

It is an extremely important component of research to delve deep into the psyche, developed by a specific artist, due to the various factors and elements such as his lifestyle, family background, domestic atmosphere, professional exposure and development of his art, sources of his inspiration and motivation. In this direction, a mentor of the artist and the caliber he possesses also plays a transforming role. **The study of lives of artists, who carved a niche for themselves in the genre of *Sikh Calendar art*, reveals the undercurrents of emotions and feelings which contributed to their initiation into this form of art, their respective stages of progress in achieving creative and professional excellence, deserves utmost delicate yet probing attention.** Another important factor which is aptly vital in the field of art, is the magnitude of exposure which impacts the art of a particular artist, laying a stress upon the stylization as well as the profundity of his/her final product. It is worth mentioning here that keen interest in history and religion, the importance of theological studies which normally trigger the stimulation of sustained contact with the company of persons and groups, who have dedicated their lives in pursuit of divine path and spiritual sojourns. These factors have undoubtedly shaped the destiny of artists who undertook the arduous voyage of pursuing the depiction of scenes and episodes of Sikh history, culture and heritage. **A detailed study of the lives of such painters will reveal that most of them possessed a poetic and philosophical bent of mind and an attitude which was without shackles of narrow mentality, had an overpowering view of a peaceful world which reveled in humanism and believed in the fraternity of mankind.** Such magnificent qualities of human nature raises the level of thought processes and provides a grasp on the ground level, ultimately resulting in equipping the artist with fine sensibilities and a sense of elation and spiritual ecstasy. **The end result of attaining these pre-requisites for the creation of a spellbinding works of**

art is essential and is amply rewarding in the shape of countless admirers whose lives are affected with such noble creations.

Traveling back in time to have a peep in the lives and art of Sikh painters, whose works reign the hearts of countless individuals, is in itself a sacred and revealing excursion and akin to a pilgrimage. **To touch the lives of artists which are drenched in the perspiration of dedication, persistent and unrelenting endeavours is an inspirational exercise. The gist of their lives revolves around directing their mental and physical energies in pursuit of creating such masterpieces which are visual tributes to the ideals of Sikhism.** It is undoubtedly the philosophy behind the Sikh religion which was the main source of inspiration for these pioneers of *Sikh Calendar art*, as a mere glimpse on their main works establishes the fact that they considered it a sacred task to paint a picture which oozes an aura of Guru Nanak's divinity and spirituality and Guru Gobind Singh's valour and resolve which turned him to *Sant Sipahi* (Saint Soldier). The man who followed these ideals in true spirit and who was eulogized as '**Saint Artist**' due to his benign personality and believed in the idiom "Grow More Good" is none other than **Sardar Sobha Singh** (Plate-253), whose entire life is the story of a crusader who embarked upon a journey of discovering the essence of Sikhism through his art. The iconic images of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh created by this apostle of peace are etched upon the hearts and minds of lovers of *Sikh Calendar art*. The imagery employed in these revealing and mesmerizing works is rooted in the soil of spiritualism, non-violence, peaceful co-existence and universal brotherhood. The idyllic surroundings at Andretta, district Kangra, Himachal Pradesh where he lived and worked, abundantly nurtured his intellect into the blossoming of his inner sensibilities and contemplation. The result of bouts of meditative stances had provided him capabilities to create astounding masterpieces in the solace of towering Dhauladhar mountains where gentle blows of breeze whispered in his ears the

mantra of a pious life, as preached by Guru Nanak Dev, other Sikh Gurus and saints.¹ He dedicated his life in creating works full of eternal bliss and scenes of violence and wars never excited him as he abhorred mindless chaos and turmoil in this world. He once remarked that “*He painted his paintings in milk and not in blood*”.²

Artist Sobha Singh was born on November 29, 1901 A.D. at Sri Hargobindpur, district Gurdaspur, Punjab. His father Sardar Deva Singh was a surveyor in Battalion 22 of the Indian Army and was a trained cavalier and a talented painter. His mother Bibi Achhran Devi was a delicate, charming and soft spoken lady, who passed away in 1906 after a prolonged illness when the Sobha Singh was hardly five years old. Bibi Lakshmi Devi, sister of Sobha Singh, who was twelve years elder to the artist showered love and affection on child Sobha Singh and compensated for her mother’s love. He lived in Lahore with his sister. After four years stay at Lahore, the family shifted to Amritsar. They stayed in ‘Kambohwan Wali Gali’ near Jallianwala Bagh. The stay at Amritsar was an important milestone in the life span of the artist. After the death of his father in 1917, Sobha Singh shifted to Amritsar and learnt scale drawing from his brother-in-law Sardar Mangal Singh. Sobha Singh had formal education upto class fifth only. He had his schooling at Sri Hargobindpur (1st to 3rd class), Gurdaspur (4th class) and Sri Hargobindpur (5th class).³

A turning point in his life was the joining of A.I. Industrial School, Amritsar in 1915, where he received a ten months course in art and craft. He served in Amritsar cantonment for a short time in 1918 A.D. He joined British Indian Army as a fourth grade draughtsman in September 1919 and proceeded to

1 **Kapoor, Dr. B.L.;** 1987, *Grow More Good*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.55-56

