

A HISTORICAL SIKH SHRINE NEAR CHANDIGARH: GURDWARA NADHA SAHIB

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Sikhism is a young faith among world religions and the word Sikh is derived from the Pali *sikha* and the Sanskrit *shishya*, which mean 'disciple'. The "Sikhs are the disciples of the ten gurus"¹ beginning with Nanak (1469-1539) and ending with Gobind Singh (1666-1708). Even though it derives its basic concepts from both Hinduism and Islam, in the teachings of its founder Guru Nanak lies the essence of the faith. The nine gurus who followed are seen as carrying forward the same *gyot*, their lives and teachings continuing the faith of Nanak. The tenth guru Guru Gobind Singh gave the Sikhs their distinctive individuality and identity.² He brought the Sikhs together to form a major religious group.³ On the 1st of *baisakh* month i.e. April 13, 1699 he founded the *Khalsa*.⁴ At the time of death, Guru Gobind Singh vested the *Guruship* in *Guru Granth Sahib* (*Adi Granth*) and ordained that the spiritual leadership of the Sikhs now on would be vested in the *Guru Granth Sahib* and the general body of the *Khalsa*.⁵

The Sikh temple is called *Gurdwara*, the house of Guru, where the Guru dwells.⁶ For the Sikhs the guru is the *Granth Sahib* and thus any building in which it is placed with reverence is thus a *gurdwara*. Before the emergence of the *Harmandir* (*Golden Temple*), in the early 17th century, as a symbol of the faith, both physical and metaphysical, its predecessors were called *dharma-mandir*, *dharamsala* and *such*.⁷ The first *dharamsala* is attributed to Guru Nanak in *Kartarpur*, which was later changed to the architectural form of a *gurdwara* as it has emerged over centuries.⁸ Perhaps the *Golden Temple* (*Harmandir*) is the earliest monument of Sikhism which serves as the germinatory seed of the character of a *gurdwara* building.⁹ The structure of the *Golden Temple* is attributed to *Guru Arjan Dev* and is replete with symbolic meanings and works as the basic model for *gurdwara* architecture the *Sanctum Sanctorum* has four doors, one in all the four directions, which symbolizes that the temple is open to all regardless of religion, cast and creed.¹⁰ The low plinth of the *gurdwara* symbolizes the humility of a true Sikh.¹¹

The *Harmandir* or *Golden Temple* in the symbolism inherent in its physical form and its architectural style, that drew from *Mughal* architecture with elements

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of the Rajasthani style, seen in elements like the dome, marble inlay work,¹² chhatris and balconied windows, became a prototype for Sikh religious architecture. A large number of the gurdwaras are commemorative buildings that are associated with the Gurus and are at sites that were sanctified by the Guru's presence. The basic form of the gurdwara with a few variations usually comprises of a Nishan Sahib¹³, the darshini deorhi (entrance gateway), a hall for congregational prayer, a langar hall and a jodaghar. In the centre of the congregational prayer hall the Guru Granth Sahib is formally installed, thus also making it the sanctum of the gurdwara.

Gurdwara Shri Nadha Sahib Patshahi Dasvin in Panchkula is one such gurdwara near Chandigarh with historic importance. The site of the gurdwara was sanctified with presence of the tenth guru Guru Gobind Singh ji.¹⁴ The Gurdwara is part of Kalka tehsil, Panchkula. It lies 2 kilometers southeast of Panchkula across the river Ghagghar on the state highway. This place is said to commemorate the visit of Guru Gobind Singh, who along with his army stayed here for a few days on the way from Paonta Sahib to Anandpur Sahib, after the victory at Bhangani in 1688.¹⁵ According to the 'Mahan Kosha' written by Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha; "Earlier Nadha was a village under Rajpura tehsil of Patiala. Guru Gobind Singh camped here for a few days while his movement from Paonta Sahib to Anandpur Sahib."¹⁶ The Gurdwara is named after one Nadu Shah, a great disciple of Guru Gobind Singh, who rendered service to the Guru during his stay at this place.¹⁷ This sacred spot remained ambiguous till the time Bhai Motha Singh of a nearby village discovered it and raised here a platform to preserve the memory of the Guru's visit. Later on the original Manji Sahib was replaced by a double storied domed structure. In 1948 the shrine was under the Dharmarth Board of Patiala and East Punjab States Union which was taken over by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee after the merger of the state with the Punjab in 1956.¹⁸

