the gurdwaras, and send out pilgrims who would also work in search teams. He gave an example of his own work. Sifting through a very long list of authoritative texts, Ashok compiled a list of two hundred and fifty gurdwaras associated with Guru Nanak's life.²⁰ The rest, Ashok said, are either lost to us or are given in apocryphal sources and cannot be believed. He suggested that similar searches should be made for the other nine Gurus' gurdwaras to compile a true list of places that rightfully belong to the Sikh community.²¹ Contrary to Murphy's suggestion that gurdwaras were material representations and 'proof' of the Sikh past, which had been narrativized in historical texts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we can see that gurdwaras were being used to question and authenticate written materials in significant ways. In other words, instead of a simplistic

²⁰ Books mentioned by Shamsheer Singh Ashok, *Puratan Janamsakhi*; Macauliffe, *Janamsakhi Bhai Pauna Sokha*, *Janam Sakhi Sodhi Mehrwan*, *Janamsakhi Bidhi Chand Hindaliyan*, *Janamsakhi Bhai Mani Singh*, *Sri Guru Nanak Prakash* by Bhai Santokh Singh, *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* part one, Gyani Gyan Singh, Pandit Tara Singh Narottam *Gurteerath Sangreh*, *Gurdwara Darpan* by Sant Arjun Muni, *Sri Gurdwara Darshan* by Gyani Thakur Singh, *Gurdham Deedar* by Bhai Parduman Singh Sr, *Gurdham Sangreh* by Gyani Gyan Singh and *Gurteerath Darshan* by Bhai Nanak Singh Jagiasu.

²¹ Shamsheer Singh Ashok, *Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji de Pavitar Asthan Dharamsala ate Gurdwara* (Dharam Prachar Committee, SGPC, 1970).

relationship between Sikh literary works and Sikh gurdwaras, a more complex process of exploring, verifying, and documentation was taking place. These expeditions and verification projects had consequences on both the written representations and in restoring gurdwaras, impacting the plans and policies for the future.

The mission to discover gurdwaras gained wider popularity across the Sikh community even in 2000s.²² Many gurdwara guides came out within a span of two decades of the Gurdwara Reform Movement, from 1920 to 1940, which dealt with issues of searching for gurdwaras that existed only in the minds of Sikhs and did not necessarily have a physical existence beyond. This resulted in two plans: the less common one was to strike out the thought that such gurdwaras existed on any piece of land and to reconsider whether the stories were true. The more common plan was to continue with the search and eventually build one with the help of the sangat. The kar seva (organized community service) board's appeals to the sangat to donate funds for building gurdwaras can be found even in present day gurdwaras. The sangat's involvement was essential in such projects of discovery and construction, which not only brought them together as a community of believers in the Guru, the granth and the gurdwara,²³ but also allowed them to place their beliefs in a physical place. This is not to suggest that the move towards building and rebuilding gurdwaras was purely territorial within the Punjab or elsewhere. The efforts to build gurdwaras should be the Sikh community's efforts at becoming visibly present in certain areas, or in asserting control on what they believed to be

²² Anne Murphy mentions the project to discover gurdwaras in early 2000s, especially when gurdwaras were associated with Gurus' objects. For more see, Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Past*.

²³ Harjot Oberoi says that the trinity for Sikhs of Guru, Granth, and Gurdwara were a creation of the Singh Sabha reformers. For more, see: Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

historically theirs. However, the practices in these gurdwaras, the ways in which the *kar sevas* were done, were not predetermined and not uniform.

Building Gurdwaras: Recovery, Repair, and Signs

The second annual trip organized by the Sarb-Hind Gurteerath Yatra Committee differed from the first in one important way. While the first had been preoccupied with exploring, discovering, and reporting on the conditions of gurdwaras, the second pilgrimage highlighted the ‘progress’ of renovation works at gurdwaras. The report emphasized that the condition of gurdwaras impacted the community in significant ways. The buildings and their repair, the cleanliness of the gurdwaras, their management in the form of *sevadars* and managers, and finally the signposts in historic gurdwaras were indicative of the relationship between gurdwaras and the community. It was believed that the external appearance of gurdwaras said much about the community’s commitment to their faith. If the gurdwaras looked unkempt and abandoned, then who protected the faith from within?

The first annual report gave detailed histories of all the gurdwaras that were visited and discovered. The following reports, on the other hand, were closer to journal entries, where the publicity department gave details about everyday arrangements of the pilgrimage and the condition of gurdwaras. Notwithstanding the brevity of the following annual pilgrimage reports, the writers missed no opportunity to point out the pain felt by pilgrims in seeing many gurdwaras in need of urgent repair. Appeals were made in these reports asking for skilled engineers and constructors from within the community who would be willing to contribute their time and knowledge in constructing the gurdwaras. The appeals stated that the gurdwaras were not commensurate to their historical value and did not hold up to the standards expected of Sikh gurdwaras of historical importance,

because there was nothing remarkable about the physical place that matched the evocative space for the Sikh community. Historical gurdwaras were required to look elaborate and given the prominence they deserved. The use of certain materials and styles of building with a number of levels would highlight the gurdwaras' importance to the community.

The main concerns were about having an appropriate building structure, maintenance, and signage that directed the sangat into the building and told them how and why these gurdwaras were important. These external features directed the sangats' experience of these historic and religious sites, weighing upon their behaviour in the place. If it was a place of triumph, one was directed to feel joy, and in places of traumatic loss and suffering, one was to feel certain grief or melancholy. Informative narratives were displayed outside the gurdwaras that would inform pilgrims and visitors alike of the history of the place. To facilitate guided tours, informed information officers were to be found in the gurdwaras, according to the size and scale of the gurdwara. Further, museums and museum-like displays were created in some gurdwaras, with painted scenes depicting such episodes as had only been heard or read about. Visualizing this material through different forms and means became standard practice, and much of this was a consequence of the pilgrimages organized on an annual basis.

For instance, Gurdwara Bandi Chorr in Gwalior is a historically important Sikh gurdwara associated with the sixth Guru, Hargobind. It is believed that the Mughal Emperor held the sixth Guru captive for challenging him by taking over temporal and spiritual authority after his father, the fifth Guru's, assassination. He was kept captive in the Gwalior fort along with other regional kings and princes. When he was finally released, he took with him fifty-two prisoners that had been held in the fort as prisoners,

hence the name Bandi (prisoner) Chorr (free). When the first annual pilgrimage reached the site, they found no gurdwara here but a small sign that pointed the pilgrims to a jail. Neither the Guru Granth Sahib nor a granthi was placed here, and no physical distinction was made to highlight the miracle performed by the sixth Guru of releasing all the prisoners with him. The situation seemed like it could not get worse: the sangat found two graves within a small room that had been built over time. The report said, “To get to the graves, there is only a narrow passage and even here no one knows how to get to it and what to do when you do get there. Are you to feel joy for the liberation of the Guru and the miracle performed? Or sad because the sangat has forgotten the miracles performed by the Guru?”²⁴ There remained the question of whose graves had been built in the sacred and pure site for the Sikhs, a question that strangely was not asked in the pilgrimage report.

The writers suggest that the area be bought over from the royal family of Gwalior to build a spectacular gurdwara in its place. The writers asked, “What good are the property disputes, when historic gurdwaras are in such neglect?”²⁵ No other gurdwara, they wrote, should be claimed until all the historic gurdwaras falling within the first schedule of the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 were fully secured and gurdwaras had been built on their sites.

The following year the pilgrimage committee organized a similar yatra (pilgrimage) and visited the same places that it had the previous year. Having reached the same gurdwara on March 13, 1931, a year after the first pilgrimage, the report claims that

²⁴ Hukam Singh Raees Kalyan Montgomery, *Roznamcha*, 62–63.

²⁵ *Hindustan de prasidh gurdwarian di yatra* (Lahore, 1930).

nothing had been done to improve the condition of the gurdwara. On the contrary, the sangat now had to pay a ticket fee of Annas 2 (the currency used in South Asia before the Rupee) to visit the gurdwara, which was in the fort.²⁶ The writer says that a gurdwara was now functional with the Guru Granth Sahib kept inside and *karah prashad* (sweet offering given back to devotees in the gurdwara) was offered. However, the lack of a proper building, an entrance, the nishan sahib, and signboards continued to aggrieve the sangat. These became the standard markers of a gurdwara, and a historic gurdwara deserved all of these.



Figure 15: New Building of the Gurdwara Bandi Chorr (2012)

²⁶ Hukam Singh Raees Kalyan Montgomery, *Roznamcha*, 65–66.

At present the gurdwara is a five-minute walk away from the fort. It looms large behind the façade that covers the main entrance. There are signs pointing the visitors to the historical event and the reason the gurdwara was built, along with visual displays inside to draw the visitor closer to the Guru's benevolence and brilliance. Not many records have survived on the building of the gurdwara or about when and how the decisions were finally made, although we do know the main person behind this kar seva was Baba Uttam Singh from Khadur Sahib in Amritsar. Baba Uttam Singh is an influential person in recent Sikh events who was also involved with the kar seva on the Akal Bunga after the Indian Army attacked the gurdwara in 1984 and made attempts to renovate, which were rejected by the community. His portrait was recently placed in the Central Sikh Museum in the Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar in July 2015.²⁷

The relationship between building gurdwaras, explorations into regions infrequently visited, and annual pilgrimages becomes clear through the example of Gurdwara Bandi Chorr. There were many other gurdwaras that were highlighted because of such pilgrimages and publicized as needing help. The pilgrimages facilitated such discoveries and led to a period of rebuilding old gurdwaras, thus converting these spaces into bigger establishments.

The explorations, discoveries and building of the gurdwaras outside the Punjab indicates that the Sikh community did not equate their sacred terrain and history with a specific nationalist boundary at least till the end of 1970s, when the explorations and discoveries were still ongoing. This suggests that the nationalist demand made in 1978 at

²⁷ The Tribune, "Baba Uttam Singh's Portrait Unveiled," July 26, 2015, <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/amritsar/baba-uttam-singh-s-portrait-unveiled/111406.html>.

the Anandpur resolution were specific to that historical moment and was not as widely acceptable amongst the wider Sikh community, especially those who lived outside the Punjab.

Disciplining Practices and Bodies through Pilgrimages

A period of reforming behaviour and actions was brought about with the passing of the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925. One of the principle ways in which people were to be trained in behaving a certain way in the gurdwara was through pilgrimages—collective and individual. Pilgrimage trips were ideal in initiating the ‘correct’ and standard Sikh practices, which were highlighted at the better known gurdwaras, which could be brought home and further trickled down. Notwithstanding these efforts at streamlining gurdwara practices, there remained debates on what was considered purely Sikh and what was thought to be Hindu practices. A common way to settle on a practice was to suggest that it had come directly from the Guru’s time and was a practice that the Guru or the sants and *bhagats* (holy men) like Bhai Buddha had started. To question such logic was made impossible by the moral force of tracing the lineage of these practices back to the Guru. The Guru, it was stated, began a certain ritual or practice and it was now the duty of all Sikhs to follow such practices.

For instance, the second report by the Sarb-Hind Gurteerath Yatra Committee claimed that a common problem was that people did not understand the protocols of traveling with the Guru Granth Sahib on the train. An entire passenger car had been reserved for the proper and respectful carrying of the Guru Granth Sahib to create a private gurdwara on wheels for pilgrims to perform their daily rituals. The reports complained that people used this passenger car for sleeping and getting on to the train,

and even to move between cars, as opposed to understanding the need for respect and privacy of the Guru Granth Sahib. They did not even observe *sukhasan* (ritual of resting the sacred scriptures) and *prakash* (ritual of awakening the sacred scriptures) of the Guru Granth Sahib.²⁸

Yet, there remained spaces to argue whether something was truly a command of the Guru or not. For instance, Pardhuman Singh, author of *Gurdham Deedar arthat Gurdham Darpan*, published in 1929, says that the Sikh community had forgotten that earthen lamps or *jots* were lit by the Gurus themselves and were mistakenly giving up this practice as a Hindu one. He criticized the Sikh public and the managers of the gurdwaras that he visited (seven to eight hundred gurdwaras, according to his own accounting) all over India for not recognizing the value of Sikh practices as initiated by the Gurus. Considering these reforms, Pardhuman Singh censured the excessive haste in dropping practices that seemed Hindu but were not actually so. The issue of jots and lighting lamps is not just a concern of early Gurdwara Reform Movement days in the 1920s and early 1930s but continues to be a problematic issue for the Sikh community. Madanjit Kaur, author of the *Golden Temple: Past and Present*, was similarly criticized on various forums for writing about the lighting of the jot in the Golden Temple in 1984. The critiques ranged from her lack of proper knowledge and research to misinformation and her Hindu ‘bias.’²⁹ The issue of recording and disseminating correct Sikh practices has been a difficult task and draws little consensus within the community. The SGPC and its wings in the form of the Dharam Prachar Committee, the information department, and the

²⁸ Hukam Singh Raees Kalyan Montgomery, *Roznamcha*.

²⁹ Madanjit Kaur, personal conversation with author, April 2014.

sevadars within the gurdwara perform a very important task in streamlining these practices.

Sikh practices within the gurdwara were important precisely because they could be watched and disciplined. For instance, the practices of cleaning and decorating the room that housed the Guru Granth Sahib were especially important as these would cascade to other smaller gurdwaras as well as private houses which kept the Guru Granth Sahib. Similarly, having clean grounds and a clean body, especially when entering the gurdwara, became paramount. These rituals marked the space as special and distinct from other spaces. What is interesting is the novelty of such practices that marked the spaces as clean and sacred. For instance, there are pictures and texts showing the presence of animals in the *parikrama* (pathway around the amrit sarovar) of the Golden Temple, which became a serious problem after the 1920s.³⁰ There were certain practices that began during pilgrimages and were meant to trickle down as the correct form of Sikhi to the sangat. While some practices were meant to be embodied everywhere, whether the home or the gurdwara or elsewhere, there were also special practices that distinguished the space of the gurdwara as sacred and significant.

Various scholars have worked on the relationship between the ritual act of cleaning and religious discipline. The impact of these small actions is significant for our understanding of the community's relationship with the gurdwara, and the gurdwaras' place in distinguishing the permissible from the forbidden. These rules were tested immediately after the Gurdwara Reform Movement but gained stringency in later years as

³⁰ Gurmat Gurbani Pracharak Jatha, *Chetavani pattar, No. 5 to the attention of SGPC and Local Darbar Committee*, (Amritsar, 1936).

the authority of the sevadars increased in the gurdwaras. Stringent checks on visitors, pilgrims, and tourists alike are now common in gurdwaras, where sevadars do not only look after the gurdwara but also look after the people who come to the gurdwaras, telling them how they can and cannot behave.³¹ Rules about where to sit, stand, and walk are important to the sevadars. People are stopped from entering the gurdwara if they do not wash their feet in the tanks provided outside the gurdwara or seem to be carrying any form of intoxicants. If the sevadars are suspicious they will open the visitor's bags or check the person to see if they are carrying anything problematic. There are many other examples of the sevadars disciplining the visitors to the gurdwara.³² Also, many works advised the sevadars to speak politely to visitors to set the right example.³³

Finally, the schedule for prayers and their location in the gurdwara crystallized over the years through repeated practices and the various writings on gurdwaras. The practices were neither new nor were they innovations, but the rigor and precision with which they were carried out, along with the added ceremony, amplified them more than before. For example, the Guru Granth Sahib being placed in sukhasan started much before the Gurdwara Reform Movement. However, some of the questions about placement, timing, and personnel were new. This was mainly because management changed hands and new *pujaris* (priests) and sevadars had to be assigned these roles, but the question of location was important precisely because this decision would have repercussions on the built form of the gurdwaras.

³¹ Personal observations (August 2013–2014).

³² “Gurdwara pavitrata ate panthak seva lai yatan”, *Khalsa Samachar*, May 12, 1929, 3.

³³ Gurmat Gurbani Pracharak Jatha, *Chetavani pattar, No. 5 to the attention of SGPC and Local Darbar Committee*, (Amritsar, 1936).

The Guru Granth Sahib is now placed in the Akal Takhat for sukhasan at night for about two to three hours. But the place for sukhasan was not always the Akal Takhat. Various books suggest that some bungas were the chosen place for taking the Guru Granth Sahib for sukhasan and would return from here to the main shrine in the morning hours. Swaiyya Singh says that Baba Miha Singh's bunga, close to the Ghadiala Bunga, was the chosen spot for many years until the Akal Takhat became the obvious choice. Jagjit Singh also mentions the placing of the Guru Granth Sahib at the bungas for sukhasan as a practice that was started during the *misl* (sovereign states of Sikh confederacy) period in the early nineteenth century, although it is stated that during Guru Arjan's time, both the Guru and the Guru Granth Sahib, which then was a *pothi* (scriptures but not the fully compiled sacred scriptures of the Sikh community), would rest and the Guru chose to sleep at a lower level than the resting pothi. The placing of the Guru Granth Sahib during sukhasan was important because when the management committee demolished bungas, it had already established new rituals of placing the sacred scriptures in the Akal Takhat.

Perhaps another precedent for the increasing value of the parikrama was the practice of *rehras sahib* in the evening. This is a practice allegedly started when the sixth Guru was captured in the Gwalior Fort (where Gurdwara Bandi Chhor is now built) under the guidance of Baba Buddha. The ritual consists of the granthi carrying the Guru Granth Sahib on his head and walking around the parikrama. Jagjit Singh mentions carrying torches on this procession to feel the nearness of the Guru, which is no longer needed as

the parikrama is well lit with electricity.³⁴ The practice of taking the Guru Granth Sahib around the parikrama every evening became an important ritual, one that many pilgrims and daily worshippers attended, giving the management reason to widen the parikrama, for which many bungalows were acquired and brought down. The building fervour, it seems, had only just begun after the formation of the SGPC. The management of the Golden Temple Complex directly influenced the decisions vis-à-vis the gurdwaras that would be maintained and those that needed to be built or rebuilt within the parikrama. Religious performances, pilgrimages and building activities were thus tied to each other and impacted the way Sikhs were disciplined.