2 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

3 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.259-260

Iraq on 20th September 1919 A.D. Here he stayed for four years. Zaman Ali, a senior draughtsman and a colleague was the closest friend of Sobha Singh at Baghdad. During his stay at Baghdad, Sobha Singh learnt English language and attended music sessions. He was in good books of his officers. For his skill and disciplined routine, he was promoted to the rank of Head Draughtsman and was appointed as surveyor. He adopted drawing and painting as a hobby in the Army. In fact, Sobha Singh was a born artist and had inherited painting from his father and aesthetic sense from his mother. He showed natural inclination towards drawing and painting from his very childhood. He approached no teacher to learn painting. He returned from Baghdad in 1923, left the army and decided to live as an artist. He got married on Baisakhi of 1923 with Bibi Inder Kaur, daughter of Sardar Ram Singh, a contractor of Gurdaspur. In 1923, he established his studio named 'Subhash Studio' at Phawarewala Chowk, Amritsar. As he was a great admirer of freedom fighter Netaji Subhash Chander Bose, he named his art studio after his name.⁴ Working at this studio, the big opportunity to paint commissioned works came from Sardar Hira Singh 'Dard', who approached him for some paintings for magazine 'Phulwari' in 1924 A.D. Due to his remarkable work, he attracted many eminent persons. The first amongst them was Pandit Mangat Ram, a renowned violinist who accepted him as a 'Guru' and became the first disciple of Sobha Singh.⁵

A rare meeting of minds in 1925 A.D., Novelist Nanak Singh shared his deep feelings and philosophy about life with the artist and they became good friends. Their mutual love for nature extorted them to undertake many journeys together, to explore the bounties of nature and facing hardships of life with a

4 **Vaidya, K.L.;** Ed. 2001, *S. Sobha Singh- Life and Contribution to Indian Art*, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.1-2

5 **Gargi, Balwant;** 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.15

renewed vision.⁶ Equipped with sizable proficiency in his profession and his love for achieving new goals, he shifted his base to Lahore in 1926 and set up an art studio called 'Echo School of Art' at Kachehry Road, near Anarkali Bazaar, Lahore.⁷ Here he attained the reputation of a successful commercial artist and was flooded with assignments and produced some of his best works.⁸ He painted many book covers and sketches for magazines such as 'Chand' in 1928 and 'Karak'.⁹ In 1928, he met Giani Kartar Singh 'Hitkari', father of Amrita Pritam, the famous Punjabi Poetess and writer and their friendship continued life long. He met Dr. Mohinder Singh Randhawa (I.C.S) for the first time in 1929 at Lahore.¹⁰

In pursuit of greener pastures after establishing himself as one of the leading commercial artist, Sobha Singh shifted to Delhi in 1930. Here he established an art studio in Connaught Circus and was residing in Karol Bagh area. He started portrait painting in a big way. From 1933, Sobha Singh painted posters for the Indian Railways, Post and Telegraphs Department, as also paintings for the Maharajas of the Indian Princely states.¹¹ In 1935, two of his paintings found place in the London Illustrated News, Annual Number. The paintings of 'Sohni Mahiwal' and 'The Devil' were first time painted in Delhi alongwith the paintings of 'The Dawn' and 'Last Resort'. It was at Delhi that Sobha Singh met Colonel Tate, Chief Publicity Officer of Railway Board. The

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- 6 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.261
- 7 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.**; November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading
- 8 **Singh, Shamsheer**; 1987, *Sobha Singh Artist*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.27
- 9 **Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh**; 2008, *S. Sobha Singh Life-Art-Philosophy*, Dr. Hirday Paul Singh, Secretary General, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.41
- 10 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.261
- 11 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.**; November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

acquaintance developed into deep friendship. The Colonel became an admirer of Sobha Singh and provided him due patronage at the government level till 1940, before he was transferred to Burma.¹²

Due to his temperament of a quiet person, the commercial hub of the Delhi city did not suit him much, as he always craved for a place where there is bounty of nature and the reign of peace and solace, where he could create works of everlasting artistic significance. In 1942 Sobha Singh visited Preet Nagar at the invitation of Sardar Gurbaksh Singh (Preet Lari). He liked the place and shifted to Preet Nagar and stayed there for three years. Here he developed close friendly relations with many of the scholars, writers, poets and journalists who frequented Preet Nagar.¹³ At Preet Nagar, Sobha Singh experimented with various forms of creative arts and showed his talents in poetry, story writing, sculpture and architectural designing. His most significant contribution during his stay at Preet Nagar was the completion of the 'Sohni Mahiwal' (original left behind in Pakistan at the time of Partition of India in 1947). Besides, some of his famous paintings of the Gurus were also painted here.¹⁴

He was spellbound with the scenic beauty of Kangra valley which he visited in 1942 and made up his mind to settle in the lap of nature. During the year 1945, he was offered the job of a 'Head Artist' in the Publicity Office of the Indian Army at Simla and he lived there briefly for over a period of eight months.¹⁵ Not satisfied with the shape of his career, he again made up his mind to pack his bags and shifted to Lahore in 1946, where he founded a larger two-

12 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.262

13 **Gargi, Balwant**; 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.16

14 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.263

15 **Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh**; 2008, *S. Sobha Singh Life-Art-Philosophy*, Dr. Hirday Paul Singh, Secretary General, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.42

storeyed studio above the famous Mehta Art Press on Circular Road.¹⁶ Here he got an opportunity to work as an ‘Art Director’ for a film titled ‘But Tarash’. During this period, he met actor Prithvi Raj Kapoor. Their friendship developed into deep understanding and Prithvi Raj Kapoor used to visit the artist at Andretta almost every year. There is a life size bust of Prithvi Raj Kapoor which was sculpted by Sobha Singh which still adorns his studio at Andretta.¹⁷ He was injured in an accident near Pathankot while on his way to Manali, during the treatment he met Dr. Karam Singh Grewal, who became his life long friend and he used to watch him paint his legendary work ‘Sohni Mahiwal’. The artist was so engrossed in the creation of this masterpiece that his friend in a lighter vein used to remark that ‘*Who says Sohni belongs to Mahiwal- It actually belongs to my friend Sobha Singh.*’¹⁸