The gurdwara is aligned on the southwest-northeast axis and faces the southwest. Along the way from the main road towards the main gate of the gurdwara there are small shops selling Sikh ceremonial material and gutkas etc. On the southwest side of the premises lies the main gate which opens into a courtyard towards the west, adjoining the boundary wall of which is the Prashad Ghar facing the southeast. In the centre of the courtyard on a low plinth is the main gurdwara or sanctum hall approached by two steps, preceded by a chubacha¹⁹ (foot bath), and surrounded by a pillared verandah on all four sides. At the four corners of the verandah are rooms projecting outwards and rising up three stories. Out of these four rooms, the room at the back on the east side is the sachkhand,²⁰ the rooms at

the back on the north side and in front on the west side are for akhand path²¹ and the room on the front south side has the staircase which leads to the upper storey of the hall. There is a row of 18 rooms along the outer edge of the plinth meant for akhand path. In the courtyard in front of the hall on the west side is the nishan sahib²². On the south side of the main hall is the space for performing kirtan and langar of tea. Before the main gate of the gurdwara on the northwest side is the jora ghar and on the southeast side is the hall for langar²³ and above it the kitchen and on the first floor are rooms used as offices. The gurdwara is still under construction. On the southwest side a huge entrance gateway is being built flanked by rooms on either side. The rooms lining the outer side will have the jora ghar, on the inner side the rooms will be used for various purposes such as for selling Sikh ceremonial material and gutkas etc.

The main hall of the gurdwara where the Guru Granth Sahib is installed is rectangular in ground plan measuring 88 (L) X 58 (W) feet approximately and faces the southwest. It appears to be a double storied hall from outside but inside the ceiling rises to double storey height. The walls of the hall have multiple doors and windows interspersed with pilasters. Inside the hall a balcony runs along all four sides and cusped arch openings look down towards the central area of the hall. The roof of the central section is at double storied height. On entering the hall one moves towards the area where the Guru Granth Sahib rests under a carved marble canopy. A low metal railing divides the hall into two sections, the first section is meant only for the congregation and the second section is where the Guru Granth Sahib is installed. The second section of the hall has one large cusped arch which rises up to the ceiling. This is flanked by one cusped arch on each side which rise to half the height of the central arch. Beyond the central arch is the space for placing the Guru Granth Sahib which measures about 25 X 25 feet. The other three sides of this space also have semi circular arches one in each side. The enclosure made by these arches contains the Guru Granth Sahib which is installed on a platform with a marble canopy above it.²⁴ Under the marble canopy roof is a cloth canopy. In front of this platform on a lower platform different weapons are displayed with bouquets of flowers. The marble canopy under which the Guru Granth Sahib is installed is supported on four pillars, one in each corner, with arched openings in between. The arches are decorated with carved foliate patterns. Above the arch there is a projecting eave forming a semicircular arch. The canopy is surmounted by a curvilinear sloped roof superstructure which is crowned by an inverted lotus and a kalasha finial. The base of the superstructure is decorated with carved floral patterns. In the hall the

ceiling under the balconies and the four arched facades around the Guru Granth Sahib are profusely decorated with coloured glass mosaic set in different geometrical and floral patterns. Inside and outside the hall the floors, walls, platforms and superstructures all are clad in white marble.

The pillared verandah that forms a pradakshinapath around the hall is about 13 feet wide and has an imposing double storied entrance portal which leads to the doors of the hall. This entrance is crowned by three kiosks; one in the centre and one on each side. The central kiosk is rectangular in plan and has three cusped openings in the front and back and one cusped opening in each of its sides. The four sides of this kiosk have cusped eaves. The kiosk is surmounted by a curvilinear sloped roof crowned with an inverted lotus and a kalasha finial. The two kiosks on each side of the central kiosk are square in plan and have one cusped arch opening on each side. They too have cusped eaves on all the sides with a square base surmounted by a circular base from which rises the dome with vertical ribs on it crowned by an inverted lotus and a finial. On each side of these kiosks is placed a cupola. The lower half of the entrance portal has a cusped arch door which leads to the main door of the hall. The upper half of the portal has a balconied window with five cusped arched openings with a cusped eave over them. This window has a curvilinear sloped roof over it which is crowned by an inverted lotus and a kalasha finial. On either side of the entrance the lower half of the building has three small cusped arch doors which flank the central cusped door. The upper storey over these doors has the same number of small windows with cusped arches over them and these windows flank the projected balconied window in the centre. All the walls and the floor are faced with white marble. The jambs and the lintel of the entrance are beautifully carved in foliate motifs. On the key stone of the entrance is carved Ikomkar which is flanked by the Sikh emblem which shows two crossed swords (kirpans) surrounding a quoit (chakkar) intersected by a double edged sword (Khanda).

The colonnaded verandah has cusped arched openings, which are nine at the back and eleven on both sides. The first storey above it has the same number of windows with cusped arches over them. Above the first storey of the hall is an eave with a low parapet on all the four sides. The parapet is lined with domical finials at regular intervals that essentially crown the pillars that rise up from the ground floor.