³⁴ “With sun-set Rahras, the Evening Prayer is recited by the Granthi. Then all standing offer Ardas at His Feet. Shortly after this a party of priests and pilgrims with a standard and torches starts from the main-gate of the Temple. They go around the Tank reading and reciting hymns in the praise of Great God. (note: Guru Har Gobind had to move out of Amritsar. The Sikhs left at Amritsar felt very keenly the pangs of His separation. Headed by Bhai Budhha, they commenced a divine service of *Dhyanam* in 1612. Every evening they would light torches and go in procession round the Shrine, feeling the Master to be with them. On Guru’s return He told Bhai Budhha how that devotion had attracted His mind to the Golden Temple every evening. He blessed them, saying that the nightly choir organized by Bhai Budha would abide forever at Hari Madir and that He would always be there observing it.” Jagjit Singh, *Temple of Spirituality* (Sikh Religious Tract Society, 1935), 70.

Chapter Four: Resisting Desecration: Preserving Bungas as Symbol or Material

Bunga jugo jugo atal (Long Live Bungas)

- *Sikh ardas*

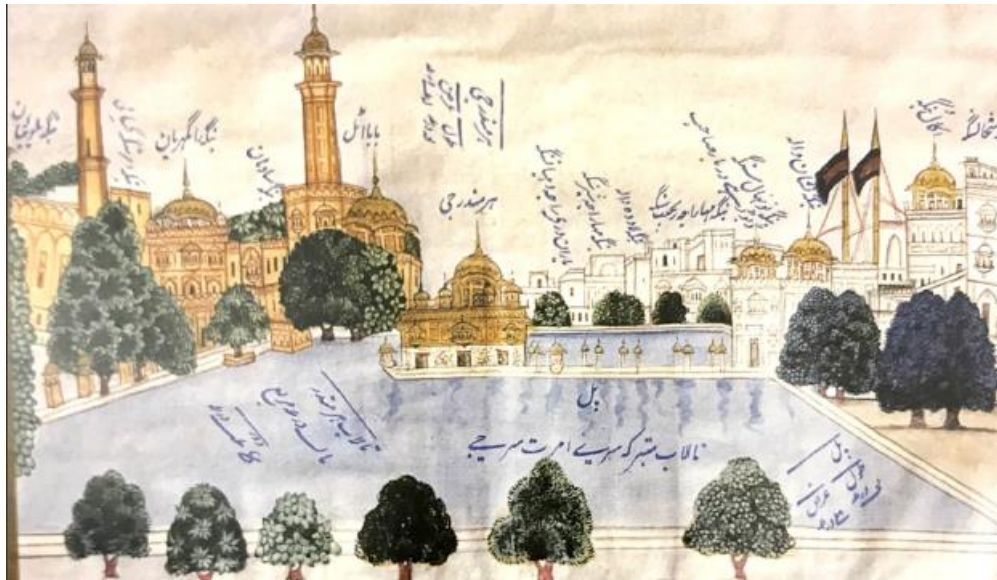


Figure 16: Painting of the tank of Amritsarji founded by Guru Ram Das Sahib, c. 1855-60 courtesy Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar (acc. No. 7)

This painting shows the Golden Temple and the built structures around it. The writing on the painting is the name of Bungas surrounding the sarovar (water tank). From left to right: Bunga Malvia, Bunga Amar Singh Giani, Bunga Ramgarhia, Bunga Sadha, Bunga Atal, Harimandir ji, Baradari Raja Maha Singh, bunga Sher Singh, Bunga Ladvevala, Bunga Ranjit Singh, Deori Darbar Sahib Bunga Nau Nihal Singh, Bunga Nishanvala, Akal Bunga, Bunga Jamedar Khushal Singh.

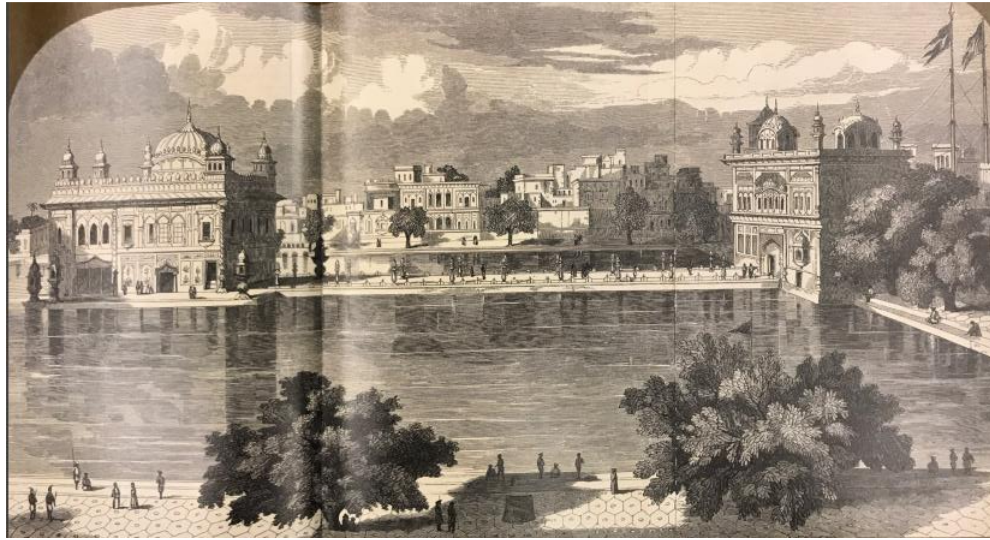


Figure 17: “The Holy Tank and Temple of Hari Mandir at Amritsar”, 1853, © Amandeep Singh Mandra and Parmjit Singh, *The Golden Temple of Amritsar: Reflections of the Past (1808-1959)*.

Prior to the twentieth century, *bungas* (“rest houses” in Persian) were constructed around the Golden Temple Complex, creating a boundary between the spiritual and quiet aspects of the gurdwara and the activities of the marketplace outside. Initially, bungas were built in the eighteenth century when Sikhs faced attacks from different groups, including the Mughal state and Afghan invaders, who more than once looted and plundered the gurdwaras. Bungas were built to create a fort-like wall around the Golden Temple Complex—the biggest and most significant target of these attacks. The memory and the sentiment of this protection are encapsulated in the *ardas* (final prayers): *Bunga jugo jugo atal* (“long live bungas”), i.e. long live the spirit of bravery, courage, and resilience of the Sikhs and their built structures in withstanding their adversaries. The mention of bungas, which symbolize the valor of being Sikh, in Sikh *ardas* or the final prayers, is noteworthy. A Sikh *ardas* is spoken at the ends of scriptural readings and on momentous occasions. The frequency of the *ardas* read in and outside gurdwaras suggests that the larger

population of the Sikh community is familiar with the term bungas, even if they have not seen them. Notwithstanding, few in the community are familiar with the struggles of the *bungais* (caretakers of bungas) or why bungas no longer exist around the Golden Temple Complex, except for the Ramgarhia Bunga. While stories about attacks on the Sikhs in the eighteenth century gained wider currency and were memorialized through distinct media, most popular being websites like <https://sikhcentre.wordpress.com/2009/05/09/brief-account-of-sikh-history-of-18th-century/> and Sikhchic.com, bungas' legends circulated only through ardas.

While bungas are remembered for providing physical protection at a critical time, they came to be much more. These structures became the centres of various activities in and around the Golden Temple Complex. They went on to play an important role in developing the region's cultural, literary, and social formations as well as aiding in medical research and practical training.¹ From early- to mid-nineteenth century, these bungas flourished and facilitated the cultural and educational development of the area where poets were invited and patronized. In fact, many well-known literary scholars and historians like Ratan Singh Bhangu and Santokh Singh Nirmala, considered to be authoritative sources on the eighteenth century by scholars of Punjab history, were patronized by bunga owners, and many of their prominent works were written within these bungas. Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, in his *Guru Mahima Ratnavali*, provides a list of poets and scholars that were associated with and were patronized by different bungas.

¹ G. W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab since Annexation* (1882; repr., Patiala, 1971), 82; Madanjit Kaur, "The Contribution of the Bungas to the Education of the Punjab," *Punjab History Conference, Proceedings* (March 17–19, 1978); and Kavita Sivaramakrishnan, *Old Potions New Bottles: Recasting Indigenous Medicine in Colonial Punjab 1850–1945* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006).

Other bungas were also well-known for their support to scientific studies and practices like Ayurveda, Yunani medicine, and surgical experiments. For example, Bhai Wasti Ram's Bunga was particularly known for patronizing ascetics and scholars interested in the study of science and the body and in conducting surgical experiments. Other bungas became famous for promoting the study of languages—especially the Punjabi language, for example Braham Buta Akhara was associated with many literary works in the Punjabi language and regular schooling for children around the area.²

After the Gurdwara Reform Movement (1920–1925), the SGPC assumed the management of the gurdwara property, igniting debates about the appropriate functions of bungas and their fate soon. The SGPC claimed that the bungas rightfully belonged to them, as they bordered the gurdwara.³ Upon the passing of the Sikh Gurdwara Act in 1925, the SGPC claimed most of the land around the Golden Temple Complex as theirs, informally known as the “red line,” and submitted the maps and plans accordingly to the Punjab Government in 1926.⁴ These claims came to be disputed by the bunga owners and managers, as concerns regarding their preservation became a key issue to these contests. Given how important bungas had been in the region's cultural and social formation, the bungas had retained some, if not all the previous functions, and a few were still

² “Bhai Wasti Ram da Bunga”, *Khalsa Samachar*, December 20, 1940: 2; Madanjit Kaur, “Contribution of the Bungas”, *Punjab History Conference Proceedings*, 17-19 March 1978, 94-5; Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, *Guru Mahima Ratnavali* (Punjabi University, 1984).

³ In a more recent case of the demolition of Bunga Ramgarhia at Nanded, the SGPC argued that the bungas had no reason to exist had the gurdwaras not been there. Once the purpose of bungas was met by building newer and arguably better and more modern lodging facilities, there was no reason to keep the bungas anymore. For more, see: Chandar Sutta Dogra, “Have You Eyes for It,” *Outlook India*, May 2008.

⁴ “Petition to Deputy Governor: Ramgarhia Bunga,” Colonel Iqbal Singh, private papers; “Bungeiyan di khabar” *Gurdwara Gazette*, Meeting notes, 1928.

patronized by *misl* families like the Ahluwalia's and the Ramgarhias. There were twelve misls in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Misls were bands of Sikhs that rallied together under the leadership of an individual who represented the group's interests. These misls can be divided into three subtypes, by caste, community, and region.⁵ The misls built the bungas and patronized them for their upkeep. Some other bungas were also owned by or associated with different social groups that can be classified by caste, village, and region. These affiliations became particularly problematic as the SGPC was endeavouring to create a standardized, and thereby a unified, vision of Sikh identity and practices. As the SGPC extended its control over the gurdwara, it became evident that the spaces around the gurdwara could not be ignored or left to other influences or impulses. The struggles between the SGPC and the bunga owners highlights the anxiety of the SGPC to claim complete control over the gurdwara and the surrounding areas, and the challenges it faced in such claims of authority and control over the space. The ownership of bungas became important as these structures indexed competing visions of Sikhism—SGPC's as the standard and uniform ideals of Tat Khalsa and that of bunga patrons as feudal caste and regional affiliations that also supported exchange of knowledge and information with other religio-cultural centres like Haridwar, which was another popular centre of religious training. Social and political power were symbolized in the physical structures of the bungas, as the more important

⁵ Hari Ram Gupta, *History of Sikhs: The Sikh Commonwealth or Rise or Fall* (Munshilal Manohar Lal, 1978); Ganda Singh, *Jassa Singh Ahluwalia* (Punjabi University, 1990); Gurbachan Singh Nayyar, "Nature of Misaldari System: A Case-study of Kanhaiya Misl," *Punjab History Conference, Proceedings, 3rd Session* (1968): 169–172.

bunga owners would have better located and more spacious bungalows in the Golden Temple Complex.

Bungalows, however, had changed hands over time from their original caretakers and owners. Bungalows had been sold or leased as private property and were being used for very different purposes than originally intended. Although the origins of the bungalows and their historical evolution still requires further investigation, this chapter focuses on the latter-day disputes between the SGPC and the bungalow owners and managers, and the grounds upon which they each made claims to ownership. In other words, how did the SGPC make claims to, and subsequently acquire the land around, the Golden Temple Complex when it was not explicitly gurdwara property nor exclusively used for religious purposes? How did the SGPC acquire bungalows after most of them were declared waqf (mortmain property, which is an inalienable religious and charitable endowment),⁶ but not SGPC-associated property, by the Gurdwara Tribunal? Finally, in what ways did the bungalow owners and managers challenge and resist such claims?

The SGPC deployed a variety of tactics to incorporate bungalows into gurdwara property to expand the boundary of the gurdwara. The SGPC was particularly concerned with clearly demarcating the boundary of the gurdwara, both to guard its borders and to assert its authority within these borders. Bungalow owners and managers, on the other hand, attempted to stake claims on the property as privately owned but as charity nonetheless—

⁶ Family Law in India says, “Waqf: according to Muslim Waqf Validating Act of 1913, means the permanent dedication by a person professing Muslim faith of any property for any purpose recognized by the Muslim law as religious, pious, and charitable. The essentials of waqf are: (a) permanent dedication of property; (b) the dedicator should be a person professing the faith (c) purpose of dedication should be religious and for the faith for example charitable organization.” *Family Law in India*, 288.

a phenomenon that came under scrutiny at the end of the nineteenth century.⁷ The British, everywhere in the Muslim world, were anxious that “private” waqf was both a form of tax cheating and also an economic malaise, as it was locking “useful” property away from the private land market.⁸ Recent scholarship has highlighted the ways in which the colonial government introduced new legal classifications under mortmain law, distinguishing private trust from public trust as well as private from public charity.⁹

This distinction, it seems, was particularly problematic for establishments like *dharmshalas* or rest houses that were privately owned but were used for charitable purposes.¹⁰ Here, there was no clear auditing or taxation practice being used for religious establishments or activities exclusively. Curiously, SGPC used colonial scrutiny into private charities in making its claims over the bungas. Over the years, many bungas had been divided between different family members and had been subsequently sold as shops, private homes, and warehouses. For instance, some of the legal fights for control of bungas were not waged with just one owner or manager, but with several claimants who had acquired the bungas over different periods of time and who used it for very different purposes. Court cases thus could not be determined on such grounds as the *a priori* intention of the building and usage, as discussed by Ritu Birla in the case of Marwari *dharamshalas* as private trusts but had to be based on evidence of private property or the function it was serving at the time of the court case. Here was another question to be

⁷ Ritu Birla says private charity became a problematic category as there was no clear distinction between charity being used for the “larger good” of the public or for personal benefits. Birla explains the ways in which the private and public forms of charitable trusts were distinguished from each other, and the impact of this on vernacular market practices. For more, see: Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture and Market Governance in Late Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

⁸ Pascale Ghazaleh, ed., *Held in Trust: Waqf in the Islamic World* (American University Press, 2011).

⁹ Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

resolved—could waqf land be considered alienable property, especially when such land had been in the hands of private families and not the gurdwara managers?

The concept of alienation has largely been understood as the ability to buy, sell, or lease a property and the right to inherit such land. The bunga cases legally came down to the question of whether they were waqf lands, which, if they were, would make them inalienable. If they were waqf, should they come under the gurdwara management's control directly, or could the families associated with them continue to manage them? In other words, whose religious authority was not legitimized by the state and its machinery—the Tribunal? If they were waqf and not gurdwara-managed, then what was their status? Were all bungas waqf, even if private families owned and lived in them? What of the caste affiliations, regional groups, and associations and classes of people that had historically protected the gurdwara? Religious identification was not mutually exclusive or exhaustive of one's self-perceptions. Notwithstanding, would these affiliations dissipate as soon as the SGPC took over the management of the gurdwara and its properties?

For these reasons, alienability was not just a matter of land transactions or the right to inherit such property; alienability of the bungas had also to achieve the severing of all other associations, memories, and histories that had significance to many groups' Sikh identities. As it will become clear, such associations and affiliations never ended and continued to persist under sants and deras in and outside the Punjab. I argue that the quickest way for the SGPC to achieve this authority over other affiliations, notwithstanding its failure, was to demolish the bungas, which had become the material instantiations of such affiliations and associations.

The SGPC responded to the bunga owners and managers' defence of private property by asserting their sole control over the Sikh religious domain. Unlike other religious communities in the Punjab, the SGPC allowed Sikhs to choose community representatives, at least in the religious sphere. However, the SGPC used this claim of democratic rule to put an end to any challenge to its activities. The question that remained, then, was whether the bungas were religious properties or private properties? How were these properties inherited? Could the SGPC alone claim to represent all Sikhs, especially when claims to the contrary were made by smaller caste groups?

Eventually, the SGPC acquired various bungas through different tactics, many times after forcing the owners to bequeath the property as a gift to the community. These tactics did not mean relying solely on the Sikh Gurdwara Act, although it had many uses in helping establish control over gurdwara properties. Despite having recourse to a set of laws and a special Tribunal committee adjudicating matters of the gurdwara exclusively, the SGPC deployed a complex repertoire of methods to acquire and establish control over different properties around the Golden Temple Complex. The struggle over bungas allows us to examine these vestiges of different visions and views for the community through a different archive. It allows analysis of the SGPC beyond its publications, self-representations, and propaganda, founded upon claims and counterclaims in court, which have produced a significant record of its actions.

The SGPC was, above all, concerned with establishing its position within the community by consolidating its strength and authority over gurdwaras. By transforming the space of the Golden Temple through its cleansing drive and building projects, discussed in the previous chapter, it took hold of more than gurdwara territory. It wanted

to control what the buildings signified—historically, politically, culturally, and in religious terms. The bunga owners, on the other hand were concerned with retaining their control over the properties and their historical roles and value in the past.

Claiming Authority: Thinking Through and with the Past

The basis of the Gurdwara Reform Movement in the Punjab was to create community-elected governance of Sikh religious establishments and wrest them from the hands of pro-British mahants.¹¹ The Sikh Gurdwara Act passed because of this movement, which included the formation of a special judicial committee called the Gurdwara Tribunal to assess whether religious lands were gurdwaras or other religious spaces. This meant that the gurdwaras now had to be defined and this definition had to be socialized with other regions.