It was tragic that Sobha Singh had to leave Lahore in March 1947 as the date of India’s partition was approaching. He came empty-handed without his paintings and a large collection of books.¹⁹ Amongst the things left behind, was the original painting of Sohni Mahiwal, who was his artistic muse and he could not forget this great loss, as it was difficult to recreate another painting like that. Later on, he painted on this theme thrice, one of these versions is in the collection of Air Force Authorities, the second painting is with Dr. Karan Singh, Erstwhile Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir and the third version lies in the Sobha Singh Art Gallery at Andretta. A sensitive artist Sobha Singh was disturbed by mass migration of Punjabis and the accompanying riots and violence that he

16 **Khokhar, Dr. Kulwant Singh;** 2002, *Soul and Principles*, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Exports, Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar, p.14

17 **Rani, Dr. Saroj;** Ed. *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.17

18 **Khokhar, Dr. Kulwant Singh;** 2002, *Soul and Principles*, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Exports, Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar, p.20

19 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

yearned to permanently settled at Andretta forever.²⁰ His old friend Dr. M.S. Randhawa, I.C.S, Rehabilitation Commissioner, who was engaged in the rehabilitation of lacs of refugees from Pakistan, invited him to hold an exhibition of his paintings at Sirhind Club, Ambala so that he could get economically stabilized. During this exhibition, some of his paintings were acquired by Indian Air Force.²¹

Owing to financial difficulties, Sobha Singh tried his luck in film industry as an art director. But Dr. M.S. Randhawa called him back and saved the talents of this artist from the stereotyped art culture of the cinema world. The acquaintance developed into sincere friendship. Sobha Singh's chance meeting with Sardar Gurcharan Singh, an expert in Blue Pottery at Ambala resulted in Sardar Gurcharan Singh to shift his studio to Andretta.²² In search of peace and solitude, Sobha Singh ultimately chose to settle at Andretta, a place surrounded by lush green forests and murmuring brooks and streams, with the presence of snow-clad Dhauladhar Mountains, providing the backdrop of a perfect picture of magnificent scenic charm. His settlement at Andretta was not without stress and strain. At first, he rented a hut from Norah Richards (Woodland Estates) in Andretta village.²³ After some time, he purchased a piece of land from a local peasant and then built his own cottage at the picturesque site on the foothills of the snowy peaks of the Shivalik range amidst green fields at Andretta. His beautiful house with a garden and a tank was built in two years and was completed in 1949 A.D.²⁴ This place was ideal for his meditation and proved to

20 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.264

21 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.**; November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

22 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.265

23 **Gargi, Balwant**; 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.18

24 **Khokhar, Dr. Kulwant Singh**; 2002, *Soul and Principles*, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Exports, Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar, p.14-15

be an abode of his heart's desires. Here, the manifestations of the mystic painter took shape in various forms of paintings, sculptures and portraits. It was here that he painted Guru Nanak (in various poses), Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh (in different poses), Sri Krishna, Sri Rama, Jesus Christ and Sheikh Farid. Besides, he also painted portraits of some famous National leaders and his friends as well as his self-portrait and the portraits of his wife and the portrait of Norah Richards.²⁵

The *nom de terre* of Kangra valley, the milieu of the famous Pahari paintings had once again renovated in the sphere of art with Sobha Singh's settlement and the establishment of his Art Gallery at Andretta. Sobha Singh had brought India particularly Himachal Pradesh on the map of the Art World. The abode of the artist in Kangra valley had become a centre of tourist attraction.²⁶

The Art Gallery of Sobha Singh is a pretty colourful *sejour* (habitation), a true home of an artist, who was tender, kind, humane and did not harbour any formalities and taboos. Throughout his life, Sobha Singh remained a devout Sikh with firm belief in the fundamental doctrines of Sikhism. Religion was his inspiration and Gurus his life-blood. This aspect is reflected in his paintings.²⁷ In 1949, he had first meeting with Yuvaraj Karan Singh of Jammu & Kashmir, which developed into a close association. The Yuvaraj acquired the famous painting of 'Sohni Mahiwal'. It was then the first photo-prints of 'Sohni Mahiwal' were sold in the market. Later on, many of the paintings of the artist found their way into the art collection of Dr. Karan Singh. The portraits of 'Maharani Tara Devi' (Queen-wife) of Maharaja Hari Singh, 'Yuvaraj Karan Singh' and 'Yuvarani Karan Singh' are special attractions of Sobha Singh's

25 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

26 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.266

27 **Kanwal, Balbir Singh;** 1987, *The Spirit of Sobha Singh's Art*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of The Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.72-73

paintings preserved at Amar Mahal Museum, Jammu.²⁸ Dignitaries such as Dr. M.S. Randhawa, Development Commissioner, Punjab, kept on meeting him at Andretta due to his affectionate and friendly nature. In 1945, Dr. M.S. Randhawa lived with him at Andretta for over a month and they planned a book titled 'Folk Songs of Punjab' (*Lokgeet*).²⁹

In 1965, he was appointed Member Executive Committee, Punjab Lalit Kala Academi. Sobha Singh attended Tri-centenary Celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh's birth at Chandigarh and presented a life-size painting of Guru Gobind Singh on this occasion on 14 January, 1967 A.D.³⁰ In 1969, his famous painting of 'Guru Nanak' (showing Guru Nanak's hand raised in blessings) was published by Shrimoni Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee on the occasion of the Quincentenary celebrations of Guru Nanak Dev. More than five lac copies of this painting have been sold so far.³¹ A fellowship by Punjabi University, Patiala was also bestowed on him in recognition of his services to art especially *Sikh art* in 1970 A.D. In 1973, Dr. D.C. Pavate, Governor of Punjab visited 'Art Gallery' at Andretta and acquired the beautiful painting of 'Kangra Bride' (first copy) for his personal collection. The original painting was acquired by Lady Mountbatten earlier. Shri M.M. Chaudhri, Governor of Punjab visited Art Gallery at Andretta and purchased portraits of Pandit Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi for Raj Bhawan, Punjab on 23rd June, 1973 A.D.³² The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting prepared a documentary film entitled 'Painter of the People' in September, 1973 on Sobha Singh. This film has been dubbed in almost all Indian languages.