At all the four corners of the verandah is a room. All the four rooms are identical and are octagonal in plan. These rooms rise up three stories and all the

faces on all the stories have cusped arches and each alternate face has a window. Over the third storey there is a cusped eave surmounted by a very low parapet. This parapet has miniature size cupolas placed at regular intervals. Above this from a circular base rises a dome with vertical ribs and this is crowned by an inverted lotus motif. The base of the dome is decorated with two rows of lotus petal motifs.

The superstructure over the main hall is square in plan and two storied. The first storey is square in plan with five cusped arch entrances on each side. It has eaves on all the sides which is surmounted by a low parapet. The roof has a kiosk or chhatra in each corner and four domical finials on each side. The kiosks have a cusped opening in each side and are surmounted by a dome shaped superstructure crowned with inverted lotus motif. The second storey of the superstructure is also square but smaller in size. It has three cusped arch opening on each side and one circular opening over the central entrance. This storey has a cusped eave on all the sides with a parapet over it. On the corners of the parapet are chhatris similar to the kiosks made on the first storey of the superstructure. In between these kiosks is a row of eleven cupolas on each side. In the centre of the second storey of the superstructure is a circular base above which rises the dome. The base of the dome is decorated with engraved flower petals. The dome has vertical ribs on it and is surmounted by an inverted lotus motif, which is crowned by two kalasha, a chhatra and a two edged sword (Khanda) finial.

The platform for the Nishan sahib is made of white marble and is octagonal in shape. There is a recessed panel on each side and the Sikh emblem and ikomkar are carved on alternate sides. The tall mast or column above the platform is clad in yellow cloth on top it has a triangular flag with the Sikh emblem of two crossed swords, which symbolize miri (temporal) and piri (spiritual) power, with a surrounding circle (quoit) intersected by a double-edged dagger (khanda). Nishan Sahib marks the gurdwara from a distance and is its most identifiable feature of a gurdwara.

Although the site of this gurdwara is linked to the Sikh history but the building is entirely new and have been renovated time and again. The present architecture of the gurdwara incorporates arcaded verandah surrounding the main hall of the gurdwara, octagonal rooms abutting the corners of the verandah, darshani deorhi preceding the main gurdwara hall, balconied window, and the use of cupolas and chhatris along the roof and centrally placed impressive domical superstructure crowning the gurdwara. The core inspiration for these elements seems to have been driven from the architecture of the Golden Temple at Amritsar.

Endnotes

- ¹ Singh, Khushwant, *The Sikhs*, Varanasi, Luster Press Pvt. Ltd., 1948, p. 12.
- ² On the 1st of baisakh month, April 13, 1699, he founded the Khalsa Panth by baptizing five Sikhs known as Panj Piare (cherished five) as members of Khalsa (pure). These five Sikhs were from the different castes and different regions of the country. The guru gave the Sikhs a new surname, Singh (lion) for men and Kaur (princess) for women. An oath was taken at the baptism ceremony to observe the five K's; Kesh (unshorn long hair), Kangha (comb), Kuchha (short breeches), Kara (steel bangle) and Kirpan (short sword) which defined a distinct identity. Singh, Pashaura, "Sikh Identity in the Light of History, A Dynamic Perspective", in Pashaura Singh and Gerald N. Barrier ed. *Sikhism and History*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 88, 89.
- ³ Anand, Mulk Raj, 'Specimen of paintings under the Sikhs', *Marg*, Vol. 10, No. 2, March 1957, p. 38. 'The word Khalsa means the pure one. Singh, Kushwant. *The Sikhs*, Varanasi, Luster Press Pvt. Ltd. 1948, p. 15. Randhir, G. S. *Sikh Shrines in India*. New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1990, p. 2.
- ⁵ Singh, Jagjit, *Golden temple of Amritsar*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1998, p. 25. Randhir, G. S. *Sikh Shrines in India*. New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1990, p. 2.
- ⁶ Randhir, G. S., *Sikh Shrines in India*. New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1990, p. 4.
- ⁷ Singh, Patwant, *Gurdwaras, In India and around the World*, New Delhi, Himalayan Books, 1992, p. 28.
- ⁸ Arshi, Pardeep Singh, *Sikh Architecture in Punjab*, New Delhi, Intellectual Publishing House, 1986, p. 14. Singh, Kushwant, *The Sikhs*, Varanasi, Luster Press Pvt. Ltd. 1948, p.13.
- ⁹ Arshi, Pardeep Singh, *Sikh Architecture in Punjab*, New Delhi, Intellectual Publishing House, 1986, pp. 16, 142.
- ¹⁰ Singh, Patwant, *Gurdwaras, In India and around the World*, New Delhi, Himalayan Books, 1992, p. 32; *The present building of the Golden Temple was built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1799-1839)*. Arshi, Pardeep Singh, *The Golden Temple: History Art and Architecture*, New Delhi, Intellectual Publishing House, 1986, p. 41.
- ¹¹ Rai Gurmeet and kavita Singh, 'Brick by Brick; Architectural Project Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind', *Marg*, Vol. 54, No. 4, June 2003, p. 18; Singh, Jagjit, *Golden temple of Amritsar*. New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1998, p. 65.
- ¹² *The superstructure of gurdwara, the dome, the use of marble as medium, simple interiors and smooth walls, geometrical patterns and workmanship on a marble medium are features*

taken from Mughal aesthetic traits. Sairam T.V., *Indian Temple (Form and Foundation)*, Delhi, Agram Kala Prakashan, 1982, p. 37.