The politics of the Gurdwara Reform Movement and the SGPC has received considerable scholarly attention.¹² Court cases against other religious communities for “shared” or contested sites have also been the subject of research.¹³ However, there exists little analysis of court cases in which the SGPC fought Sikh community members, especially those that contested their sole rights to represent all Sikhs in the Punjab. The bunga cases highlight the resistance met by the SGPC. These cases also point to the dissatisfaction that had set in as a result of prolonged court cases, which did not always

¹¹ Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Movement* (Macmillan, 1978).

¹² Mohinder Singh, *Akali Movement*; Ganda Singh, *Some Confidential Papers on Akali Movement* (SGPC, 1965); Rajiv Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith* (Vikas, 1987); Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge University Press, 1974); Baldev Nayar, *Minority Politics in Punjab* (Princeton, 1966).

¹³ David Gilmartin, “Shahidganj Mosque Incident: A Prelude to Pakistan,” in *Islam, Politics and Social Movements*, ed. Edmund Burke and Ira M. Lapidus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

yield results in favour of the SGPC.¹⁴ Different interest groups, especially the mahants, challenged the moral and religious high ground taken by the SGPC as the representative of the Sikh community as well as its claim to be sole caretaker of the communities' religious institutions. Special memos were sent to the colonial officers appealing to their partiality to customs and traditional rights.¹⁵ Added to this, Udasis and other religious groups were also contesting for their specific rights; overall there was an increasing number of cases not in favour of the SGPC, which were lost to *udasis* and *mahants*. The SGPC leaders felt a sudden urgency to show quick successes to the community. The enormity of the costs and the amount of time and effort spent on each case, which at times had more than one or two plaintiffs, was much more than the management committee had bargained for. Many of these cases were filed out of immediate euphoria for the passing of the Sikh Gurdwara Act and were obviously not worth the accruing costs. These cases, it was appealed to the Punjab Government, should be withdrawn, and until such a time that an amendment allowing for cases to be taken back be passed, it was requested that the Gurdwara Tribunal be summarily suspended.¹⁶ This chapter highlights the ways in which the SGPC tactically used different legal classifications and practices to acquire land and buildings around the gurdwara and their opponents' arguments to prevent such attempts.

¹⁴ "Mukadmiyan sambandhi vichar", *Gurdwara Gazette*, June 1931. An article on the drain of resources in all shapes and form—money, time and effort—it argues that at the rate it is going, it will take 65 years and 14 lakh Rupees to see through all the cases that are registered in the tribunals.

¹⁵ "Udasi Memo to The Honorable Mr. Justice Coldstream I.C.S. President Gurdwara Tribunal," [3 December 1928], No. 3472 Judl., State Archives of Punjab, Chandigarh and Civil Secretariat Home General 1927, file no. 5495.

¹⁶ *Gurdwara Gazette*, Meeting notes, July 1931.

At the most basic level, bunga cases were fought on the grounds of whether they were to be considered private property or not. But a more specific and more significant issue was the need for and meaning of historic preservation—maintaining the diverse profiles of the buildings around the gurdwara. The SGPC had made clear its desire to demolish these structures early on, claiming they were arenas of mischief and profane activities.¹⁷ In establishing tighter boundaries around the gurdwara and maintaining greater control on its thoroughfare, the SGPC focused on their everyday uses, whereas the bunga owners and managers insisted upon a historical view of the bunga, asserting their symbolic and historical value for the community. The legal contests over their fate highlight an early step in the SGPC’s evolving understanding of historic structures that were not necessarily or wholly religious in function, but which were characterized as *waqf* properties nonetheless.¹⁸

Since bungas were used for different purposes—as schools for children, as hospitals or medical centres, as printing shops and warehouses as well as rest houses for pilgrims—there was no one legal category under which these structures could be placed within the judicial process.¹⁹ For example, Bunga Sher Singh had been divided into at least three main parts. One of these functioned as a rest house, but the other two functioned as private properties, although legally they were all considered to be *waqf* land and therefore

¹⁷ Santokh Singh B.Sc., *Sri Report Sri Darbar Sahib*, (SGPC pub., 1929) and Report Sri Darbar Sahib, (SGPC pub., 1931).

¹⁸ A similar case of *samadhis*, or cenotaphs, was brought up around the same time as the bunga cases started being registered. The cenotaphs at Shahida Gurdwara, in close proximity to the Golden Temple Complex, were brought down and a leveled entrance was built around this gurdwara dedicated to the memory of Baba Dip Singh. The SGPC received a large number of petitions from different groups and Sikh individuals that the cenotaphs were sacred and important for the memory of the martyrs in Sikhism. However, nothing momentous came out of the petitions or demonstrations. *Gurdwara Gazette*, Meeting notes, January 1931, and Private Papers of Colonel Iqbal Singh.

¹⁹ In fact, Bunga Sarkar had been taken over by the British Government, who made a police station and a Victorian Clock Tower on this land.

no one's private property. Many of these bungas received maintenance grants from the Golden Temple and continued to be mentioned in the audit reports that were published annually after the Gurdwara Reform Movement.²⁰

However, many bungas had to survive on their own, partly by leasing smaller portions of their premises to commercial enterprises, but also by seeking grants from Sikh princely states and from rich patrons who wished to maintain them. The question of ownership was further complicated by the question of inheritance. How were bungas passed from one generation to the next? Were they given as inheritance according to the laws of primogeniture, the prevalent method in the Punjab? Or were they managed communally, especially in cases where the bungas were owned by smaller committees or groups like the Mazhabi Sikh Society?

There were three major types of bungas based on who had commissioned them to be built. The first was bungas built by Sikh misl chiefs and royalty like Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Maharaja Sher Singh. Second were those built by different communities like the Mazhabi Bunga or Bunga Rangretta. And finally, there were bungas built by localities and prominent villages that acquired land around the Golden Temple at some point and built smaller pilgrim centres or rest houses to stay.²¹ Finally, another problem with seeing bungas in a standard way was that some of these buildings were given grants by the communities that had built them originally. Were these grants then vested in the building or the people who managed them? Did these managers become owners by living in these

²⁰ Bungas like Bunga Jhalliawala, parts of Bunga Sarkar, Bunga Chainpuriya, and many others continued to get maintenance grants from the Golden Temple. These were both declared waqf in separate court cases. *Gurdwara Gazette*, "Audit Reports," July 1931, 9.

²¹ For more, see: Parm Bakshish Singh, *Golden Temple* (Punjabi University Press, 1999), 40–45.

buildings and being their caretakers for a set number of years, which was a legal benchmark for inheriting property rights?

Pre-colonial ownership and inheritance practice have been a subject of many scholarly works.²² Recently, Anne Murphy has argued that although waqf property rights were categorized in particular ways under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign, as documented in the Khalsa Darbar records, there was a shift in the legal definition, and as a result, a shift in the concept of private property and ownership with the onset of colonial rule. This shift meant a deeper desire to own the properties and make the rights alienable and inheritable. Bungas similarly underwent a change of hands in terms of ownership and accountability, over a period, although often this was not documented well enough to win court cases. In studying the religious grants as recorded in the Khalsa Darbar records, especially grants that were given to the Golden Temple or to the bungas associated with the gurdwara, it is clear that they were attached to people and not the built structures.²³ There was some notion of private property in the period immediately preceding British rule, where religious grants and establishments were in the hands of individuals assigned for that specific role, e.g., udasi sants claimed that certain bungas were handed to them when they were taking care of the Golden Temple. These sants claimed that the bungas now belonged to them and not to the role of the caretaker, so the next granthi would not inherit this bunga, which was already in the hands of that specific udasi mahant. This understanding was contested under religious reformist movements, when the community

²² Irfan Habib, *Agrarian Systems of Mughal India: 1556-1707* (Oxford University Press, 1991); Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs: Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century* (Manohar, 1978).

²³ Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Past* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 170–173.

became more clearly a corporate and bounded entity²⁴ and desired the control of religious establishments by community elected representatives as opposed to hereditary managers. The property rights were therefore to be placed in the sacred scriptures and the caretakers and managers were to be assigned a more specific and accountable or transparent role.

Historical publications became a viable means for the Singh Sabha reformers to disseminate their message.²⁵ The SGPC leaders inherited this strategy for cultivating a sensibility of being Sikh, and to act as the representative leaders of the community. There was a selective process in applying historical narratives to envision a future for the Sikh community that did not include bungalows and the layered authority of those who had constructed them. Claiming authority over the Sikh community required a certain kind of alienation from the collective past that was visibly present in the bungalows. But the matter was not as straightforward as simply extending control over the bungalows. SGPC's claims to the landed property had to go through the Tribunals to prove legitimacy over these lands. And beyond the legal procedure, there remained the matter of winning the support of different caste groups and associations. The bungalow cases highlight the anxieties of the SGPC vis-à-vis different associations and interest groups within the community and their efforts to maximize their authority over different sections of the community. Despite the demolition drive that began in the 1930s and lasted till the 1970s, caste groups and affiliations continue to have a strong influence. This is so much the case that the SGPC has been ordered to rebuild some bungalows by the highest courts in the country in recent

²⁴ Ibid., 173.

²⁵ Historical fiction by reformers like Bhai Vir Singh and Mohan Singh Vaid are particularly well known in this genre. For more, see: Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

years in the twenty-first century, discussed below. Although these historic structures have been lost, their historical value is invoked daily.

Inheriting the Bunga: Private Property or Waqf Land?

In some of the earliest court cases over the bungas, the SGPC attempted to claim control of gurdwara properties, as they argued against the current managers' and tenants' claims of private ownership and or of inheriting such lands. SGPC argued that Emperor Akbar had given the gurdwara property to Guru Ramdas as a grant in the late sixteenth century.²⁶ The area had subsequently become a marketplace known as Guru-ka-bazaar and eventually taken over by misls to build a protective wall around the gurdwara when it was endangered. This interpretation meant that the misl families did not own the property but had merely built on the community's land. The earliest case where the issue of private property and right to inheritance became particularly important is in that of Bunga Sher Singh, controlled by Maharaja Sher Singh, stepson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Rani Sada Kaur.

The court case was first filed in 1933 where a judgment in favour of the defendant was made in 1936. Although the court decided the property was waqf, it declared Bunga Sher Singh to be a non-gurdwara property and assigned the ownership to the descendants of Maharaja Sher Singh. The history of this bunga is telling of the biography of these structures and the competing claims to Sikh practices past and future. Over the nineteenth century, this bunga had been taken over by three sets of people.

²⁶ Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes; Punjab Government Gazette*, (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1916); Giani Gian Singh, *Twarikh-i- Amritsar* (Kendri Singh Sabha pub, reprint 1979); Ganda Singh, ed., *Var Amritsar Ji Ki*, (Sikh History Society, 1951).

Bunga Sher Singh was particularly important to the SGPC because of its positioning—it was located opposite the Akal Bunga or the Akal Takhat and faced *Darshan deori*, the entrance to the main sanctum sanctorum. However, the descendant and his family, as well as the managers and servitors, were not going to give in easily. After a relatively short court case, in which it was declared that the SGPC had no right to the management of the bunga, there remained the question of who was the rightful owner of this property? Moreover, could the bunga be inherited if it was waqf land?

In the 1936 judgment, it was declared that the three appellants who had claimed private ownership of parts of the bunga—Sardar Kesar Singh (a room in the bunga), Sardar Jaswant Singh (one of the floors in the bunga) and Sardar Darbar Singh (another floor in the bunga)—had been wrongfully occupying it, as they could produce no proof that they had ever bought or leased these parts.²⁷ This left the plaintiff, Sardar Balwant Singh, who was declared to be the legal descendant of Maharaja Sher Singh, as the only contender. However, the court also determined that he did not privately own the property. It was now declared that the bunga was waqf land and could only be used for religious and charitable purposes.

The Gurdwara Tribunal made an important statement by accepting Sardar Balwant Singh's right to inherit the bunga. It established the right of individuals to inherit religious and charitable establishments even if they were not private properties. The bungas could still be passed on to the next generation as private trusts, in so far as they were clearly being used for religious and charitable purposes alone. But as it will become clear, the court also took away the right to alienate such property, making any sales of bungas null

²⁷ *Kesar Singh and Anr. v. Balwant Singh and Ors.*, AIR 1936 Lah 645.

and void. Moreover, it accepted the SGPC's "red line" as marking religious land, even if it did not recognize the land to be exclusively managed by the SGPC.

Since the court had decided that the bunga belonged to the descendants of Maharaja Sher Singh as waqf land under their care, Kesar Singh filed an appeal in 1943 on the court's decision on the proof of genealogy.²⁸ Kesar Singh demanded to know how the court had decided that Balwant Singh was in fact Maharaja Sher Singh's descendant? What and where was his proof? Sardar Kesar Singh, who was the legally acknowledged *bungai* (servitor of the property), appealed that the Gurdwara Tribunal had no jurisdiction to take away the property from him and his family. He claimed it was not a religious building but rather had been his family's residence for many years. As the law stipulated the number of years in which the owner of the property had to have some contact with or made use of the land in some way (twelve years), which Balwant Singh had not done, Kesar Singh claimed the right to ownership and management of said property. This opened the case to several questions, such that the parties appealed to the Supreme Court of India to settle the dispute.

Of the eight questions raised at the Court, the first, fifth, and sixth are particularly important to this analysis of the shifting meaning of bunga property. First, the Court asked: Was "the bunga in dispute a waqf property founded by Maharaja Sher Singh, or any descendant of Maharaja Sher Singh?" This question emphasized the definition of waqf land and its characteristics. For example, could it be transferred, alienated or inherited? Could it be used for reasons other than religious and/or charitable purposes? And did the SGPC have direct rights on all Sikh waqf lands? Similarly, question five

²⁸ *Kesar Singh v. Balwant Singh*, AIR 1967 SC 487, [1962] Supp. 1 SC 325.

asked: “Is the suit barred under s. 92 Civil Procedure Code?” This was a further refinement of the definition of waqf land, especially Sikh waqf land, and whether the Gurdwara Tribunal was the sole authority in adjudicating all cases concerned with gurdwara properties. Finally, question six: “Are the defendants debarred from denying the plaintiff’s title in view of the judgment of the Lahore High Court and the decision of the Sikh Gurdwara Tribunal?”²⁹ The Gurdwara Tribunal was set up as a part of the Act of 1925, which pre-empted the legal cases regarding gurdwara lands and their ownership. The Tribunal was a part of the High Court, but it was separate in that all cases pertaining to gurdwara property went to the Tribunal and its jurisdiction exceeded any other judgment. However, there were some areas of grey in this autonomy and later appeals made use of these loopholes to negotiate a settlement or case in their favour. The last question then set the statutory limitations for the Gurdwara Tribunal as it asked whether a case tried by the Tribunal could be opened again? This question was finally reduced to whether a judgment passed by the Gurdwara Tribunal could be challenged and appealed. These three questions allow us to understand the evolution of a new legal regime for property rights and the right to inheritance of waqf land in general and the bungas in particular.

Question one considers the nature of waqf property as a religious or charitable institution, and what that meant to the application of the Sikh Gurdwara Act. If the Court decided that the property was neither religious nor charitable but was marked off as private and non-waqf, there would be little support for applying the Act of 1925 in adjudicating its fate, which could link it to question five: whether the Civil Procedure

²⁹ *Kesar Singh v. Balwant Singh*, 2–3.

Code of 1902 could be applied to the bunga cases at all. The answer to this question was particularly important because many bungas had been apportioned over the years to different owners, caretakers, and users for very different purposes. These could vary from religious uses, such as charitable schools, gurdwaras, or rest houses, to what may be secular uses, such as shops or warehouses. In fact, many times the same bunga could function as a gurdwara, with the sacred scriptures in the premises and a *Granthi* hired for the continuous observation of Sikh rituals, and as a shopfront, with an outer room facing the market streets being used by shopkeepers or medical men.

Determining the legal status and uses of this particular bunga therefore became an important precedent for judging who could become its official and legitimate caretaker and which court had jurisdiction over the matter. If it was legally considered a purely religious institution, then the SGPC could make a simple claim to it as its immediate and natural inheritance, because of the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, Section 2.³⁰ But the issue was not as simple or straightforward as that, because different people had already claimed ownership of the property. Similarly, question five on Section 92 Civil Procedure Code of 1908,³¹ which dealt with the issue of public trusts, and question six about whether one could challenge a previous judgment made by the Sikh Gurdwara Tribunal, demanded clarification of the stance of the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 vis-à-vis the immovable

³⁰ Sikh Gurdwara Act, Section 2, 1925.

³¹ “Section 92 is a complete Code by itself in respect of suits based upon an alleged breach of any express or constructive trust, created for public purposes of a charitable or religious nature. In order to attract the application of the section the following four conditions are necessary, viz., (1) there must be a trust, express or constructive, for public purposes of a charitable or religious nature; (2) the plaintiff must allege a breach of trust or necessity for direction as to administration of that trust; (3) the suit must be in the interests of the public, i.e., it must be brought in a representative capacity for the benefit of the public and not to enforce individual rights; and (4) the relief claimed should be one of the reliefs set out in the section.” Santanu Dey, *Legal Provisions of Section 92 of Code of Civil Procedure 1908, (C.P.C.), India – Public Charities*.

properties attached to the gurdwara. In this last question, it was declared that previous judgments made by the Gurdwara Tribunal could not be questioned unless new evidence was presented. Hence, the claim that Sardar Balwant Singh had to prove his genealogy was rejected on the basis that the Tribunal had already accepted Balwant Singh's claim.

Defining the bunga and fixing its nature as waqf property dealt with the first question, on the legitimate use of this building as a religious or charitable institution. The bunga had already been defined in the first round of this case in the lower court and was used in passing the judgment in 1936. The court case defined bungas as "hostels where pilgrims coming from various parts of India to pay a visit to the Golden Temple stay. These hostels were founded by rich men especially by Rajas and were dedicated to the public as waqf property. There was appointed a custodian at each bunga called a Bungai whose duty was to read the Guru Granth Sahib and arrange for the comforts of pilgrims staying in the bunga and keep the bunga in proper order."³² The definition of the bungas fixed the meaning and function of the structures in totality. All bungas were to be waqf property unless there was clear proof to show otherwise. However, who owned them or had the right to manage them was still up for questioning and arbitration. In other words, not all waqf properties were given over to the SGPC, and to acquire them the SGPC had to use other methods than court cases alone.