28 **Vaidya, K.L.;** Ed. 2001, *S. Sobha Singh- Life and Contribution to Indian Art*, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.12

29 **Vaidya, K.L.;** 1987, *Sardar Sobha Singh: An Artist in Kangra Valley*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.36

30 **Bhatti, S.S.;** 2004, *Sobha Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.222-223

31 **Gargi, Balwant;** 1987, *Sobha Singh*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.20

32 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, , p.267-268

Followed by many other awards and honours such as the honour of ‘State Artist’ was conferred on him by the Punjab government, yet another documentary on the life and work of the artist was made by the Punjab government.³³

The ‘Quami Darpan’ weekly magazine dedicated a whole issue to all the aspects of his art and creative journey in 1974 A.D.³⁴ Dr. Karan Singh perhaps the greatest admirer of his work again organized a grand exhibition of his paintings at the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi in 1976, which was attended by a number of dignitaries and art connoisseurs.³⁵ After this exhibition, he visited Rome to see the works of the European masters in original as he was influenced by the magical and dramatic charm of their masterpieces. Punjab Art Council honoured this doyen of *Sikh art* with their highest honour.³⁶ He was decorated with ‘Padam Shree Award’ by the President of India in 1983 A.D.³⁷ As his fame and name crossed Indian boundaries and found admirers in far-flung nations, British Broadcasting Corporation, London, came forward to record a documentary on Sobha Singh in 1984 A.D. which dealt with his creative processes, his inner vision and essence of his art. As honours and awards were being showered from many quarters, Punjabi University, Patiala thought it befitting to confer the degree of Doctor of Literature *honour is causa* on this celebrated painter of Punjab in recognition of the artistic influence, he wielded in spreading the message of Sikhism through his paintings filled with divine

33 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

34 **Kaur, Madanjit;** Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.268

35 **Shanta, Serbjeet Singh;** 1987, *First Exhibition of Sardar Sobha Singh's Art (1976)*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p. 57-58

36 **Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh;** 2008, *S. Sobha Singh Life-Art-Philosophy*, Dr. Hirday Paul Singh, Secretary General, Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, p.43

37 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.;** November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

message of the Gurus. Punjab had to suffer an irreparable creative loss as this great 'Saint Artist' passed away in August 1986, leaving behind a mass movement and a renaissance of *Sikh art*. He was immortalized by the monumental iconographic paintings which are adorned and admired in every Punjabi household. Ascetic, withdrawn, dedicated, soft-spoken, kind, gentle, full of honour and free from rancour, Sobha Singh remained isolated by choice and shunned publicity. With his tall (six feet) and slender figure, silken grey hair, penetrating eyes and flowing beard, Sobha Singh reminded one of an ancient Indian sage. Religious, philosophic and creative- he was indeed the 'Painter of the Divine'.³⁸

Sobha Singh was one of those ascetics for whom painting was akin to meditation and a pious path to reach the Almighty. Throughout his life, he made it a point to feel and touch the divine aura of spiritualism and was naturally fascinated by the simple and truthful message of Guru Nanak Dev's gospel of 'One God' and 'Oneness of human family'. Through his meditative sessions, he contemplated and envisioned divine images of Guru Nanak. Thus his first and foremost artistic creation which received wide acclaim and appreciation, was the image of Guru Nanak which was based entirely on his perception and the ecstasy he experienced, while creating this image in ethereal verve and spirit.³⁹ Teachings of Guru Nanak shaped his vision and artistic journey and he created a series of Guru Nanak's images in the light of a benign entity.⁴⁰ It was with the 1937 **Nam Khumari Nanaka** (Plate-254), of which thousands of prints were sold, that Sobha Singh embarked on a search for a perceptible form for the Guru, which would become fixed in the minds of the Sikhs as the permanent and authentic image of the Guru. None of the prototypes which were available to him

38 **Kaur, Madanjit**; Ed. 1987, *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.268-269

39 **Singh, Tejinder**; 1987, *The Concepts and Philosophy of Sobha Singh's Art*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.74-76

40 **Bhatti, S.S.**; December 5, 2010, *Master Artist*, The Tribune

– the *Janam Sakhi* model or the Italian one satisfied him. It became essential to him to create a ‘Personal’ image which would yet have the energy to evolve into a symbol of love, protection and rancour for which Guru Nanak stood in popular imagination. And so he created an image of a *Sadhaka*, simply dressed in a honey-yellow *choga*, eyes half-closed, rosary in hand, against a non-definable background, yet with face and hands closely defined, each line sharp and clear. This dialectic between the temporal and the spatial, between the worldly and the unworldly- was to remain his single most consistent motif in many renderings of Guru Nanak. Realizing that it was not possible to capture the essence of the Guru in a single image, he portrayed him as a preceptor- ‘Eko Simro Nanaka’ proclaiming after truth in a state of meditation; and in a series of three paintings, ‘My Meditations on Guru Nanak’ where the form and the formless, the *saguna* and the *nirguna* aspect of *Bhakti* become an ineluctable whole. For such an expansive interpretation, the technique and the form undergo a process of gentle modification as the eyes virtually close themselves in ecstasy and the colour becomes, in the final images, only an incandescence often serving as the halo itself.⁴¹

Amongst the earlier iconic portraits of **Guru Nanak Dev in Aashirwad pose** (Plate-255) in late 1950s gained widest popularity and acceptance and till today it is considered the most popular specimen of *Sikh Calendar art* and many editions of this painting have been reproduced by ‘Sobha Singh Memorial Art Society’, which exclusively reserved the rights of its reproduction.⁴² It is an interesting fact that Guru Nanak’s hand painted in this masterpiece depicts the lines as analysed by renowned ‘Palmist Pandit Agnihotri’ of Hamirpur after studying the *Janam Patri* of Guru Nanak Dev.⁴³ This portrait portrays human

41 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.122-124

42 **Bhatti, S.S.**; December 5, 2010, *Master Artist*, The Tribune

43 **Randhawa, Dr. M.S.**; November 24, 1985, *Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity*, The Tribune Sunday Reading

emotions and conveys the abstract through concrete. Nanak's half-closed eyes are fixed at a point in the infinity and he wears two *simarinis* - one over his turban and the other is shown around his neck. There is a cloak covering his shoulders.