¹³ The Nishan Sahib is a tall mast or column placed on a pedestal in the front of the gurdwara building in the gurdwara premises. Clad in yellow cloth on top it has a triangular flag with the Sikh emblem of two crossed swords, which symbolize miri (temporal) and piri (spiritual) power, with a surrounding circle (quoit) intersected by a double-edged dagger (khanda). Singh, Jagjit, *Golden temple of Amritsar*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1998, p. 63.

¹⁴ After the martyrdom of the ninth guru Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib Guru Gobind Singh was succeeded to the Guru gaddi. He felt that the existence of Sikhism was in danger and to save it there was need to take some drastic steps. For this he influenced and encouraged people to be soldiers-cum-saints, strong in body, mind and soul, who could fight the tyranny of the rulers with faith and confidence. The guru also started procuring all sorts of arms and weapons. People with the knowledge of martial arts and whose fore-fathers had fought in the army of Guru Hargobind made an important part of the Guru's army. The Guru's Darbar at Anandpur Sahib took the form of a military camp. The neighboring chiefs became impressed with the high sense of Guru's superiority and a vague dread of his ambition. Around 1665 at the invitation of Raja Medni Prakash the ruler of Nahan Guru ji left Anandpur and came to stay at Paonta Sahib. Here at Paonta Sahib Pir Buddhu Shah met the Guru and offered him the service of 500 Pathans for his army though they deserted him later. Then the peace was broken; the hill Rajas marched towards Paonta Sahib and a bloody battle was fought at Bhangani. The Sikhs stood out victorious and the Guru with his army returned to Anandpur Sahib. It is during this return that Guru Gobind Singh ji sanctified this place now known as Nadha Sahib. Johar, Surinder.

The Sikh Gurus and their Shrines. Delhi, Vivek Publishing Company, 1976, pp. 84-87.

¹⁵ Randhir, G. S. *Sikh Shrines in India*. p. 40. <http://www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/historic-gurdwaras-in-punjab/nada-sahib>. retrieved on September 18, 2015.

¹⁶ *Sankhep Itihas Gurudwar a Shri Nadha Sahib Patshahi Dasvin Panchkula*. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Shri Amritsar, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Haryana District Gazetteers Ambala*, Haryana Gazetteers Organization, Revenue Department, Chandigarh, 1984, p. 398; *Sankhep Itihas Gurudwara Shri N adha Sahib Patshahi Dasvin Panchkula*. p. 5.

¹⁸ <http://www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/historic-gurdwaras-in-punjab/nada-sahib>. retrieved on September 18, 2015. Nothing more is known of the devout Motha Singh nor of the date of the establishment of the Manji Sahib.

¹⁹ *A rectangular shallow pool of water, where one can wash one's feet before entering the hall symbolizing ritual cleaning.*

²⁰ *The room where the Guru Granth Sahib is kept at night after Sukhasana. On it is usually inscribed the verse 'sachkhand Wase Nirankar' and in popular parlance the room has come to be referred to as the sachkhand.*

²¹ *Akhand path is prayers done continuously without break.*

²² *The Nishan Sahib is a tall mast or column placed on a pedestal in the front of the gurdwara building in the gurdwara premises. Clad in yellow cloth on top it has a triangular flag with the Sikh emblem of two crossed swords, which symbolize miri (temporal) and piri (spiritual) power, with a surrounding circle (quoit) intersected by a double-edged dagger (khanda).*

²³ *Langar is a community kitchen where all the devotees sit in rows on the floor to have consecrated food.*

²⁴ *Guru Granth Sahib is always draped in a clean cloth. It is opened in the morning (prakash) and closed after the evening prayers (sukhasana) every day. While opening and closing it a great respect is shown to the Granth. While reading it a flywhisk is always waved over it as a mark of respect to the book. Everyone who comes to the gurdwara takes off his shoes outside and washes feet and covers his head and then enters the gurdwara building. Inside the gurdwara every one bows and kneels before the Guru Granth Sahib and does a parikrama of it in order to revere it. Singh, Teja, Sikhism: Its Ideas and Institutions, Amritsar, Khalsa Brothers Publication and Booksellers, 1970 (reprint; first edition, 1938), pp. 101, 102.*