In response to question five, regarding the application of Code of Civil Procedure versus the Gurdwara Tribunal particularly in bunga cases, the Court declared that the ultimate authority in judging the ownership or management of gurdwara properties resided with the Gurdwara Tribunal, even when the properties were declared to be non-

³² *Kesar Singh and Anr. v. Balwant Singh and Ors.*, AIR 1936 Lah 645, 3.

Sikh. In this judgment, the Supreme Court was making it clear that all bunga properties were in fact associated with their gurdwaras even if they were not given over to the SGPC for management. Hence, bungalows were legally seen to be part of the gurdwara regardless of how they had been occupied or used in recent years, or what and how they were to be managed or owned in the future. Their association with the gurdwara was seen to be paramount in legal terms. The SGPC used this ruling effectively for later court cases, reminding the Gurdwara Tribunal that the bungalows had been built to protect the gurdwara in the first place; they therefore belonged to the community and not to individuals. Even when bungalows were given over to the care of individuals, as in this case, the SGPC made sure that the individual would behave and work according to their set guidelines. Eventually, the family gifted Maharaja Sher Singh Bunga to the SGPC in the early 1970s. Only the entrance to this bunga remains, an aide-mémoire that a bunga once existed. The plaque on this entrance, that has now been removed, once explained that the bunga was the gift of the family of Maharaja Sher Singh to the SGPC, after the creation of the management body as the official Sikh representatives for it.³³

The SGPC has removed a plaque put up at the historic Maharaja Sher Singh Gate adjacent to Akal Takhat in the Golden Temple complex after a plea was filed with the Sikh Gurdwara Judicial Commission, stating that the plaque carries wrong information about the descendants of Maharaja Sher Singh.

When the Tribune team visited the Golden Temple complex, it found that the plaque was removed from the gate and the place where it was installed is now plastered with cement.³⁴

³³ Sikh Sangat News: East, "SGPC Removes Plaque with Wrong Information at Golden Temple," <http://sikhsangat.org/2014/sgpc-removes-plaque-with-wrong-information-at-golden-temple/>.

³⁴ Perneet Singh, "Crumbling Brick by Brick," *Tribune News Service*, September 14, 2014, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140915/punjab.htm>

When I returned to this gate in 2016, looking for the plaque and asking questions about it, I was told that such a plaque never existed. The obliteration of this structure and the memorials associated with it are dangerous because they force certain strident views over others. However, not all memories are encapsulated in singular lieu de memoire and re-emerge in other spaces. The SGPC, despite its attempts at producing an authoritative discourse, struggles to enforce it. To gain supremacy over other practices, the SGPC has incorporated some of these differences within its own structure, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Moral Claims and Sikh Representatives

SGPC's claim as the sole authority of elected Sikh representatives was built on a moral argument against Udasi and Nirmala mahants and sants. The Akali leaders and the SGPC managers claimed to have the interest of the community at heart, as the SGPC was a community elected body. The guidelines for the SGPC's formation, as given in the Sikh Gurdwara Act, say that there are 175 members in all and that elections are to be held every five years. The members stand for election in the Punjab and all registered Sikhs above the age of eighteen years may vote. The Act aimed to make the community's voice heard in gurdwara management and in the management of its funds by electing its representatives. However, as the committees were formed, it became clear that the composition of the committee was heavily weighted towards urban-educated and higher-caste men. The claims of being a united religious community became difficult to bear as casteism and the rural-urban divide became evident in meetings and ensuing decisions.

Claims that *partybazi*, or politicking for selfish and petty concerns, were rife in the activity of the SGPC became a resounding belief amongst most Sikhs and can be seen

widely in newspaper editorials from the 1930s onwards. In the interviews I conducted in Amritsar, this belief that high-caste and petty and selfish leaders drove the SGPC was still rife. Bungas, at least under the ownership of parties other than the SGPC, served as reminders of the Sikh community's failure to transcend distinctions of caste and class, creating deeper problems for the SGPC. Bungas instantiated different sources of allegiance and authority.

One significant case highlighting the problems with the SGPC's claim to represent all Sikh interests was over Bunga Mazhabi. This case was first filed in 1933 and was re-appealed in 1975, the judgment for which was finally given in 2005.³⁵ Unlike in the earlier case discussed here, the SGPC argued that Bunga Mazhabi was not waqf property anymore and had not been used for religious or charitable purposes for the last twenty years at least, since the partition of India. The SGPC claimed that it was privately owned property, held by three different people, and that the management committee had rightfully and legitimately purchased the property from these different owners. Further, they pronounced themselves to be the sole representatives of the Sikh community, so the case as created by the Mazhabi association could not stand—the interests of lower-caste Sikhs was already represented by the SGPC.³⁶

The ex-military Mazhabi Society was an association of the Mazhabi group, i.e. the lower-caste group of *Chura* Sikh (Churas were traditionally known to be leather workers)

³⁵ The case was first filed by the SGPC to take over the Bunga Mazhabi in 1933, but no judgment was passed until 1940 when it was decidedly given over to the ex-military Mazhabi society. As a result of Partition, the association was uprooted and it handed over the bunga to Sardar Harnam Singh, making him sign an affidavit that he was merely a Bungai and not the owner. The sale deeds that the SGPC presented to the court between Sardar Harnam Singh's widow and the management body were therefore rejected as legitimate sales.

³⁶ Appeal no. 870, High Court of Punjab and Haryana at Chandigarh, Judicial Department.

and was a registered society under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. The society was earlier situated in Shiekhupura, now in Pakistan, where there was a majority base of the Mazhabi caste group. It was reconstituted in India following the partition of the Punjab, after a gap of almost twenty years.³⁷ The society argued that it had named Sardar Harnam Singh as the Bungai, who was merely given the right to manage the bunga and read the Guru Granth Sahib. He or his family had no rights to alienate the property at any time and there existed land documents and an affidavit to prove that Harnam Singh was only the Bungai. Because of the historical circumstances, referring to the upheaval of Partition and changes in the composition of the society, as well as the conditions of the gurdwara, it was argued that the bunga had come under the “adverse” possession of the management committee. But the society now wished to retain its control over the bunga, although it had been demolished. Moreover, the society proceeded to not only claim the bunga land but also demanded that the SGPC cover costs for rebuilding the bunga for Mazhabi caste pilgrims. The SGPC, on the other hand, argued that their possession of the bunga was no longer valid, as the SGPC had used it for the “greater good” of the gurdwara and the Sikh community.

The argument for the greater good of the community meant returning to what the SGPC claimed was the “original purpose” of all gurdwaras, as had been built by the Gurus and carried on by Sikhs since. In other words, it meant returning to the moment when the Sikh Gurdwara Act and the SGPC were created in a more recent past. The

³⁷ Under the title ‘Grounds of Appeal’, point three says, “That admittedly, the Mazhabi Sikh Association is a Society registered under Act 21 of 1860. No suit can be brought by said society without a resolution passed by the said society, which is wanting in the present case. As such the plaintiff had no right or locus standi to file for present suit.” Appeal no. 870, High Court of Punjab and Haryana at Chandigarh, Judicial Department. The Mazhabi society was registered again based out of Karnal in Haryana in 1966 with the Registrar of Societies.

SGPC frequently quoted Master Tara Singh where he stated that the purpose of creating the SGPC and the Act was “to utilize the property and income of the gurdwaras for the purposes for which they were founded and save it from being wasted in luxurious and immoral living.”³⁸ Since it was claimed that the defendants had come to privately own the bunga since independence, it was morally sound for the SGPC to intervene and return the bunga to its original purpose and “to save it from being used for immoral purposes.”³⁹ The case was pivotal in the ways in which the court detailed that bungas could not be alienated or sold to anyone, regardless of whether the property was abandoned or had been passed to a manager of an association that did not exist for a period of time. SGPC’s assertion of representing the greater good of the community was also challenged by the association, which alleged that the SGPC constituted a select elite that wanted the bungas demolished for their own private purposes. The Mazhabi Society maintained that it was important to resurrect the bunga to protect minority caste groups, who had equal rights to visit the Golden Temple Complex. The SGPC denied the Society the sole rights to the protection of the lower caste groups by maintaining that it was them, the SGPC, that were the custodians of the Sikh community, which theoretically did not observe caste.

In this way, they questioned the Mazhabi Society’s “locus standi” in bringing forth this case. Locus standi meant the legal standing of the Mazhabi Society in proving its connection with and relation to its previous avatar located in Sheikhpura. The

³⁸ Master Tara Singh, *Punjab Legislative Council Debates* 3, no. 22 (May 7 and 8, 1925), 1105.

³⁹ While the SGPC acknowledged that the bunga must have been under some form of control with the Mazhabi Sikh community, they also claimed that after Partition there had been no clarity on their claims or their existence. As a result, the Bungai Harnam Singh and his family had acquired legal authority to alienate the property, and the SGPC had legitimately paid the market value of this property according to the sale value of a non-religious building. For more, see: Appeal no. 870, High Court of Punjab and Haryana at Chandigarh, Judicial Department.

Committee challenged the Society's case by saying that the appellant of the case had no leadership position in the society and did not represent the concerns or the consensus of the caste group. The Society, in response, proved its connection with its earlier manifestation in Shiekhupura by calling witnesses who attested to the Society's existence in Shiekhupura and now in India, with a consistent membership in both the places through the years. The question of locus standi was decided in favour of the Mazhabi Society.⁴⁰ This decision in favour of the Society set a precedent that parties other than the SGPC could manage and control the rest houses or *sarais* around the Golden Temple Complex. After the formation of the SGPC and the local Darbar Sahib Committee, a series of building projects had been undertaken. One of these was to build new sarais for the pilgrims, which were close to but remained outside the boundaries of the gurdwara parikrama.

By returning the bunga to the Society and instructing the SGPC to pay for its rebuilding, the court allowed and acknowledged the rights of another body within the gurdwara to function, if only in a small way. But the SGPC continued to fight for its complete autonomy by arguing for the use of the Sikh Gurdwara Act and claiming that it took precedence over any other court's authority or civil code. The Court also decided that since the SGPC had never filed a case for this bunga in the Gurdwara Tribunal or under the Sikh Gurdwara Act but had bought the property from other named defendants,

⁴⁰ "They have locus standi to sue even if it is taken that the Bunga was not founded by the Mazhabi Sikhs of Sheikhpura district and not managed by them. Any Mazhabi Sikh can come forward and protect the property belonging to the Mazhabi Sikh community. In AIR 1973 Mysore Page 281 it was held that a suit by some of the devotees in a representative capacity for possession of the properties of a deity is competent." Appeal no. 870, High Court of Punjab and Haryana at Chandigarh, Judicial Department, 13.

whom it was found had no right to alienate the property, the sale could not be treated as valid.⁴¹

While the Court acknowledged the Sikh Gurdwara Act and the Gurdwara Tribunal's verdict, it was found that the SGPC had neither approached the tribunal nor invoked the Act to claim the property. By going to the alleged owners of the bunga and buying the property from them directly, the SGPC had been involved in a sale that was not legally recognizable. The Mazhabi Society was granted full rights over the bunga, and the defendants had to pay the Society relief. The SGPC's attempt to keep the bunga under their control for the "larger good" as the higher authority representing Sikh concerns over those of caste or sects was found less stable than the Mazhabi Society's claims to representation. Other court cases and settlements outside the Court similarly challenged the SGPC's claims to exclusively represent the Sikh community.

Although the SGPC claimed to represent all Sikh interests regardless of caste, regional affiliation, or sect, it was found increasingly that the SGPC represented the interests of a select few. The contests within the SGPC and outside increased over the years, adding to the ideological differences that people had about the shape and the future of the gurdwara. Some of these cases will be discussed in the following chapters.

⁴¹ The judgment says, "It has not been shown by Sri Darbar Sahib that Boonga in question was claimed by them as their property under the provisions of the Sikh Gurdwara Act and that no claim/objection was filed by anybody under the provisions of the Sikh Gurdwara Act and as such Darbar Sahib has become full owner of the Bunga." Appeal no. 870, High Court of Punjab and Haryana at Chandigarh, Judicial Department, 14.

And, "Defdts 2 to 4 had no right to sell the Bunga. Defdts 2 to 4 stepped into the shoes of Bungai Harnam Singh. The position of a Bungai is analogous to that of the Mahant in a Hindu shrine. It was held in AIR 1936 Lah 623 that a bunga institution intended to be reserved as a hostel for pilgrims is inalienable although there is no formal dedication if it is for religious or charitable purposes... as bungais they had only the right of management of the Bunga, which was also inalienable (vide AIR 1916 Lah 98). Appeal no. 870, High Court of Punjab and Haryana at Chandigarh, Judicial Department, 11.

However, no management committee or association can survive if it is solely embroiled in conflictual relations; the SGPC also figured out ways in which the community could function and exist in some form of conciliation and cohesiveness. This cohesiveness and conciliation were created by building rituals and organizing pilgrimage routes on an annual basis. While the case of the bungas highlights the rifts between different notions and values of Sikh history, the participation and role of different Sikh groups and the preservation of these Sikh structures, there were also many rituals that aligned Sikh interests.

From the two cases discussed above it becomes clear that many bungas were given to their owners/managers and not to the SGPC, despite its claims to natural inheritance as the Sikh community's representative. Also, it was declared that the bungas were essentially part-religious and part-charitable units and could not be put to any other use.⁴² Having declared these properties waqf land, it was also declared that the properties could not be sold to anyone else but could be given over to the SGPC as a "gift." Most of the bungas acquired by the SGPC were through this method, of receiving gifts from bunga owners or managers. But in the case of Bunga Mazhabian, the SGPC was ordered to return and rebuild the bunga. The bungas affairs are by no means a thing of the past. New cases regarding these buildings have been filed, and, sensing foul play, the courts have ordered the SGPC to return these properties to the associations and individuals involved. For example, Bunga Rangretta was completed recently in 2014 after another prolonged

⁴² *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak ... v. Raja Shiv Rattan Dev Singh and Ors.*, March 24, 1955, AIR 1955 SC 576.

court case and has been at the centre of controversy for various reasons.⁴³ In the case of Bunga Rangretta or Bunga Jiwan Singh, history was invoked as much as the social support for lower-caste Sikhs, reminding the Sikh community that it was Baba Jiwan Singh, a low-caste Sikh, who had carried the tenth Guru Teghbahadur ji's body back for cremation. For this, it is believed that the tenth Guru had given the community the title, 'Rangretta-Guru ka beta,' or the sons of the Guru.⁴⁴ In the next case that I discuss, it becomes clear how history and historical preservation were applied to save the bunga from the SGPC's demolition drive. This is the only bunga that has survived the SGPC's *parikrama*-widening scheme, for the sake of which bungalows were demolished.

Bungalows as Heritage: Contesting Visions of the Sikh Past

The SGPC attempted to gradually take over bunga properties through different measures such as buying the properties (although the court declared these to be invalid sales, many bungalows were still "purchased" from their alleged owners/managers), intimidating the owners by way of pressure tactics, and, of course, taking the issue to the Gurdwara Tribunal. The cases, as discussed above, took a long time and were an enormous expense to the Committee. The SGPC's preferred method was making private settlements with the owners and managers.

⁴³ Sikh24, "Inauguration of Bunga Baba Jiwan Singh Postponed," September 29, 2014, <http://www.sikh24.com/2014/09/29/inauguration-of-bunga-baba-jiwan-singh-postponed/#.Vht2zROqqko>

⁴⁴ Grounds of appeal: "That the S.G.P.C. and its officials and its office bearers were duty bound to maintain the sanctity of the said building being of historical importance of the Sikhs". Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925, Section 142, 177 says that the SGPC will care for notified gurdwaras and will be responsible for their maintenance. The demolition of this bunga, which was part and parcel of the gurdwara, is a breach of trust and duty by the SGPC officials who were to care for Sikh historical monuments and not defile them. Private papers at the SGPC office in Chandigarh.

However, the most effective way to take over the bungas was to campaign against the people who had earlier occupied these buildings. However, this had to be done in a careful manner. Although the SGPC disavowed the present bunga owners, many of whom were direct descendants of misl leaders and still cared for the bungas, the SGPC did not wish to break away from the misl period completely. The argument against the misuse of these properties had to demonstrate a particular historical narrative that showed how these buildings were earlier crucial to Sikh history but were now arenas of corruption and selfish gains. The SGPC aspired to clear the space of such elements that upset the sacred nature of the gurdwara, a project they invested in heavily even before the British Government legally recognized them, beginning with the *kar seva* (literally meaning clearing the silt from the water) cleaning of the water tank in 1923.

The project to sanitize the gurdwara space had started with the very establishment of the SGPC, which believed in a strong connection between the outward appearance of the gurdwaras and Sikhs' commitment to their religion. The practices of renovating, remaking, and constructing new gurdwaras, which began in the 1920s, was a result of this connection between the appearance of built structures and the community's commitment to its faith. These practices, as discussed in the following chapters, became central to the SGPC's policies towards gurdwaras. They set a precedent for later preservation work, especially in historically important gurdwaras and other historically important places like the bungas. The bungas were thus seen as an obstacle in the path to rejuvenating Sikhs' commitment to their religion. Demolishing the structures, it seems, was the only option that the SGPC could consider in order to return the gurdwara land to both religious functions and to cleanse the space of external elements.