An epoch making large painting painted in 1976 which captured the imagination of millions of admirers is titled **Guru Nanak- Eko Simro Nanaka**(Plate-256) which depicts legend of Guru Nanak emerging out of waters and is a departure from the early depiction of the Guru. The artist has given it the look of oceanic depth and vastness to symbolize his enlightened emergence from the darkness of ignorance and riddles of this world to the realm of light and knowledge.⁴⁴ This painting is painted in the heavenly hues, takes the viewer to the realms of a sublime world, where the light of knowledge enlightens the atmosphere with mystic and divine charm. This is an image of the essence of this great preacher, who dispelled all worldly fears and projected euphoric landscape, where truth is the colour of skies and divinity is depicted in swirling light blue oceanic waves. The pale silken shawl wrapped around Nanak's body soothes the hearts and souls of mortals yearning for *nirvana* or salvation. Sobha Singh had reached at the pinnacle of his creativity and had achieved the power to depict even the whispers of soul, feeling it with touch of his soft brush and kind and mellow palette. Guru Nanak's eyes in this portrait are laden with the ecstasy of realization and a divine joy.

In prolonged meditative trances, Sobha Singh continued with discovering and rediscovering in his mind's eye the persona of Guru Nanak, which resulted in a new series titled **My Meditations on Guru Nanak** (Plate -257-258). The outcome of this creative journey gave us magnificent masterpieces portraying Guru Nanak in the idiom of a sage who was the epitome of spirituality and embodiment of the

44 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.20

cosmic light. The flame of truth emerging from the space and there is no definite outline around his face signifying the belief that this image radiates with a glow of heavenly gleam. Guru Nanak's half-closed eyes are intoxicated with the realization of the supreme and ultimate power. The artistic achievements can only be experienced by no ordinary soul and the credit goes to Sobha Singh for gently solidifying a thought, which can easily escape from the brushstrokes of even a master. The unparalleled depiction of the divine can only be touched by an intellectual, whose head lies in the clouds and his feet are firmly entrenched in the soil of truth and dedication. Sobha Singh, a true seeker has tried to define the omnipresent cosmic power of the Almighty through the path shown by Guru Nanak Dev.

It is a striking revelation that all the iconic paintings of Guru Nanak have been done in *shanta rasa*, where peace is of paramount importance and his other masterpieces done on Guru Gobind Singh depict mainly *veer rasa*.⁴⁵ Some other paintings on **Guru Nanak alongwith Bala and Mardana** (Plate-259) ooze with mystic charm and cast a spell on the viewer, which lingers on for a long time sending the viewer on contemplative sojourn.

Sobha Singh also offered his energies towards eulogizing *Sant Sipahi* concept in portraits of **Guru Gobind Singh** (Plate-260) as a great Saint and a valiant warrior, who dedicated his entire life to protect the lives of down-trodden and picked up the sword to ward off the oppressors and tyrants, who stood in the way of peaceful existence and did not conform in the philosophy of freedom to preach and practice one's religion and faith. Sobha Singh has successfully captured the strength of character of tenth Sikh Guru and his deep resolve to establish a realm of equality of human race and to provide resistance to the perpetuation of mindless barbaric and inhuman oppression. He was so overwhelmed with the

45 **Bhatti, S.S.**; December 5, 2010, *Master Artist*, The Tribune

sacrifices of the Guru that he channelised his creative faculty in understanding the inner vision of Guru Gobind Singh, who was a rare persona of spiritual as well as physical strength, demystifying the source of his valour and the magical influence he wielded on his followers. He deeply analysed the energies which went into the formation of a true Khalsa.⁴⁶ While painting the iconographic portrait of Guru Gobind Singh, he came across many versions of the Guru painted by the Sikh painters. But there was an ever-increasing forceful resurgence in his mind to capture the light of the resolve on Guru's face and the abundance of saintly composure which shaped the destiny of the Khalsa. '*Chiddion se mein baaj ladaun tabhi Gobind Singh naam kahaun*' –these words stirred an excitement and kindled a storm in Sobha Singh's heart, to be able to portray the moral power Guru Gobind Singh possessed. The earlier portraits of **Guru Gobind Singh painted in head to bust style** (Plate-261), were the pictures of a strong and youthful warrior with *chakkars* and *kalgi* on his turban, wearing royal robes bedecked with jewels and pearls, carrying the sling of his sword across his chest. The most important and captivating feature in this painting was the confidence shown in his eyes with a stern gaze focused on his goal. Soot black flowing beard and moustaches twisted upwards, present a valiant and powerful soldier. Here he is depicted in all finery and royal appearance. The bright colour palette amply justifies the disposition of a royal heroic crusader.

The later portraits of **Guru Gobind Singh saw the addition of falcon perched on his right gloved hand standing besides a horse** (Plate-262). Both these elements are attributed to his position as a protector and a saviour. He carries a bow and an arrow casket typical of a *ranyodha*. The city of Anandpur Sahib, where Guru Gobind Singh founded Khalsa Panth in 1699A.D. and erected a fort, was his abode for a short time as this was the city of joy and a place very dear to

46 **Khokhar, Dr. Kulwant Singh**; 1995, *Sobha Singh Artist*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.64

Guru Gobind Singh, where he transformed the course of Sikh history. Sobha Singh has captured the magnificent ambience of this place in a very powerful large painting titled **Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur** (Plate-263), wherein the essence of the *ananda* means eternal bliss is skillfully depicted. Guru Gobind Singh is shown leaning against the portion of a fort's structure built in red stone. The reign of peace and tranquility has been expressed by employing elements such as flowering plants, two large peacocks leisurely moving around near a pair of pigeons. A white horse lazily grazes in the background and lush green foliage is surrounding a milk white structure of a Gurdwara. This is a picture of calm and poignant expression. There is an aura of soothing light behind his head which ultimately filters into an enigmatic mystical space. Soft and mellowed colours on Guru's face and costumes reflect a serene atmosphere. This masterpiece though projects Guru Gobind Singh in rich and splendid costumes yet he seems to be gazing in the space denoting that he is engrossed in introspection and contemplation. The composition engages the eye in powerful movement and all the elements in the painting are so beautifully juxtaposed that they lend an extraordinary balance to the painting. The hallmark of this painting projects that Sobha Singh had a keen eye for detail and a remarkable control over his brushwork.

Continuing with the theme for which he had a great reverence for the spiritual glow, he envisaged on the faces of the Gurus and their followers, who sacrificed their lives in the service of mankind, Sobha Singh harboured an unquenchable thirst to depict Guru Gobind Singh in truly larger than life persona. In the next painting, which emerged from his brush shows **Guru Gobind Singh riding a galloping horse** (Plate-264), accompanied by iconographic depiction of a white falcon perched on his gloved hand and reins of the horse tightly pulled up, describing the symbolism of complete control on the energies. The highlights on his face present an expression of deep resolve surrounded by dark thundering

clouds. This painting is a tribute to a warrior, who had made up his mind and is valiantly standing against all odds in the battlefield of life. Rough and rocky terrain amply illustrates the hardships of life. This superb painting by Sobha Singh was well received and it became an iconic calendar related to this Guru, as this painting is a celebration of a true Khalsa who fears no foes.

Sobha Singh's other remarkable paintings of **Guru Hargobind Sahib** (Plate-265), who founded the '*Miri*' (Temporal Power) and '*Piri*' (Spiritual Power) concept and armed his followers so that they may protect themselves against the forces of hatred and tyranny and presented impediments in the way of freedom of practice and preaching of their religion. Using rare symbolic elements, Sobha Singh painted a portrait of Guru Hargobind Singh, wherein he has depicted the hilt of a sword on one side and white swans and ducklings covering the area on the left side of the painting. Consolidation of this symbolism after a sustained thought process justifiably depicts the inner wisdom of '*Miri*' and '*Piri*'. Sobha Singh completely understood the importance of sacrifice in Sikhism and was inspired by this tradition as he remained immersed in the study of heroic feats and countless sacrifices made by the followers of Sikhism.

Concentrating on this theme, he painted the **Portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur** (Plate-266) in a seated posture, lost in deep prayer with his eyes half-closed. The Guru is presented here, wearing white clothes and a soft pale shawl around his shoulders. He is sitting crossed legged with folded hands in his lap. There is a halo behind his head and a metallic lamp in the shape of 'Ek Onkar' illuminating his face and the body. These symbols were creatively used to depict the realm of knowledge and darkness is shown receding behind his back. This is a true portrait of a towering personality, who possessed the strength of offering his head in sacrifice to protect the faith of others. This calendar too, is a most sought after piece of *Sikh Calendar art*. Reproductions of this calm and serene painting are in great demand.

Sobha Singh being a man of peace, whose sensibilities were deeply entrenched in the folk tales of Punjab, aspired to portray the legendary lovers of Punjab- 'Sohni Mahiwal' and 'Heer Ranjha', as the tales of these eternal lovers inspired a whole generation of writers and poets, which developed into *kissas* (stories) of their lives. It was a common scene in the Punjab, people singing these legendary tales, sitting under the banyan trees in soulful voices, with heart rending expressions and feelings. Paying his own tribute to these legendary lovers, Sobha Singh tried his hand at their depiction in various versions and successfully filtered the images in his own inimitable style and sensitivity, befitting a true and eternal love. This visual manifestation move the heart of every Punjabi, as it was a first time attempt by any painter to visually narrate the saga of lovelorn lovers, who lost their lives. People were so fascinated with this theme that even the art connoisseurs of those times appreciated this bold attempt by this master artist and these paintings were acquired by eminent dignitaries and reproduced images of these paintings reached every nook and corner of Punjab and Northern India.

Sohni Mahiwal (Plate-267) was painted in such an enigmatic fervour, depicting a dream-like vision, painted in strange soft tones and tints that it envelops the viewer in mesmerizing and magnetic parlance. In a poetic depiction, Sohni and Mahiwal are painted on the bank of river Chenab. Sohni is shown carrying an earthen pitcher, on which she used to float in the rough currents of this mighty river, to meet Mahiwal on the other bank of the river. The lithe figure of Sohni draped in wet clothes with long dark locks of hair, surround the innocent and tender beauty of her face.⁴⁷ There is a not an iota of any disgraceful erotic stance but the figures of true lovers are shown united in an embrace of divinity and pure love. Cleverly juxtaposed dark trunk of a tree in the foreground

47 **Kanwal, Balbir Singh;** 1987, *The Spirit of Sobha Singh's Art*. In Madanjit Kaur, Ed. *Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.72-73

is helpful in creation of a mystic soft light, emerging from the darkness of clouds, roaring and swirling in threatening exuberance. A viewer cannot shift his gaze from the faces of these lovers, which are placed in the middle of the painting. In a painting captured in mystical charm and lyrical expression, Sobha Singh painted the arrival of **Sohni in Heaven** (Plate-268), sitting alone on small rocks, swayed by the gentle touch of waves, gazing at the source of an eternal light, where there resides a realm of peace and tranquility. Her earthen pitcher lies by her side and an amazing look prevails upon her face. This is a picture of twilight dawn. The sunrise of heavenly ecstasy, where fear fades into thin air. The white apparels are shown drenched in nectar of purity, condensing Sobha Singh's view that such pious lovers surely end up in heaven.