On the other side of this debate, Bunga owners emphasized the historical significance of these structures. They argued that the bungas had not only been essential in protecting the gurdwara and the community in the past but had made significant contributions well into the present. For instance, the Ramgarhia Bunga was one of the better-known bungas and became representative of an earlier era when misl leaders resided in these bungas and invited British officers to view the Golden Temple Complex from the bunga premises. Additionally, bungas doubled up as educational centres, hospitals, and rest houses, performing multiple roles. Bunga owners challenged SGPC's historical narrative, which emphasized the Guru period and the contributions of certain individuals in the early development of Sikhism. The bunga owners and managers forwarded a different and broader historical narrative that emphasized the misl period in continuity and did not just focus on individual misl leaders stuck in time as the community's heroes. Works on individual misl leaders like Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia are particularly popular subjects of both fictional stories and non-fictional histories. The trend started with the Singh Sabha reform period when fictional works like *Sundari* gained popularity and became important in the reformist agenda to educate Sikhs on correct moral behaviour.⁴⁵ The bunga owners claimed that the bungas had stood the test of time and had been reinvented for the community over the years. The very individuals and families that the SGPC now vilified as selfish and corrupt still cared for these properties and patronized artists and masons to preserve them. These owners urged the Punjab Government and the Gurdwara Tribunal through various petitions to protect them and Sikh heritage in the form of these built structures. They urged them not

⁴⁵ Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundari, first pub.* 1898 (New Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, 2003).

to be led astray by the SGPC leaders who pushed the religious function of this property and to consider all the work they had been doing in sustaining the heritage of Sikh architecture and of Sikh cultural and political history at large.⁴⁶

Underlying the conflict between the SGPC and the bunga owners were the different expectations and understandings of the built structure around the gurdwara. While the SGPC desired to distinguish a sacred zone (also called the “red line,” drawn by the SGPC) with clearly defined entrances and exits to the gurdwara, the owners saw these buildings as historical markers integral to the gurdwara. The opposition between the religious and the historical functions of the built form was by no means new. For example, the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya had three different contenders for complete rights to the place. One was the Government of India, which wanted rights to preserve this historical site and to prevent any work on the temple complex without the government’s prior approval.⁴⁷ Tapati Guha-Thakurta has argued that the two priorities of active religious service and historical preservation were always kept separate by the British officials and there was an effect of “museumization” of the relic once the colonial government took over the task of preservation. In other words, once a place was pronounced to be a preservation site, it could no longer be an extant religious site and vice versa. Deborah Sutton has argued that despite the British authorities’ claims of cordoning off historical or heritage sites from active religious observations, these functions co-existed in the Linga temples in Bhubaneswar.⁴⁸ In other words, activities

⁴⁶ Sardar Tarlochan Singh of the Ramgarhia Bunga, Petition to the Deputy-Commissioner of Amritsar. [September 1930].

⁴⁷ Tapati Guha Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ Deborah Sutton, “Devotion, Antiquity, and Colonial Custody of the Hindu Temple in British India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 1 (2013): 135–166.

related to conservation and historical research did not end the religious properties of the place. At times, they rekindled the interests of followers, who now came back to observe religious duties in these temples. Considering these works, the bungas present us with a curious position as they were never fully religious sites but were contested upon the grounds of waqf property. Also, the bunga cases did not lead to museumization, which curiously was the only way bungas and misl history could have been saved, nor did they renew the interests of the masses to protest their demolition.

The Ramgarhia Bunga is the only remaining bunga that exists outside the eighty-four that surrounded the gurdwara until the early 1940s. Slowly, bungas were brought down for a variety of reasons and building projects. These building projects, discussed in the next chapter, had acquired the significance of being *seva* or service, a ritualized activity in which individuals worked to give something back to the community. *Seva* in its simplest form could involve daily cleaning of the gurdwara; more involved *seva* was to take part in the building activities, which also included demolishing the bungas.

The case of Ramgarhia Bunga was first filed in 1929 and was eventually settled outside the court in 1972–73; it is one of the longest court cases over bungas on record. The case was first filed by the SGPC against three members of the Ramgarhia family who were in possession of the bunga—Sardar Tarlochan Singh, Sardar Pratap Singh, and Sardar Mahender Singh. They had inherited the bunga from Mangal Singh CSI, their great-grandfather, who had been granted the bunga as private property by the British Government for his service in managing the Golden Temple Complex from 1862–1879. Out of the three, Sardar Pratap Singh and Sardar Mahender Singh sold their share of the bunga to the SGPC after intense pressure to do so. As they did not live in the bunga, they

considered it easier to turn the bunga over to the Committee. Sardar Tarlochan Singh, however, chose to fight the case because he feared that the SGPC would demolish this bunga as well. He lived in the bunga with his family, and eventually reached a settlement with the SGPC that a museum would be built in its place, devoted to the history of the misl period.

The case stretched on from 1929 as the SGPC kept asking for more time to present its case. On the opposing side, Sardar Tarlochan Singh had documents proving the long history of the well-reputed bunga that he had inherited, which received many British officials and other foreign dignitaries as guests. For instance, J.C. Oman, a colonial official in Amritsar, mentions watching the fireworks on special occasions from this bunga, which was in the ownership of Sardar Mangal Singh CSI's descendants.⁴⁹ The bunga was important to the SGPC because it contained the coronation stone that Jassa Singh Ramgarhia brought from Delhi after defeating the Mughals.

As the case stretched in court, and the other two members of the family sold their portions of the bunga, Sardar Tarlochan Singh began facing pressure from multiple directions. One was the increasing financial cost of the court case; the other was pressure from the SGPC. Since they had taken over the area surrounding the bunga, the SGPC built a langar hall (a food hall where all pilgrims and devotees receive free food all day). This langar hall cut off the entrance to the bunga from outside the gurdwara walls and the entrance from within the gurdwara could only be accessed by following gurdwara rules of not wearing shoes and socks, covering one's head, and not carrying big bags etc. The SGPC was aware of the implications of building the langar hall at the entrance of the

⁴⁹ J. C. Oman, *The Mystics, Ascetics, and Saints of India* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1903).

Ramgarhia Bunga—even today, the bunga can only be accessed from behind the langar hall.

The tenor of the court case changed as Sardar Tarlochan Singh realized that despite having the correct paperwork which established the bunga as his home, there was little chance of keeping the bunga in his family in the long term. Circumstances had changed after Partition; a larger number of pilgrims filed into the gurdwara daily, severely restricting his family's mobility (because of the blocked doorway) and increasing scrutiny by the community. Sardar Tarlochan Singh also witnessed the demolition of many other bungas between the 1940s and 1970s, many of which were historic structures that had been vibrant centres for artistic creativity. It became clear that the bunga had to be given up—but to whom? The Archaeological Survey of India was showing keen interest in taking over the bunga as a historic structure, but the SGPC would never have allowed a government agency so close to the gurdwara premises.⁵⁰ This was also the reason that the Victorian Clock Tower and the police station in Bunga Sarkar had been demolished in 1947–48 by the SGPC and its followers,⁵¹ as soon as the Punjab became independent from British control.⁵² The question then became: How could the bunga be preserved from SGPC's demolition drive and from its plans for widening the parikrama?

In one of the court's rulings, it declared that the bunga was a historic place and could not be demolished by any managing body, whether by the SGPC or by the owners

⁵⁰ Colonel Iqbal Singh, descendant of the Ramgarhia Bunga, personal conversation with author, March 2015.

⁵¹ Jathedar Dalip Singh, personal conversation with author. He was the Jathedar of the Akal Takhat in the early 1970s.

⁵² Nayanjot Lahiri talks about a number of monuments that were brought down after colonial rule ended. For more, see: Nayanjot Lahiri, *Monuments Matter: India's Archaeological Heritage Since Independence* (Marg Publications, 2016).

of the bunga. This was a small victory for Sardar Tarlochan Singh, who had been involved in the case for over thirty years, having assumed it from his father. After this declaration, Sardar Tarlochan Singh, aged seventy, gifted the bunga to the SGPC for its management and transition into a Sikh misl museum in early 1970s. In 2010, the SGPC called for an expression of interest from museum consultancy and design firms to help build this museum.⁵³

Despite the process of museumization of the bunga, which the SGPC was forced into by the Gurdwara Tribunal and by the settlement reached with Sardar Tarlochan Singh, there remains little interest in bungas amongst the wider Sikh community. A signboard, placed by the SGPC, briefly describes the history of Ramgarhia Bunga, but there remains much more concealed within the structure. The museumization process neither pushed the bunga into secular-preservation concerns, nor did it reawaken the community to its religious and historical functions. In sum, the strategy of obtaining a court order to maintain the structure and build a museum was the only way in which the bunga could be saved from the demolition drive led by the management body.

The three cases discussed above highlight the ways in which the SGPC attempted to assert its authority in seizing control over all lands around the gurdwara as waqf property and claimed to be its natural inheritance. The courts often refuted the SGPC's claims, making the lands around the gurdwara waqf but not necessarily the responsibility of the SGPC. Because of these cases and many others, the SGPC used various tactics to force the issue, like building new structures that obstructed the path to the bungas and forcing

⁵³ *The Indian Express*, "Bunga Ramgarhia to be Converted into Museum," May 8, 2010, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/bunga-ramgarhia-to-be-converted-into-museum/616272/>.

bunga managers to give away their property by creating stringent rules of management.

The bungas, despite being invoked regularly in the ardas several times a day, are today

lost structures that incite little interest or questions from the community.

Chapter Five: “To Serve with Honour”: Deras and the Practice of Kar Seva in the Twentieth Century

The advent of colonial rule in the Punjab in 1849 initiated a series of events that were unprecedented. From increased mobilization by means of railways and roadways to wider access to print media, colonial rule brought with it access to wider geographical reach for more number of people, despite the inequality of such access. One of the central debates in South Asian history has been about the kinds and depth of changes in the socio-cultural and religious fields. In other words, colonial rule did not just enumerate and categorize the colonized people into insular and inward-looking associations, example caste and religious identities, but also led to a “rapid integration of the region into the interregional and global structures that gave the empire its shape... (and) the spatial boundaries of the Punjabi world were suddenly stretched, elongated, and reconfigured”.¹ In other words, while ascriptive identities became more fragmented, these identities were also drawn on a larger and wider scale. This chapter explores one such instance in which the precolonial traditional practices and networks were recast under colonial rule and modified again in the post-colonial period. However, there are clear indications that they are part of the same traditional practice that began in the fifteenth century. Through a study of kar seva (originally desilting of the water tank and later community service to build/ conserve gurdwaras) practice, this chapter explores the role of saints (holy men/ live gurus) and

¹ Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*, (Duke University Press, 2006), 69.

their deras (homes of living Gurus/ holy men) in Sikh practice and the ways in which they have been incorporated by the SGPC. Despite the SGPC's prolific activities from 1920s to standardize and institutionalize Sikh practice, long established religio-cultural traditions were not entirely displaced. Instead, the SGPC incorporated these practices within its folds and minimized the threat posed by these heterodox identities.

The Singh Sabha movement began the process of defining and codifying Sikh religion and practices, a process of sanitizing the religious traditions that was eventually taken over by the SGPC. While the Singh Sabha was prolific with its agenda through print media and organizing festivals that only celebrated the Gurus' lives over agricultural festivals, we do not know how successful the Singh Sabha was in streamlining these practices.² The SGPC took over a similar agenda of sanitizing and institutionalizing Sikh practices but it was more accepting of "living Gurus" and their deras than the Singh Sabha. In the absence of an existing religious language that could speak to a national and global audience, *kar seva* spoke with greater ease. Organized in 1923 by the SGPC, this *kar seva* was SGPC's first populist religious act that included popular saints as the "beloved five" in this event. This inclusion marked not just an acceptance of the heterodox elements within Sikh institutions but show how the Sikh institution as created by the SGPC could not survive without the inclusion of these traditional centres of Sikh learning and practice.

Following the practices and the social processes involved in carrying out the *kar sevas*, we get a glimpse of the motley nature of Sikh authority in religious management.

² Harjot Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries*, (1994); Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, (2006).

The SGPC is not an isolated institution, although it is the premier institution for Sikh religion. It sets the standards not just for the historic gurdwaras in India, but for gurdwaras outside of its authoritative domain, in the UK, USA, Singapore, and elsewhere. At its founding, the SGPC had a wide base of members who came from diverse backgrounds and training. The Committee emerged from a milieu of shared ideas, knowledge, and practices in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. These founding members influenced the SGPC's guidelines, practices, and views on the future direction for the *panth* (literally, the Guru's path, or the Sikh community). For instance, many of the SGPC's founding members committed themselves to *deras* and were *sants*.³ Following Ballantyne's call to "recognize that although the Panth is united by its devotion to the gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhs occupy diverse cultural locations and articulate a multiplicity of identities. The recognition of the cultural exchanges and hybridized social patterns borne out of inequalities of colonialism and the upheavals of migration necessitates the creation of new historiographical visions and forms of practice."⁴ This chapter seeks to add to this new historiographical vision that recognizes the multiplicity of identities and adherence to traditional practices and forms in different format.

The sacred geography of Punjab has undergone significant changes over the twentieth century resulting from various political events. The Partition in 1947 created a new boundary between Punjab in India and Punjab in Pakistan. Another redrawing of the Punjab state in India occurred because of the Punjabi Suba movement in the 1950s and

³ W. H. Mcleod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* (Scarecrow Press, 1995), 70.

⁴ Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, (2006), 33.

1960s. Most recently, the Khalistan movement demanded an independent Punjabi nation-state. These events led to the creation of new boundaries that determined how people accessed religious places, thereby shaping the religious practices and institutions of gurdwaras in Punjab. While these events may have closed off certain regional networks and passages in North India, they opened global networks with the Sikh diaspora. As a result, there developed new institutions, religious authorities, and boundaries between communities. The partition of Punjab in 1947 and the reorganization of the state with a Sikh majority in 1966 have perhaps highlighted the caste and community differences between Sikhs.⁵ Some scholars have suggested that it is because of these differences in caste and community-based organizations that deras and sants have regained their popularity. This chapter argues that the popularity of sants and their deras is not a resurgence of interest purely because of caste or class interests or vote-bank politics. On the contrary, these traditional centers of learning and religious practice were always popular and have been accepted by the SGPC as well.

Sants traditions and Deras

From early 2000s, coverage of sants and their dera increased in media channels and print journalism. Part of this was a consequence of the kar sevas done by groups like Guru Nishkam Sevak Jatha- a group from UK that carried out the kar seva of the golden domes at the Golden Temple in Amritsar and were decried for damaging the heritage of the gurdwaras.⁶ And another reason was the increasing popularity of dera chiefs like Guru

⁵ Ronki Ram, "Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (12 October 2007), 4066-4074.

⁶ "All set for kar seva at Golden Temple", *Times of India*, (24 March 2004)
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/All-set-for-kar-seva-at-Golden-Temple/articleshow/578806.cms>

Ram Raheem, who had a major following in Sirsa, Haryana and Punjab and were considered to be threats to the conventional forms of religious and political bodies like the SGPC and the SAD (political wing of the SGPC).⁷ Scholarly works on deras can be categorized into two fields. Certain works believe deras to be “dens of mischief” and corruption. Additionally, they critique the followers for their mistreatment of heritage structures and for privileging new buildings over historical and “authentic” buildings. Other works consider the caste and class component of dera followers and argue that deras are recent attractions for marginalized groups.⁸ In both perspectives, there is an implicit suggestion that these sants and dera followers are outliers to the mainstream thought and management of Sikhism. Even in academic works, scholars like Harjot Oberoi have argued that the tradition of sants and *pirs* (Muslim spiritual men) was ousted by the Singh Sabha reformers.⁹ Contrary to such works and opinions, this chapter takes into consideration the lineage of sants and deras and their importance to mainstream religious practices and processes as a serious component of lived religion.

The sant tradition belongs to the North Indian region and has varied schools and traditions. Karine Schomer argues that the sant tradition is a controversial topic that has

⁷ Praveen Swami and Aman Sethi, “Faiths at War”, *Frontline*, Volume 24, Issue 11, (June 2- 15, 2007), <https://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2411/stories/20070615002602500.htm>

⁸ Harkirat Singh, “Heritage Destroyed by Custodians,” *Hindustan Times Amritsar*, October 9, 2014; Surinder S. Jodhka, “Of Babas and Deras,” *Seminar*, no. 581 (January 2000): 54–57, http://www.indiaseminar.com/2008/581/581_surinder_jodhka.htm; Varinder Walia, “The Rise and the Fall,” *The Tribune*, September 14, 2006, <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060914/aplus1.htm>; Surinder Singh, “Deras, Caste Conflict and Recent Violence in Punjab,” *Mainstream XLVII*, no. 26 (June 13, 2009); Ronki Ram, “Ravidass Deras and Social Protest: Making Sense of Dalit Consciousness in Punjab,” *Asian Studies* 67, (November 2008); Ronki Ram, “Untouchability, Dalit Consciousness, and the Ad Dharm movement in Punjab,” *Contribution to Indian Sociology* (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2004); Ronki Ram, “Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (October 6, 2007); Vandita Mishra, “Inside Dera Sachkhand,” *The Indian Express*, May 31, 2009.

⁹ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 316.

little consensus among scholars of Hinduism. She says the difficulty begins with the word sant itself, which has “several overlapping usages.” The word derives from the root word, *sat* (truth) and means “one who knows the truth” or “one who has achieved ultimate reality.” However, she says that the word has taken on a more general ethical meaning of a good person, who serves as a good model for society. Historically, however, the term refers to a designation given to poet-saints belonging to traditional *bhakti* (literally devotion, the term refers to saints loosely defined by their beliefs in the identity markers of God and truth) groups. The sant tradition in the north is a fragmented concept that has been pieced together more by scholars than by the sants themselves. They did not think of themselves as belonging to a larger fabric but focused rather on personal enlightenment. Scholars agree that the binding characteristic of these sants is not a self-awareness of belonging together, but a similarity in their teachings. It is for this reason that we find references to other sants in the works of Guru Nanak.¹⁰

Sants and their dera followers have been an important part of the religious landscape of Punjab for centuries. Within Sikh history, we have examples of Udasi sants, Minas sants, and Ram Raiya sants who created their own schools of religious thought and practice, affected by Sikhism, and had major followings around Northern India. These sants were related to the “canonized” Sikh gurus. Authoritative discourse by the SGPC

¹⁰ Diana L. Eck, ed., *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India: Studies in Honor of Charlotte Vaudeville* (Egbert Forsten Publication, 1991); C. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton University Press, 1992); J. S. Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices* (Oxford University Press, 2005); David Lorenzen, ed., *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action* (State University of New York Press, 1995); Katherine Schomer and W. H. McLeod, ed., *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1987); Charlotte Vaudeville, *Myths, Saints, and Legends in Medieval India* (Oxford University Press, 1999); Karen Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

claims that the Gurus cast these heretics out of the fold of Sikhism. However, Jeevan Deol suggests that contrary to this opinion, Minas were “spurned” because they followed a separate lineage of Guruship in opposition to the successor chosen by the previous Guru, Arjan, there is evidence that the Sikh gurus maintained their relations with them.