The painting of **Heer Ranjha** (Plate-269) equally enralls the viewer and transports him to the times of these eternal lovers. Heer is shown seeing through a transparent veil, the image of Ranjha who became a *jogi* (wandering ascetic), is asking for alms at Heer's door. She is observing him with belated breath and placing a hand on her heart in a gesture of astonishment. The juxtaposition of *charkha* (spinning wheel), utensils, *chhiku*, and other objects in soft colours, describes the surroundings of a Punjabi household. The composition is complete with the addition of another female figure, who is engaged in conversation with Ranjha. The standing figure of Ranjha with bald head and his body is soaked in ash, is holding a long stick and a begging bowl.

Rich culture and traditions of Punjab have come alive in numerous bewitching paintings, showcasing social events and customs in a series of brides of Punjab and Kangra hills. In 1952, Sobha Singh painted a **Punjabi Bride** (Plate-270), complete with ceremonial marriage costume, intricate jewellery, *kaliras*, *tikka*, *kantha*, *kade*, *chaunk*, *nath* and a cane *pitari* as *shingar* box. She is peeping through the curtain of her *doli* (palanquin) and her eyes are full of dreams and focused on her feature. There is delicate rendering of her body

contours and her transparent *dupatta* reveals her lithe figure. Suited for the solemn occasion, the choice of colours of her clothes, is adding an additional charm and a hint of happiness. Yet the mood of the bride depicts a picture of expectation and a little sad tinge in her eyes relates to her departure from her parents' house. Portion of the *dola* (palanquin) made of bright shellac coloured wood is visible exposing a view of her parental house. This picture is very emotive and leaves a long-lasting impression on the viewer's mind. It is both enchanting and sad painting.

In yet another marvelous painting, Sobha Singh's **Kangra Bride-I** (Plate-271), takes one's breath away due to its resounding impact. Here he has concentrated more on the bride and her mood without loading the background with any elements. The stark grey blue wall left blank behind her seated figure complements the main character and lays stress on the bride sitting in a thoughtful composure, placing her chin on her hands, adorned with gold jewellery and *henna*. The typical large deep red *salu* (*dupatta*) is decorated with intricate *Phulkari* work and a *kalira* hangs from her wrist. Her feet are also decorated with *henna* designs and traditional Wicker-work *shingar* box with typical Punjabi decorations lies near her feet. The most attractive feature in this composition is the depiction of her doe like eyes filled with millions of dreams and feelings floating in them. Another **Kangra Bride-II** (Plate-272) in a different pose was completed in 1978, which shows his deep love for the subject, as the women depicted in these paintings look like shy rustic fairies, who are innocent and possessed with mellowed mannerism. The intoxicated eyes depicted in profile remind us of the almond eyes painted in Kangra miniatures.

Once Sobha Singh was asked to give his thoughts on frequent appearance of women in his paintings, he replied that '*The women haunted me in the third phase of my evolution because of her devotion to her husband, children and other members of the family. She is transplanted from one family to the other and*

*sacrifices her everything for others. She is great. I thought the Mother is always great. To satisfy my desires for mother, I painted a few women.*⁴⁸

Sobha Singh was very fond of interacting with the local people, who lived around his cottage and had a genuine concern for their welfare and deep sympathy for their simple lives full of hard daily chores. He used to converse with them to know their difficulties and hardships. These simple folks in return poured their hearts to him and there existed a natural bond between them, which prompted him to paint a few characters, who came across his abode. Hardworking, shy and simplistic *Gaddi* women appealed to him, who roamed about in the pastures with their lambs, goats and sheep. Thus establishing a bond between these simple folks, he created paintings of ever-lasting appeal and charm, enjoying and relishing the green bounties of nature, where peace prevailed and the air used to be thick with mystical music and echoes of the breeze acted like balm on his soul. These pictures have a charismatic appeal and are able to carry the viewer with them to the distant meadows and snow-clad mountains.⁴⁹ **Gaddan** (Plate-273) is an excellent example of his work, where he could infuse poetry and lyricism in the composition. The look and the smile on the face of the beautiful Gaddan, stirs the strings of every man's heart and a feeling of heavenly bliss envelops him. The palette here soft and tender is bathed in an euphorical light. The study of goats and *Gaddi* dogs is truly remarkable, which energizes the painting with loads of pure innocent joy. The depiction of *patu* (soft woollen hand knitted blanket), *thatu* (a typical Gaddi headgear) and *kamarkasa* (waist band) provides authenticity to the subject. The area around Palampur and Andretta has many tea gardens, as this area falls in the foothills of

48 **Kaur, Bibi Gurcharan** (Daughter of S. Sobha Singh, Legendary Punjabi Artist); October 2, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, S. Sobha Singh Art Gallery, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

49 **Kaur, Bibi Gurcharan** (Daughter of S. Sobha Singh, Legendary Punjabi Artist); October 3, 2010, *Through Personal Interview*, S. Sobha Singh Art Gallery, Andretta (Palampur), District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

Dhauladhar range. A soothing and soft hued painting of **Gaddan in Tea Garden** (Plate-274), with her *Kilta* (basket for carrying tea leaves) at her back, is shown passing through the tea garden in dimly lit landscape. There is exuberance of colour perspective with trees and mountains are merging with the sky. A look in her eyes reveals that she is waiting for someone. The painting is draped in mysteriously soft tones, as even her yellow scarf and pinkish shirt do not offend the eye, but the whole picture presents a pleasing effect on the onlooker.