While the mainstream Sikh community has depicted them as a “criminal” tribe, Minas do not consider themselves to be outside the Sikh community. Minas, Deol says, were prolific in producing hagiographies, scriptural exegesis, and devotional poetry. It is for this reason that the authoritative discourses claim that Guru Arjan asked Bhai Gurdas to compile the *Adi Granth*, the scriptures of the ‘authentic’ Gurus, which is now recognized as the live embodiment of all Gurus and is the final Guru for all Sikhs. Deol also highlights the importance of Minas in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries in the Punjab, as indicated in the vast number of followers that attended the courts of Minas guru. Reading other regional histories of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, Deol says, “This account (*Dabistan-i-mazahib*) indicates that the guruship must have been so thoroughly contested by the descendants of Arjan and Prithi Chand as to create two noticeable panths or sangats—an impression supported by a reading of later Sikh sources, most of which indicate that uncertainty about the succession followed Guru Ramdas’ death.”¹¹ It was only in the twentieth century, Deol argues, that Minas lost their prominence as a result of the Singh Sabha movement.

As such, sants and their dera followers have been a prevalent part of “the enchanted universe of pre-modern religiosity.”¹² It was perhaps through these sants and their dera

¹¹ Jeevan Deol, “The Mīnās and Their Literature,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 2 (April–June, 1998): 174.

¹² Harjot Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries*.

followers that the messages of the Gurus spread beyond their locales and attracted *sangats* (communes) from distant parts of the region.¹³ Deras, in fact, continue to influence and attract new converts in different parts of the world.¹⁴ Paramjit Singh Judge writes, “In the absence of an institutionalized priesthood, and in a predominantly oral tradition, Sikh identity and revivalism have long been inspired by itinerant *sants* in both Punjab and in the global diaspora.”¹⁵ He says that *deras* originated in the Punjab with the Nath tradition of Gorakh Nath, but quickly spread into different traditions, beliefs, and practices. The diversity of these *deras* and their religious principles and practices has attracted very different communities and schools of thought. For example, the Nihang *deras* are associated with the warrior tradition within Sikhism and are known to be a commune of itinerant Sikhs who travel to locations associated with the tenth Sikh guru and the battles he fought. Nihangs are internalists, in that they do not interact with the outside world and have their own practices, education, and training that focus on the martial spirit of the Sikhs.

While the SGPC has traditionally maintained its distance from Nihangs for their practice of consuming opium and focusing on the tenth Guru’s Granth over the *Adi*

¹³ Madanjit Kaur, “The Contribution of the Bungas to the Education of the Punjab,” *Punjab History Conference, Proceedings* (March 17–19, 1978).

¹⁴ For example, 3 HO movements in California led by Yogi Bhajan. His website says, “Yogiji went to Gurdwara every Sunday. Many of his students went with him. A devout Sikh, Yogi Bhajan never tried to convert anyone to follow the Sikh Path. But his faith and devotion, and his deep love of the Guru were contagious. People wanted to learn more about the Sikh religion. Some of his students went to the local Gurdwara in Los Angeles and asked to be baptized as Sikhs. The *Granthi* (religious official) there didn’t know what to do, because Americans had never done this before, so he called Yogiji for help. In 1971, Yogi Bhajan was bestowed the title of *Siri Singh Sahib* by Sant Chanan Singh at the *Akal Takhat* and was authorized to ordain Ministers and perform the Amrit Ceremony. Through his efforts, Sikh Dharma became officially incorporated and recognized by the US Government as a Religion on April 10, 1973.” For more see, Shakti Parwha K. Khalsa, “About Yogi Bhajan,” Healthy Happy Holy Organization, <https://www.3ho.org/yogi-bhajan/about-yogi-bhajan>.

¹⁵ Paramjit Singh Judge, “Taksals, Akharas and Nihang Deras,” in *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis Fenech (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Granth, they have increasingly been inducted into the mainstream in recent years. Some scholars claim that this is to increase the political base of the SGPC, but there are other reasons for their inclusion in the mainstream.¹⁶ Nihangs, while being inward-facing, are an important part of Sikh history and have taken over the dissemination of the tenth Guru's works and practices, like *Gatka*, the martial arts training of the Sikhs, and *dhadi* singing, a particular form of music invoking the martial spirit of the Sikhs. Nihangs also played a very important role in the *kar seva* following the Indian Army's attack on the Golden Temple in 1984. The SGPC and the Sikh population deeply contested this *kar seva* as they believed that the Government of India was behind it.¹⁷

While some *deras* can trace their lineage and history back to the sixteenth century and earlier, many *deras* are newer and have been established in places like Birmingham and Kericho, Kenya. Paramjit S. Judge says, "Deras are invariably non-sectarian in nature. Even when they have acquired the status of a sect, they do not insist on being part of an exclusive normative system for the adherents. Dera identity has traditionally been more like an 'add-on' identity. One continues to be a Sikh or a Hindu or a Muslim and still gets blessings or *naam* from the guru or the *pir* at the dera."¹⁸

While Judge suggests that *deras* are largely fluid organizations, this is not a universal understanding of *deras*. For instance, Baba Kashmira Singh argues, "Sikhs are breaking away from *gurudwaras* and coming to *deras* like mine for spiritual guidance because of their disillusionment with Sikhism." Meanwhile, Avtar Singh Makkar, the

¹⁶ Joginder Singh, "Sikhs in Independent India," in *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis Fenech (Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Shekhar Gupta, "The Elusive Solution," *India Today*, August 15, 1984, 58–67; Man Singh Deora, ed., *Aftermath of Blue Star* (Anmol Publications, 1991).

¹⁸ Paramjit Singh Judge, "Taksals, Akharas and Nihang Deras."

President of SGPC claims, “We are trying to bring such babas [another name for sants] into our fold. But many are misusing the gurbani [literally Guru’s voice, or devotional songs] for their own commercial motives and we are directly in confrontation with them.”¹⁹ All these deras have significant differences in their practices, principles, and understanding of Sikhism. Many of these are simply Sikh gurdwaras led by individual sants and their followers. Often, deras have been built in the memory of a sant, when the sant has gained a more sacred status, although still below the *Adi Granth*’s sacred status as the sacred book is considered to be a living being. These dera followers largely adhere to the conventions of Sikh preaching as they have evolved, with a few differences from the mainstream institutionalized preaching of SGPC;²⁰ the SGPC recognizes these dera run temples as gurdwaras. For example, Bibi Jagir Kaur heads the dera for Labana Sikhs in the Punjab and was president of SGPC in 1999.

Broadly speaking, deras can be divided into four categories. The first category is deras that give primacy to the *Adi Granth* and largely accept SGPC’s practice of Sikhism. An example of such a dera is Baba Sham Singh ji, discussed later in the chapter. Another example of this is the Damdami Taksal, which may have some differences with the SGPC over politics but typically echoes the organizational and institutional line of the SGPC.

The second category contains sant traditions that have always differed from the mainstream SGPC view. These deras have their own distinct practices, philosophies, and

¹⁹ Surinder S. Jodhka, “Of Babas and Deras.”

²⁰ Joginder Singh says, “There are 25 historical and 107 non-historical gurdwaras (in Amritsar in 2009). Among the non-historical, 25 per cent of gurdwaras are based on caste/sect; 20 per cent belong to various babas; 8 per cent are constructed in memory of dead personalities; and 47 per cent belong to various Singh Sabhas. The castes to which these gurdwaras belong are Ramgarhia, Kamboj, Bhatra, Jat, Khatri, Mazhabi, Sevapanthi, and Namdhari.” Joginder Singh, “Sikhs in Independent India.”

visions for their future, but these are still grounded in the Guru's philosophy. Examples of this category are the Nirankari and Namdhari Sikhs, who believe in a Living Guru but also Sikh scriptures. They have their own specific rituals of birth, marriage, and death. These deras have separate religious places as well and their community does not use the gurdwara as the singular location for meetings or rituals.²¹ Another sub-group of sants and deras within this category are the global sants, who provide believers an avenue to participate in Sikh practices while living away from India, but still tow the institutional line. They have established gurdwaras, educational and technical institutions, hospitals and other charitable organizations, both within and outside Punjab, creating zones of influence parallel to the SGPC, which also manages such institutions. More importantly, these sants have been active in the kar sevas of the gurdwara. For example, the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha was tasked with replacing Maharaja Ranjit Singh's plates in the Golden Temple that had been placed in the early nineteenth century with gilded copper plates. This dera has been criticized for the damage caused to the heritage structure because of this task, as they did not appoint a trained person to carry out this seva.²² Later in this chapter, I will examine the context in which diasporic sants have taken up kar sevas and the implication for the heritage of the gurdwaras for the Sikh community.

The third category includes sant traditions that are very different from mainstream Sikhism, to the point where there seems to be no similarity between the two. For example,

²¹ W. H. Mcleod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*.

²² Amandeep Mandra, "Kar Seva at the Golden Temple for Cleaning of Gold Plating Changes Hand," <http://news.ukpha.org/2013/06/kar-seva-at-golden-Temple-for-cleaning-of-gold-plating-changes-hands/>; Yudhivir Rana, "Let SGPC Give in Writing, We Will Stop Seva: GNNSJ," *Hindustan Times*, April 28, 2003, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Let-SGPC-give-in-writing-we-will-stop-seva-GNNSJ/articleshow/-149259456.cms>.

the Udasis, the Nirmalas, and the Sevapanthis are traditions of sants and deras that are very different from mainstream Sikh practices and principles of the SGPC. They are closer to Hindu yogic practices and spirituality. These deras had been well-integrated with Sikh institutions and practices in the early half of the twentieth century but were later sidelined by the orthodox leaders of the SGPC.

The final and fourth category of deras have almost become new religions movements across the globe. Deras like the Sacha Sauda Dera from Sirsa (Haryana) and are representative of current trends of regional and global politics. These deras attract lower caste and class communities and are also popular amongst the Sikh diaspora who have the resources and desire to participate in Sikh religious institutions, albeit from a distance.

As this chapter shows, these deras are important because of their wide following, both regionally and globally. They are prominent players in Sikh religious and political practices and it is for this reason that the SGPC has incorporated them within their structure. The following section on the *kar sevas* shows how the sants effectively influence Sikh traditions and practices. The *kar seva* of 1923 created a new fervor in the community to come together and perform an act of religiosity that renewed its sense of belonging, but at the same time summoned a new mass public into being. There had been other traditional events where Sikhs had gathered in large numbers in Amritsar, for example on *gurpurabs* (birth anniversaries of the Gurus) and other sacred days according to the agricultural customs in the Punjab. The 1923 *kar seva*, however, differed by the sheer scale of people coming into Amritsar. We have reports from the Punjab CID on the

huge mass of people arriving into Amritsar, which brought on security fears as a result.²³

In a literal sense, the kar seva was just a cleansing of the amrit sarovar to remove the silt accumulated over the years (sources say it had reached four feet high), but the timing of the event suggests a deeper meaning.

Deras' Influence on Kar Sevas: The Continuation of Traditions in the Twentieth Century

From every part of the Punjab, even from the depths of the jungle, Sikhs flocked in multitudes to Amritsar. Special trains had to be run, in which the pilgrims were closely packed, some finding room on the foot-boards, the tender, and even on the engine. It is reckoned that more than 300,000 devotees took part in the festival, and followed barefoot the ritual procession that preceded the ceremony. The column of pilgrims was more than three miles long. *Five persons of high rank, known as the 'Well- beloved,' inaugurated the work of digging.... The crowd thronged the Temple walls, some crawling in the mud, or sinking in it up to their knees, and even waists..., in their efforts to get near the place where the 'Well-beloved' were, so that they could take away, as soon as the ceremony had begun, a little mud from the sacred reservoir.* This mud they will keep in their homes, and they will leave it to their descendants. And every hour of every day since the 17th June has seen the same fervor, the same ritual observances performed by thousands and thousands of Sikhs.²⁴

The quote above was published in the *Illustrated London News* for an English audience regarding a ritualistic event in the Punjab in 1923. Highlighting the volume of people attending this event, it captures the challenge this event posed for the colonial officials in the Punjab, for instance, special arrangements had to be made at the railway station, to ensure that the walled city was secure and there was continuous surveillance in the area.²⁵ This event, known as the kar seva of 1923, was occurring at the same time as

²³ "Exemption from Terminal Tax of the Articles Imported by the Darbar Sahib Authorities of Amritsar Income with the Clearance of Silt of the Holy Tanks," Punjab Government Civil Secretariat, Part B, Proceedings, File no. 293, 1937/30, April 1923.

²⁴ *Illustrated London News*, "Where Mud is Sacred: Strange Rites at an Islanded Sikh Shrine," September 15, 1923, 28, italics added.

²⁵ "Exemption from Terminal Tax of the Articles Imported by the Darbar Sahib Authorities of Amritsar Income with the Clearance of Silt of the Holy Tanks," Punjab Government Civil Secretariat, Part B, Proceedings, File no. 293, 1937/30, April 1923.

other gurdwaras in the region were being occupied by Sikhs, to oust traditional mahants and caretakers. Incidents like that at Nankana Sahib gurdwara were all too fresh in the memories of the colonial officials and the Sikh participants, wherein a confrontation between the mahant and Sikh leaders led to physical and violent fights between the two sides. The kar seva, although motivated by religious feelings, posed a threat to the colonial officials.

The *kar seva* of 1923 was one of the earliest mass gatherings organized by the SGPC, soon after its formation in 1920. At this time, the SGPC was an ‘illegal’ body, and was under British scrutiny for organizing other politically charged events that occupied gurdwaras for long periods of time and challenged the mahants authority in these spaces. The Gurdwara Reform Movement was at its peak during the kar seva. This kar seva placed the SGPC as the supreme representative of the Sikh community, as opposed to any other Sikh representative bodies like the Chief Khalsa Diwan, which is structurally SGPC’s predecessor.

At the time of the kar seva, it was unclear whether the SGPC was purely a political or religious body.²⁶ It was also unclear whether it was more radical than the previous reformist body, i.e. The Singh Sabha, and the question of how could the SGPC distinguish itself from other Sikh bodies and representatives was at large. The Singh Sabha was a socio-religious reform movement that began in 1881, with the foundation of the first Sabha in Amritsar. This movement is understood to be the intellectual

“Report of the Pilgrim Committee Regarding the Railway Arrangements for Pilgrim Traffic,” Part A, Proceedings, March 1922, File no. 214, 35-7 and 49/50 B.

²⁶ Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab 1849–1947* (Sage, 2005).

predecessor of the SGPC, as the SGPC adopted the conservative views of the reformers. Chief Khalsa Diwan was the first socio-political organization of Sikhs that came into existence on October 30, 1902. The Chief Khalsa Diwan's objectives were to promote the intellectual, moral, educational, and economic welfare of the Khalsa order. They particularly invested greatly in publishing the Sikh *rahit maryadas* (code of conduct) and in propagating the correct practices of Sikhism by compiling works on daily practices while also promoting the Sikh Education Conference that attended to the issue of Sikhs education in the twentieth century, focussing specifically on issues of women's education and the technical training of the Sikh community in fields of science. The Panch Khalsa Diwan was more radical in its view of Sikhism and followed similar tactics as the Chief Khalsa Diwan in promoting Sikhism across Punjab, for example, they published their own *rahit maryada*, but this was a lot more stringent than the CKD's. It was important for the SGPC to distinguish itself from all these other organizations and establish its authority quickly. Commonly, newly established competing community groups quickly lost steam and either dispersed or lost any clout on their followers.²⁷ The beginning of the *kar seva* was deeply colored by this context in which it was first organized, and its impact on the SGPC's organizational structure has endured.

Kar seva literally means the service (*seva*) of silt (*gar* in Persian and *kar* in Punjabi), which accumulated at the bottom of the *amrit sarovar* (sacred water tank). Volunteers collected and disposed of the silt, a deed considered to be one of the greatest performances of service by the Sikhs. The quote above says that Sikhs doing this *seva* saved the silt as sacred mud and took it to their homes. The silt by being in the *gurdwara*

²⁷ N. G. Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature* (Manohar, 1970).

is sacred and is considered to have miraculous powers. Sikhs continue to hold on to such beliefs and I confirmed this during my fieldwork in 2013-14. It is not just the silt though that is sacred, any part of the gurdwaras' built-material is now considered sacred, as it has been a part of the gurdwara for a period. So kar sevas as a term have extended from just gathering and desilting to building parts of the gurdwara that are essential to the religious function. This extension of kar seva was instrumental to the deepening ties between the sants, deras and the SGPC.



Figure 18: First Kar Seva in 1923



Figure 19: Kar Seva 1923 © Illustrated Weekly of London



Figure 20: Bashesar Nath Chopra, "Where Mud is Sacred: Strange Rites at an Islanded Sikh Shrine," Illustrated London News, 15 September 1923

The article from the *Illustrated Weekly of London* quoted above mentions, "Five persons of high rank, known as the 'Well- beloved,' inaugurated the work of digging.... The crowd thronged the Temple walls, some crawling in the mud, or sinking in it up to

their knees, and even waists...., in their efforts to get near the place where the ‘Well-beloved’ were...”. These five “well-beloved” men were the *panj piare* (the beloved five) who led the seva. The original panj piare were five Sikh men who were first inducted into Khalsa in 1699. Legend has it that on Baisakhi Day in 1699, the tenth Guru Gobind Rai transformed Sikhism into a new form known as Khalsa Sikhism. This form of Sikhism outlined a courageous and sacrificial persona for Sikhs. As a result, Sikhs adopted the new name of Singh (for men) and Kaur (for women) and underwent a baptism of sorts, signifying a new birth, whereupon Guru Gobind Rai became Guru Gobind Singh. Tat Khalsa or the Singh Sabha is known to have promoted the Khalsa identity over others like the sants that are discussed in this chapter. These five “beloved” personified the original panj piare, who had adopted new personas in the face of danger and uncertainty. The beloved five took on a symbolic role in Sikh practice, especially in the formation of any political council.²⁸

The beloved five in the kar seva of 1923 were Baba Sham Singh ji of Atta Mandi; Gulab Singh Gholia (Moga); Fateh Singh, the head granthi of the Golden Temple; Baba Kharak Singh, the President of SGPC; and Sardar Teja Singh Samundari, the Vice President of SGPC. To be chosen as one of the beloved five was a high honor, as it gave that individual a position of authority in traditions and practices of Sikhism. Interestingly, the beloved five during the kar seva represented different schools of thought and practices of Sikhism as opposed to the mainstream ideology adopted by the SGPC in the following years.

²⁸ Bhai Santokh Singh, “Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth,” *Khalsa Samachar*, ed. Bhai Vir Singh (Amritsar, 1963); Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prachin Panth Prakash* (Amritsar, 1962); Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash* (1776).

Gulab Singh Gholia belonged to the dera of Bhai Ram Singh in the Faridkot district. He was trained as a *kirtankari* (people who performed hymns at the gurdwara), and to further train in the scriptures such as the *Adi Granth*, he studied Sanskrit, which was then common practice. For this reason, he apprenticed under Giani Anokh Singh in Sangrur, where he studied Sanskrit and Vedanta for approximately ten years, finally moving on to Rishikesh to further study classics under Pandit Nihal Singh and Pandit Advaitanand. Here he also studied Indian medicine. As the Singh Sabha movement gained popularity, he returned to the Punjab and took on a greater role in the education of Sikhs as well as in doing *kirtan* (performing of hymns) in Amrtisar.²⁹ He was actively involved in the Rikabganj affair in Delhi in 1914, where a group of Sikh reformers contested the building of the new colonial capital (Delhi) by taking over parts of the gurdwara land.³⁰ Gulab Singh Gholia's biographical sketch seems at odds with the present understanding of Sikhism as defined by the SGPC, where kirtankaris are trained at the Damdami Taksal and the Sikh Missionary College and not at deras, as discussed in Chapter Two. It would be difficult today to find professional kirtankaris who are also trained in Indian medicine or in Vedantic knowledge. There has been a streamlining of professional training with the SGPC coming to the fore in institutionalizing Sikhism. Yet, deras continue to be very important to Sikh practices and education, and their significance is even more marked during kar sevas.

²⁹ Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism* (Hemkunt Press, 1998); H. S. Doabia, *Life Stories of the Sikh Saints* (Singh Brothers, 1995); Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines* (Sikh Itihas Research Board, 1942); Joginder Singh, *Sikh Leadership in the Early Twentieth Century* (GNDU, 1999).

³⁰ Harjot Oberoi, "From Gurdwara Rikabganj to the Viceregal Palace," *Punjab Past and Present* 14 (1980): 182-98; Mrinalini Rajagopalan, "1918-Rasul Numa Dargah: Interrupting the Archive; Indigenous Voices and Colonial Hegemony," in *Building Histories* (Chicago University Press, 2017): 59-86; K. L. Tuteja, *Sikh Politics 1920-40* (Vishal Publications, 1984).

Baba Sham Singh ji, another of the panj piare in the 1923 kar seva, has a dera dedicated to him in the Atta Mandi (an area in the walled city located in close proximity to the Golden Temple), which is fairly popular in Amritsar even amongst the *Amritdhari* Sikhs (baptized Sikhs).³¹ Baba Sham Singh had also been a kirtankari at the Golden Temple, just like Gulab Singh Gholia, and his followers believed he lived for 125 years, from 1800 till 1925. They believed he was a kirtankari at the Golden Temple for 75 years, from the 1840s onwards.³² Legends have it that Baba Sham Singh ji was adopted by a Sevapanthi, Sant Bhai Ram Singh. Sevapanthis are a dera founded in the seventeenth century when the Sikhs were being persecuted and when many battles were fought between the Sikhs and Mughal and Afghan forces. This dera believes in doing service without any discrimination. Its followers believed it was the caretaker of some of the bungas around the Golden Temple. Sevapanthis are also known to have a close association with the Udasi sants and the Nirmalas. These three *sampradayas* (traditions of learning) were prolific in their literary activity and were custodians of the Golden Temple at some point from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.³³ Baba Sham Singh ji

³¹ Personal interviews with devotees coming into the dera over a period of three months from June to September 2013. I was introduced to this dera by a contact who is an Amritdhari Sikh. He and his family have been devotees of the dera for more than a generation.

³² Major Prem Singh, *Jivan Braham Giani Sant Baba Sham Singh* (Sohan Singh Pub., Amritsar, 1978); Giani Balwant Singh, *Agam Agadh Purakh Shriman Pujya Sant Attar Singh Ji Maharaj Mastuane Valian da Sampuran Jivan Charittar* (Mastuana Pub., 1983); Suraj Singh, *Baba Sham Singh Ji* (no pub., no date).

³³ Gurinder Singh Mann, "Sikh Studies and the Sikh Educational Heritage," in *Studying the Sikhs: Issues for North America*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Gurinder Singh Mann (SUNY Press, 1993), 95–112; Gurinder Singh Mann, "Teaching the Sikh Tradition: A Course at Columbia," in *Studying the Sikhs*, 129–160; Christopher Shackle, "Survey of Literature in the Sikh Tradition," *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis Fenech (Oxford University Press, 2014); Eleanor Nesbitt, *Sikhism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism* (Hemkunt Press, 1998); Shamsher Singh Ashok, *Atharvi Sadi da Punjab* (SGPC, 1972).

moved to Amritsar with his Guru, Baba Ram Singh, where he stayed at the Dharamsala of Addanshahis, another name for Udasis sants.

After his preliminary training in scripture reading, Baba Sham Singh ji studied Sikh theology and history successively under the guidance of Pandit Atma Singh and the Nirmala scholar, Thakur Dayal Singh.³⁴ Baba Sham Singh ji embodied the education and training he had through his life. For instance, there is a story of Bhai Sham Singh ji's life about traveling from Haridwar, where he was training in religious scriptures, to Amritsar in order to make a pilgrimage to the Golden Temple. When he returned he became very sick and performed *bhumi aasana*, a practice in yoga, along with *nam simran*, a Sikh practice of repeating the name of the Guru.³⁵ The writer of this text gives many examples where Baba Sham Singh ji practiced Advaita Vedanta and Sikhism, which seemed to have philosophical similarities, specifically with the belief that the soul is the same as the universal truth or *Brahman*.

Baba Sham Singh ji wrote a handwritten *pothi* (scriptures) called the *Bhagat Prem Prakash*, also known as the *Prem Pracheean Baba Sham Singh*. The language of the *pothi* signifies the confluence of philosophies, knowledge, and traditions. It indicates a regional exchange that was taking place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continued in the twentieth century, as Baba Sham Singh ji continued to write in the *pothi* till the very end of his life. Although the *pothi* was written in Punjab, the language is a mix between Hindi and dialects from Haryana (then a part of Punjab); Haridwar-Rishikesh, where he was trained in Vedanta, theology, scriptures, history, and yoga; from Jammu,

³⁴ Major Prem Singh, *Jivan Braham*; Giani Balwant Singh, *Agam Agadh*.

³⁵ Major Prem Singh, *Jivan Braham*, 24.

where his Guru was from; and finally, Manjha Punjabi from the vicinity of Amritsar. An example from this text gives a flavor for the language.

Ik yavan (musalman) fakir kalavant Khun Shah nam tiska, sasta jis ko siddhon ki devion, aur param shaktivan, dono pantho ke pujan mein bi, ate ashram tinka subhaviman jaise rikhion ka hota hai, jo jeev subhavak shatur bhav karan hare hai, so tinke ashram par vair tiag kar vicharte hai. Aise anant gunon ke dharan hare so sain lok, koi rababi jal pan karat bhaya tin pas jai kar. Tab sau puchat bhai, 'jo tum kaun ho? "tab so kahat ji guru Nanak ji ka shabad padan vala 'rababi'." Aisa sun kar so sahib lok kehat bhae jo 'bhai mardane di umat? Phir kehet bhae oh sain lok: "vah vah Nanak darvesh, vah Nanak kalandar, Nanak Shah faqir, hinduon ka guru, muslamanon ka pir. Guru Nanak ji ka darja vada hai khuda ke darbar mein."³⁶

The text says, "There once was a Muslim ascetic who was also knowledgeable in science; his name was Khun Shah. He was a follower of two sects, the Gossains and the Udasis. He lived like a Hindu ascetic and had given up enmity and fear. He was the bearer of so much knowledge, so the yogis and the Gossains, who have achieved greater spirituality and knowledge, asked this Muslim ascetic, "Who are you?" and he said, "I am a Rababi who reads Guru Nanak's words." Hearing this, the yogis said, "like Bhai Mardana?" and the Gossains said, "Praise Nanak devotee! For Nanak belonged to both, the Muslims and the Hindus. Guru Nanak has a higher ranking in God's court."

Words like *tiska*, *tinka*, and *ate* are distinctly Punjabi words, while *kalavant*, *kehat*, *subhaviman*, *subhavak*, and *gunon ke dharan* are Hindi words. Apart from language choices, the content of the pothi also reflects diverse knowledge from the region, while often privileging Guru Nanak's knowledge and practices. Guru Nanak is accepted by all the sampradayas of Udasis, Nirmalas, Sevapanthis and Sikhs as the founder of Sikhism. The differences emerged in these religious sects, as Jeevan Deol explained in his work on

³⁶ Prem Pracheeyan Baba Sham Singh, quoted in Major Prem Singh, *Jivan Braham*, 133–34.

the Minas as well, with the direction these sects wanted to take after Guru Nanak's passing. For example, the Udasis continued to integrate Guru Nanak's teachings with yogic and tantric practices. Minas chose Prithi Chand, Guru Arjan's brother, as the Guru after their father Guru Ram Das, although they accepted the teachings of the previous Gurus. The story cited above highlights the respect and higher privilege given to Guru Nanak, although other religious sects like the Gossains and the Udasis received respect.

Baba Sham Singh ji was trained in this context of different sampradayas that influenced each other in significant ways. His dera continues some of these practices and traditions. The SGPC accepted and welcomed this, as evident from his role as one of the panj piare in the first kar seva. He is also held in great esteem for having baptized two highly revered Sikh leaders, Bhai Vir Singh and Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia.

Baba Sham Singh ji would travel to different gurdwaras where he would perform different kinds of seva to improve the experience of devotees. Some examples of his seva include building a *parikrama* (pathway around the gurdwara) at Gurdwara Mata Kaulsar (behind the Golden Temple and Gurdwara Atal Rai), painting the gurdwara in Khadur Sahib, building a room at Sangrana Sahib, rebuilding the Jhanda Bunga in the Golden Temple, building foot baths at the entrance of the gurdwara, repairing stairs to Santokhsar Sahib and building the parikrama, resthouses, and extra rooms in the gurdwaras where there was no space for pilgrims to stay.³⁷

At the Golden Temple, there is a story of Baba Sham Singh ji giving a sermon about seva's importance to Sikhs' lives. He said, "The seva of the Guru Granth Sahib is

³⁷ Suraj Singh, *Baba Sham Singh Ji* (no date), 54–56.

the seva of the Guru's heart. And the seva of gurdwaras is the seva of the Guru's body."³⁸ He encouraged Sikhs to perform seva of the gurdwara, from menial tasks like cleaning the parikrama to more important tasks like building *chabeels* (water points) and stairs to enter the gurdwara. In fact, it was Baba Sham Singh ji who is known to have inspired Gurmukh Singh of Patiala to do the kar seva in 1923 and later sevas as well. Gurmukh Singh is known for many sevas all over India. For example, he oversaw building the main shrine at Muktsar. He helped construct a twenty-kilometer paved road linking Khadur Sahib and Goindwal to Tarn Taran; helped build Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib at Khadur Sahib; and helped reconstruct Gurdwara Dera Sahib and the *sarovar* (pond) at Jamarai, which is the ancestral village of Guru Nanak.³⁹ Following him, Baba Jiwan Singh Kar-seva-wale became Gurmukh Singh's disciple and continued the tradition of kar seva. Baba Jiwan Singh was a central figure in the kar seva of the amrit sarovar in 1973.

Baba Sham Singh ji has a wide following both in India and outside. During my fieldwork, on certain occasions at the dera, I observed that a *granthi* (reader of scriptures) would read parts of his pothi by mobile phone to Baba Sham Singh ji's followers in different parts of the world. I could listen to some of these sessions over the phone (for diasporic followers only) and in person (for local followers). In the brief sessions that I observed, I heard descriptions of the seva done by Baba Sham Singh ji over his lifetime and how this reflects Sikh ethics, responsibilities, and morals in the present day. His pothi contains interesting historical facts about the Golden Temple and Amrtisar from the perspective of Sevapanthis. Additionally, there are hagiographies of different sants that

³⁸ Ibid., 19.

³⁹ Giani Gurdit Singh, *Sant Gurmukh Singh Patiala Wale* (Sikh Sahit Prakashan, 1985); Sant Visakha Singh, *Malva Itihas* (Kishanpura, 1954).

inform the dera and the practices of its followers, like the one mentioned above. Largely, these hagiographies stress characteristics like compassion and devotion, and the devotees are asked to perform kar sevas in the gurdwara or donate for the kar seva.

A work by Jang Singh Giani lists the different kar seva projects in the Golden Temple done by leading sants. The figures below show some of these projects that modernized the gurdwara facilities that were perceived as problems by the SGPC and recorded in the *Gurdwara Gazette*. For instance, the langar hall was first built and then expanded in the 1950s and was located right behind the Ramgarhia Bunga.



Figure 21: Guru ka Langar © Gurveen Khurana

In personal conversations with Colonel Iqbal Singh, heir to the Ramgarhia Bunga, said that he remembered the time when they lived in the Ramgarhia Bunga till early 1960, after which they gave the Ramgarhia Bunga to the SGPC under conditions that the bunga would not be demolished and that a Misl museum would be built there. He says that the

SGPC had been applying pressure on the family to hand the bunga to them for many years, but it was only when the langar hall was expanded and drew its border close to the family's home that they had no choice but to vacate.

The second picture shows Guru Nanak Niwas, which is built behind the gurdwara entrance, and was built by kar seva sants including Baba Jaimal Singh Bhuriwale. This dera now is known for its kar sevas solely and the head is known as the kar seva baba of Bhuriwale.



Figure 22: Guru Ram Das Sarai built in the 1930s © Pratap Singh 'Giani': Sifti da Ghar

A period of intense building activity followed the passage of the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 recorded in the Gurdwara Reports available from 1929 to early 1940s. We have records of the resources allocated for buildings- repairs and new buildings and audit

reports on how much was spent and for what particular projects.⁴⁰ These reports indicate that building activity increased and became one of the central focus for the management committee, as discussed in chapter two. Although the regular repair, renovation, and rebuilding of gurdwaras was not new to Sikhism, there was a difference in the intentions and the intensity to this activity during and after the Gurdwara Reform Movement (1920–25). The intensity and interest grew quite steadily from early 1930s and peaked again in the 1990s, as the Sikh diaspora started contributing to these activities. Sants and their deras were heavily involved in these projects as they provided both monetary resources and physical labor through its large following.

As newer and glossier buildings came up, the question of the impact of these building projects became evident, especially about their historical value and the overall impact on heritage. Scholars and conservation architects have termed most of the recent renovation works and new buildings to be inauthentic “eyesores,” making an argument for protecting the continuity of historical structures and materials and ousting the *kar seva* babas, who are considered to be ignorant and uneducated.⁴¹ In May 2008, Chander Suta Dogra asked, “Have you the Eyes for It?” The question was posed in the context of the recent demolition and rebuilding of the historical *baradari* (a building or pavilion with 12 doors) at Gurdwara Hazoor Sahib in Nanded. Quoting H. S. Dilgeer, she says that after 1984, the Sikh community donated generous amounts of money and time to rebuild the Golden Temple precinct. Soon the *kar sevaks* (those doing the *kar seva*) realized the value of these projects and the opportunity to profit. Dilgeer says, “The trend then spread across

⁴⁰ Gurdwara Reports 1929-1940.

⁴¹ Chander Suta Dogra, “Have You the Eyes for It?”, *Outlook* (5 May 2008).

Punjab, and in the last two decades, old heritage structures began to be demolished and replaced by garish, opulent marble gurdwaras.” Chander Suta Dogra, and other scholars quoted in the article suggest that there is collusion and corruption between the kar sevaks and the leadership at the SGPC, who she claims are at the same time ignorant and uncaring about Sikh heritage. Dr. Gurtej Singh says, “Whether it is the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee or the Akal Takt or even the political Akali Dal which draws its strength from the former two, there is no appreciation for our heritage... The SGPC patronizes these babas and they do not realize that they are converting history into mythology by destroying historical evidence.” Dogra’s article highlights a popular sentiment amongst scholars of the Punjab and conservation architects about how religious communities value or devalue their heritage and their built structures.⁴² Additionally, the gurdwaras are also tourist sites, which adds to the pressure to make these buildings look polished and new.

Sants and their deras have been doing kar seva since the seventeenth century, specifically since the Sevapanthi sampradaya came into existence. Although kar seva is a voluntary service, since the 1920s only the SGPC can authorize these sevas, especially when they happen in historic gurdwaras. While many deras had their own traditions and styles of doing kar seva, they have now been integrated into the SGPC’s ideal for standardizing and modernizing gurdwaras. A structured approach has thus been created, where the SGPC now seeks tenders for the kar seva work. In a call for “expression of interest” for the “appointment of conservation experts for Sri Harimandir Sahib” in 2013,

⁴² Chander Suta Dogra, “Have You the Eyes for It?”; Varinder Walia, “The Rise and the Fall”; Amandeep Mandra, “Kar Seva at the Golden Temple”; Yudhvir Rana, “Let SGPC Give in Writing”.

the SGPC made clear its criteria for appointing the right people for this work. The form states:

With a view to ensure a thoroughly professional implementation of the initiative; the consultant/consultancy and implementing firm must have an association with individual(s)/domain expert(s) of building conservation/artwork conservation/ architectural and art history background. This is an essential requisite.

1. The applicant should be a registered Architect/Firm with special expertise in Building Conservation/Consortium of allied professionals/organization registered in India. Appropriate documents supporting their status must be submitted.
2. The applicant should have the requisite ability to execute conservation of art works such as Wall Paintings, and Copper gilding/Goldwork, ability to manage complex situations and to effectively co-ordinate the work with the concerned offices/officers of SGPC.
3. The applicant should have academic, technical and financial capabilities on the lines, mentioned below.

Technical Expertise- To provide the project a professional & right direction, the associated/employed panel of expert(s) should have the following qualifications:

- Principal applicant should have a recognized degree/diploma in Architecture with Master in Conservation/Archaeology or equivalent or have commensurate experience in the field.
- At least one member should have a degree/diploma in Art Conservation or equivalent or have commensurate experience in the field.
- At least one member should be a Historian/Art Historian/Social Scientist.
- Others in the panel should include conservators, architects, artists, with sound background & experience.
- In case of association/consortium, the lead applicant should have qualifications in Building Conservation including association/team members with conservators.⁴³

⁴³ EOI, Conservation works of the Main Shrine: Relating to Building Structure at Harimandir Sahib, Shri Amritsar, Punjab. <http://sgpc.net/tenders-2/>

The contracting process in the gurdwara was therefore centralized and tightly controlled by the management body. There had emerged, for this reason, a particular and standard practice and view of Sikhism, especially when it came to conduct kar sevas in and around the gurdwara by the 1980s. Kar seva became the SGPC's response to the various challenges it perceived from external power contests. For example, the SGPC's decision to raze the Victorian Clock Tower in 1947–48 was an explicit response to the end of colonial rule to reclaim the gurdwara space as its own, and as my interaction with Jathedar Dalip Singh suggested, the SGPC encouraged the Sikh public to demolish this structure as a kar seva. Other examples about kar sevas of the gurdwara space, where rest houses, langar halls and the very parikrama within the gurdwara took on new significations and established Sikh autonomy and authority. It became evident to the SGPC, from the first kar seva in 1923, that the deras and sants had to be included in these events, evident in the inclusion of Baba Sham Singh and Gulab Singh Gholia.

In this realization, kar seva also took on a more powerful position amongst the Sikh community, as more than a simple donation of money, time and resources. But a planned engagement with the space of the gurdwara, creating and strengthening this social formation amongst the Sikh public. Kar seva as a practice and as a concept has developed and matured in particular ways. The new building process and the institutionalization of kar seva shows that the Sikh community did not forsake its interest in historical buildings entirely, while rebuilding in a way that replaced the old. On the contrary, it crafted a narrative of rejuvenation and autonomy. In the next section, I investigate the kar seva done by the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha at the Golden Temple in 1994. In this

section, we see how deras have evolved from the early twentieth century, discussed above, and how they conceive the role of kar seva in bringing the community together.

New Riches: Gold Plating the Dome at the Golden Temple

In explaining the motives and desire to do seva amongst the diaspora, Murphy suggests that kar sevas provide an “alternative to militant political modes of action related to the Khalistan movement, which has sought an independent Sikh state in India—modes that in recent years have lost power within the mainstream Sikh diaspora community.”⁴⁴ She writes that this kar seva should be seen as a political act as it “asserts particular orders of values, and often entails the conversion of peripheral or non-mainstream life-styles and value systems to fit a dominant one.”⁴⁵ Murphy’s assertion of kar seva as political and an alternative to a violent movement from the 1980s alone is limiting in understanding why the diaspora engages in kar seva in their “home” countries and in India. This approach in understanding diaspora’s involvement in kar sevas falls neatly in Tony Ballantyne’s historiographical categorization of the “diasporic approach.”⁴⁶ This approach, Ballantyne explains, grew out of histories and sociological studies of Sikh migrants and developed in 1970s and 1980s and were focused on issues of acculturation and assimilation. Anne Murphy’s reading of the kar seva emerges from this understanding of diaspora studies of

⁴⁴ Anne Murphy, “Mobilizing Seva (Service): Modes of Sikh Diasporic Action,” in *South Asians in Diaspora: Religions and Histories*, ed. Knut Jacobsen and Pratap Kumar (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 337–72.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 363.

⁴⁶ Examples of the diasporic approach includes Knut A. Jacobsen, Kristina Myrvold, ed. *Sikhs Across Borders: Transnational Practices of European Sikhs* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2012); Michael Angelo, *The Sikh Diaspora: Tradition and Change in an Immigrant Community* (Garland Publishing, 1997); Darshan S. Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood* (UCL Press, 1999).

assimilation wherein she studies why the Sikh community does any kind of service in their “host” country- the USA.

Tony Ballantyne however also suggests that the study of diaspora can also be very productive because it allows us to understand the history of mobilities from nineteenth century to the present, despite the inequalities and issues of access. He writes, “At an analytical level, the concept of a Sikh diaspora was both promising and troubling. In conceiving of the diaspora, itself as the analytical focus (rather than the Sikh community in a nation), the possibility of a genuinely transnational approach to Sikh studies is opened. In so doing, a strategy is produced through which we might recover not only the social networks, institutional structures, and cultural traffic that have linked Sikhs living overseas with the Punjab, but also the ties that directly connect different diasporic communities.”⁴⁷ Following Ballantyne, this chapter on kar seva captures the regional as well as the global networks of knowledge, ideas, and practices in the two main events discussed here, the kar seva of 1923 and the kar seva of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha (GNNSJ).

Sant Puran Singh, born in India in 1898, founded the GNNSJ in Kericho, Kenya, where he immigrated in 1917. Legend says that Sant Puran Singh had a divine calling and adopted a mission to bring more people into the Sikh faith. Sant Puran Singh had a big following in Kenya before he moved to Birmingham in the 1970s. Many of these followers, it is believed, moved to the UK because of him. Sant Puran Singh preached

⁴⁷ Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World* (Duke University Press, 2006), 21.

selfless service and made seva a predominant part of individual devotion and service.⁴⁸

To understand the motivations for Sant Puran Singh's followers to move from Kericho to the UK, to become "twice-migrants" and to do seva for gurdwaras in the UK and in the Punjab, we need to widen our analysis of the Sikh diaspora. Employing Ballantyne's heuristic of "webs," the project of kar sevas highlights the flow of ideas, monies, and people between different locations. Ballantyne defines webs as, "the 'horizontal' connections that linked colonies directly together as well as the 'vertical connections' between metropole and colony."⁴⁹

The GNNSJ provides us with a good example to understand how the legacy of colonial ideas about restoring heritage and of orthodox Sikh ideas of seva have intermingled in present times. Sant Puran Singh's move to Kenya, for instance, was made possible within the newly opened networks of colonial rule. His later move to the UK was possible because of Commonwealth ties. The creation of religious identity as the predominant way to identify and to create a community of Sikhs in Kenya was also a product of the Singh Sabha reform movement. And finally, the idea of restoring one's heritage by employing different methods including seva is also a product of being exposed to different ideas of history. As Ballantyne says,

The annexation of Punjab in 1849 did not just mark the onset of colonialism but also initiated the rapid integration of the region into the interregional and global structures that gave the empire its shape. As Punjabis were drawn into the complex international webs of the British imperial system and tentatively

⁴⁸ J. Barrow, "Religious Authority and Influence in the Diaspora: Sant Jaswant Singh and Sikhs in West London," in *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, ed. P. Singh and N. G. Barrier (Delhi: Manohar, 1999); D. S. Tatla, "Nurturing the Faithful: The Role of the Sant among Britain's Sikhs"; *Religion*, 22/4, (1992), 349-74; P. Bhachu, "The East African Sikh Diaspora," in *The Sikh Diaspora*, ed. N. G. Barrier and V. A. Dusenberry (Chanakya Publications, 1989).

⁴⁹ Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, 30.

explored distant lands beyond the empire, the spatial boundaries of the Punjabi world were suddenly stretched, elongated, and reconfigured.⁵⁰

The seva for gold-plating the Golden Temple led by the GNNSJ is the result of this global web created by the twin legacies of the colonial ideal of history and of Singh Sabha values of religious belonging and autonomy.

Gold-plating of the Golden Temple dome was suggested by the Baba Mohinder Singh, the sant succeeding Sant Puran Singh, for the 300-year anniversary of the formation of the Khalsa. An important reason to prioritize this task was that parts of the dome had been damaged after the Indian Army's attack in 1984 to extract Sikh separatists and militants who had fortified the gurdwara. This seva was to repair those areas by changing the plating. In the process of changing the plates, the older plates were documented and kept safely, to be placed in a museum.

The GNNSJ took responsibility for financing this project and leading the entire process of hiring the experts and the labor. The autonomy given to the sants in this case raised many questions. Why was the seva given to a sant tradition, in which the leading sant is believed to be higher than all its followers, thereby practically taking a position of the Guru? Others have questioned if the expertise and the method employed in the seva was up to the standard of the Golden Temple.

On the question of authority and autonomy, as highlighted in this chapter, kar sevas have traditionally been led by the sants. Following this, it should not be surprising that sants and deras continue to manage the seva for the SGPC. Even after the audit reports and processes had been laid down, the leading manager for these sevas was someone

⁵⁰ Ibid., 70.

from a dera. On the latter question of expertise and methods employed, documents in the GNNSJ headquarters illustrate the way decisions were made and what arrangements supported its work in the seva. Over a hundred craftsmen worked on the project over two years, from 1995 to 1997. Artists came from Agra, Moradabad, Hoshiarpur, Makrana, and Varanasi to do different kinds of work required for the restoration. For the methods employed, Sanjay Suri and Bhavdeep Kang say:

The master craftsmen from Varanasi first copy the pattern on the old patra on a sheet of paper. The drawing is to scale. The pattern is then etched with a small, needle-like chisel on plates of copper. A thicker chisel is used to emboss the pattern on the copper. The embossed plate is then put on a slab of lac, so that the finer points of the drawing can be executed on copper. Nearly a thousand copper *patras* have been completed. Once the copper plate is ready, it is covered in gold, which must be absolutely pure. The jewelry donated for the project is usually in 22 carats and must be purified to remove traces of copper and silver. The pure gold is then melted and shaped into a bar. The malleable metal is pressed into flat ribbons of a precise thickness. A seven-foot strip must weigh exactly 17.5 grams. The technology employed by the craftsmen dates back several centuries—the very same techniques that Ranjit Singh’s artisans used. Modern techniques would not have served half as well. Sanjay Kumar, a craftsman from Varanasi, explains: “Electroplating is not guaranteed to last more than a few years. The work has to be done by hand. We are confident it will last for 500 years.”⁵¹

Kar seva changed in form and process as the Sikh diaspora created new networks and exchanges with the Sikhs in the Punjab. This exchange ultimately impacts the heritage of Sikhs.

This chapter explored the issue of autonomy and authority amongst the Sikh religious community and indicates that despite the SGPC being the authoritative and legally recognized body, older sant traditions continued to influence main events and activities within Sikh practice. Using the kar seva as a main event to highlight the active influence of the sants, this chapter indicates the ways in which the SGPC has had to

⁵¹ Sanjay Suri and Bhavdeep Kang, “The Gift of Gold,” *Outlook*, January 29, 1997.

accept and incorporate traditions within its own structure to ensure its authority is accepted by and large by the community and outside. It was argued that the recent scholarly and journalistic attention to the sants and deras as new religious movement is only a small part of a longer historical tradition. We need to understand the sant tradition and its historical changes to contextualize the recent developments as well as the structure of the SGPC.

Chapter Six: Layered Authority: SGPC and its Impact on the Management of the Golden Temple Complex

The Golden Temple has been center stage of a range of activities—socio-cultural, educational, sometimes political and of course religious over the twentieth century. Over the twentieth century, these functions and activities have been streamlined to be largely religious in nature, although there have been a series of political events within the Golden Temple Complex. From efforts to streamline activities by making certain acts legitimate and others illegitimate, as argued in chapter two, the SGPC sanitized the gurdwara environment. Further to this, with the building activities, which involved the Sikh community through different forms of labour, including physical labour and monetary support, the SGPC gained authority over Sikh religious institutions. From the different activities and events organized or patronized by the SGPC, what becomes clear is the SGPC's attempts to clearly define its role as the only religious manager of Sikh institutions. However, as this dissertation has argued, this authority was *layered*.

The SGPC could only gain its momentum and support amongst the Sikh community by appealing to traditional sants and their deras. These sant traditions, far from dying out, are transforming in different ways in the twentieth and the twenty-first century. The term layered authority suggests that the SGPC is not a simple democratic body wherein all the members have equal power or say. The term layered authority means that there are multiple layers within the SGPC that positions certain traditions, rituals and schools of thought above others, thereby defining the nature and character of this body. To understand the SGPC as a political body with some religious affiliations is to

misunderstand the functioning of the SGPC, which tends to prioritize Sikh missionizing through gurdwaras most importantly. It is also a misrepresentation to think of the Sikh community as a community of memory or one that lives through its past. Conversations during my field work and studying the SGPC's activities and events, it becomes clearer that the Sikh religion thrives through religious practice and the SGPC motivates, directs and patronizes these practices. However, the layered authority is not simply internally stratified. There are other agents in the Punjab that influence the management bodies' organization and decisions. Through the illustration of the *galliara project*, this dissertation will conclude this study of the SGPC's nature and organizational structure.

The *galliara project* is an apposite conclusion to this study for a few reasons. One, it highlights the relationship between the SGPC and the Punjab state, which sponsored this project. Second, it indicates the other influencers in the layered authority of the SGPC. While this dissertation focuses on the internal dynamics of the Sikh community, there are a number of external factors that influences the structure of the SGPC. Although this dissertation could not focus on those dynamics at all, this project highlights a way in which we can atleast begin to understand the inter-relations between the SGPC and the Punjab state.

The relations between the SGPC and the Punjab state have not always been confrontational or fraught, as defined by an "events" history perspective of the Punjab. Many buildings projects around the Golden Temple have been funded by the Punjab state, which continues to oversee the areas security, hygiene and upliftment. However, the *galiara project* did emerge from a conflict. SAD's political ambitions were on a rise in 1970s, when they passed the Anandpur Sahib resolution in the parliament. This resolution mainly sought greater independence from the Indian government to rule over state issues

along with a legal recognition of the separation of religions between Hinduism and Sikhism. These political ambitions ended with radical Sikhs occupying the Golden Temple Complex and fortifying their hold over this space by arming themselves. Eventually, an armed attack in 1984 ended this crisis when the radicals were either captured or killed by the Indian National Army.

This moment of an armed intervention impacted the community's ideas of autonomy and control over gurdwara management in significant ways. The events in 1984 damaged a large part of the gurdwara complex, especially the Akal Takhat, which naturally led to the issue of repair and renovation. The Akal Takhat is the temporal seat of authority, built by the sixth Guru, Hargobind in the seventeenth century. This temporal authority was constructed in front of the spiritual authority of the Golden Temple-Harimandir *Sahib* and marked a shift in Sikh religious collective thought. The question was, who would do the repairs and how? The government of India guided the Nirankari leader to take up this cause, but the SGPC and the Akali Dal did not permit this seva. Eventually, the community did the seva under Baba Kharak Singh, a renowned Sikh leader, who was then 90 years old and had led the first kar seva of 1923 and had been a prominent Sikh leader through the decades. The Sikh community rallied behind Baba Kharak Singh, who represented the initial management body and the first resistance of the Akali Dal in the 1920s. It was an authoritative signal to get Baba Kharak Singh to lead the seva of 1988, especially as the Akal Takhat was being rebuilt, which was badly damaged after a tank fired and hit the dome of the Akal Takhat. The internal contest on leading the kar seva of the gurdwara and the Akal Takhat signaled a larger challenge to the authority over the gurdwara and its management. And the Sikh support rallied behind Baba Kharak Singh reset the SGPC's role in gurdwara management despite increasing discontent over

the last few years of uncertainty.

While seva was being done inside the gurdwara, the Punjab state was making its own plans to create a circumference around the Golden Temple to create clearer entries and exits. Known as the Galliarda project, the project aimed to create a thirty-meter wide corridor with a garden area immediately outside the Golden Temple complex. The Galliarda project was conceived immediately after the militancy period in the Golden Temple complex and it was meant to create a corridor between the buildings and the gurdwara, so that anyone accessing this space was visible from a distance. This allowed the state to survey and keep a check on the activities in the gurdwara. The plan involved buying shop-houses immediately outside the gurdwara. During this time attempts were made to consolidate the lands around the Golden Temple as part of this project. Mapping the area and the sites around the demarcated area was far from straightforward and frequently conflictual. This area, it was found was largely owned by the SGPC and had been leased to private business owners. The Galliarda project had many roadblocks, the purchasing of the landed property being one of them. The SGPC and the state were drawn on two sides of this conflict and there was no easy resolution. The Galliarda project was then divided into five phases, wherein shop-houses were bought in parts and the Galliarda was built.

The Galliarda project demarcated a “new space” of the Golden Temple complex for the first time in the twentieth century. The Galliarda project created a moment in which the building project was initiated by an external agency and had a different motivation than the building projects initiated by the community itself. And this was the first time that such a distinction had emerged in the building projects in and around the Golden Temple. The Galliarda project became a precursor for the later UNESCO world heritage site

proposal for the Golden Temple.



Figure 23: Galliara Project around the Golden Temple Complex



Figure 24: Galliara Project Overview

The galliara project aimed to create a distance between the Golden Temple and the shops around the area and create a green belt of garden space. Ravindra Bhan, a well-known landscape architect who has also worked on the landscaping around the Ayodhya

mosque, designed this garden space.¹ The galliara project is the first attempt to bring an environmentally sustainable angle into the development plans for the Golden Temple complex and its surrounding areas. The garden became central to the organization of the monument as a distinctive, orderly space, set apart from the people around. The landscape around the Golden Temple now formed a barrier as it was insulated from the quotidian affairs of the market area.

The galliara project was attempting something new, by engaging a landscape architect who envisioned a sustainable development plan for the galliara project. The new paradigm of landscape design and architecture used land and water availability to create a space for recreational purposes. However, as discussed in this dissertation, the area in and around the Golden Temple has various structures that have historical and religious significance for different communities. These structures had to be bought and razed to finally create what was a sustainable and environmentally friendly area albeit dismissive of religious sentiments and utility. The galliara project as a result used similar tactics as those applied by the SGPC when they bought bungas from their owners- by influence, money or legal procedures. The galliara project highlights the ways in which the SGPC mirrors, intersects and works with the Punjab state to ensure that the gurdwaras are managed according to certain standards, thus creating an evolved layered structure for the SGPC, even with an external body.

The SGPC, as this dissertation has highlighted, had to work hard to influence Sikhs within and beyond the Punjab over the years. For this, the management body employed a wide variety of tactics like fighting for properties in the Tribunal court, occupying

¹ Conversations with Dr. Morenz (9th May 2014).

gurdwaras, organizing pilgrimages and kar sevas, educating the community and collectively restoring gurdwara structures. These activities opened the SGPC to become an amalgamated organization that continues traditions and practices from the pre-colonial period as well as influences from the state. This creates a layered authority of the SGPC.

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