In pursuance of mystical subjects, Sobha Singh did not stop at painting only the day-to-day events or creating the portraits of the local people, he sought creative satisfaction in painting new and varied subjects. But the element of mysticism always came to the front and filled his paintings with indescribable mastery in technique and rendering of excellent level. Historical events and legendary figures always attracted his attention and as a result, we have a wonderful masterpiece in the shape of **Last Desire of Mumtaz Mahal** (Plate-275), which has a plethora of all the royal and majestic leanings and this painting is full of pathos. Mumtaz Mahal is shown leaning on the shoulder of Shah Jahan in their imperial palace, who is gently embracing her in a gesture of tearful sorrow. This painting was inspired by the story of Mumtaz Mahal, who died in the arms of Shah Jahan, whispering her last desire that a suitable tomb, a symbol of their love, be erected on the banks of river Jamuna, which will immortalize their true love. There is a richness of details in this painting which has captured the palatial surroundings complete with silken curtains, lamps and Mughal style metallic objects.

His works on other themes which come to mind are painting of **Shaheed Bhagat Singh in his cell** (Plate-276), **Portrait of Baba Sheikh Farid** (Plate-277) and **Bhai Kanhaiya depicted in his own perception quenching the thirst of the whole universe** (Plate-278). Some other offbeat paintings display his keen desire to illustrate the latent humanistic and beastly powers engaged in perennial collision.

He has symbolically captured the essence of art and its purpose in the painting titled **Let art be to refine the swine and divine the refined** (Plate-279), depicting three stages of art, which refines the swine and then divines the refined. Here he had used large white wings to portray divinity and the form of an animal with human torso, as evil and unrefined creature. Pristine white mountains, soft grey blue fog behind the strange looking animal, adds a touch of mystery and enigma. A few other paintings with symbolic expressions amply project the course of his thought processes and reveal that he possessed a literary bent of mind. Another painting depicts **Art is the language of heart** (Plate-280); here a pure white fairy is shown playing on a *veena* and is surrounded by some instruments, a colour palette and some brushes. In the corner, there is a hint of full moon and some foliage in the background highlights the realm of night. It is a rejuvenating experience to go through the mystical creative world of Sobha Singh, which enriches the taste of a viewer, besides kindling the flame of a new awakening, which throws light on new perceptions and concepts. No wonder the work of such magnitude inspires and motivates the upcoming generations of artists and the general viewers alike. The purpose of art is truly served through his paintings which have no parallel in *Sikh art*.

The renowned Sikh painter, who earned the nickname of **John Constable of India**⁵⁰ was no other than **S.G. Thakur Singh** (Plate-281), who had his share of hardships and tribulation in the early phases of his life, when he had to work incessantly even for bare subsistence. He had to wade through deep waters, but he seems to have come out on the other shore unscathed and at peace with himself and his surroundings and the serenity of mind and inner equilibrium, he has achieved after life's strenuous toil has imperceptibly passed into his creative work. Born in 1895 in the small village of Verka near Amritsar, young Thakur

50 **Bhatti, S.S.**; May 1, 2011, *Art under Attack*, The Tribune

Singh did not cut his teeth on any artistic heritage but according to all accounts, he had a natural inclination towards drawing often wandering off into fields to sketch from nature or seeing one of his aunts paint folk patterns on the walls of their home. S.G. Thakur Singh took initiation in art at a comparatively early age of ten by drawing mural sketches on the mud walls of his ancestral home at Verka. Regular studies did not interest him but to his good fortune in his village school, there was an art teacher, Mian Muhammad Alam, who took the young boy, all of ten years of age then, under his wing. Some time later, when Muhammad Alam got the job of an 'Art Director' in a theatrical company in Bombay painting backdrops, one imagines- he sent for Thakur Singh who joined him. The twosome were back in Amritsar a year later, however; Thakur Singh was sent to Lahore to join the Victoria Diamond Jubilee School of Art but his disinterest in formal studies continued and was back home in two years. Bombay beckoned him again and both young Thakur Singh and Muhammad Alam set off for the place. There the two worked for some years. There is the charming episode of Thakur Singh's gifts being spotted- as he sat on the Chowpatty Beach, painting the sea at sunrise- by the editor of a *Parsi* newspaper, who encouraged him to participate in an art exhibition then scheduled to be held at Shimla. Thakur Singh did take part and came back with the first prize. He was 18 years of age then. After this, there was no looking back for him.⁵¹

After Bombay, it was to Calcutta that teacher and pupil headed, for so much was happening there then: theatre, art, music. Names like Abanindranath and Rabindranath Tagore hung about in the air; a large and talented group of artists was doing things differently; *jatras* and *Parsi* theatre were drawing crowds; European paintings could be seen in the flesh: there was much to learn and, with luck something to earn at the place. Thakur Singh attached himself to

51 **Goswamy, B.N.;** December 12, 2010, *Risen from the soil*, The Tribune

the Maiden Theatrical Company of Rustamji, painting large sceneries for the stage, but he was also constantly painting on canvas and on paper on his own.⁵² Here he cultivated intimate friendship with eminent artists like Rabindranath Tagore, J.P. Gangooly. H. Mazumdar and others, who lavished high economies on the wonderful executions of his brush. So widespread was the spell of his genius in the art-world that it occasioned very little surprise when he annexed the second prize of eight hundred pounds in the British Empire Exhibition, held in London in 1924 for his masterly painting ‘After The Bath’, remarkable for a well formulated and lucid style applied with complete conviction.⁵³ For sixteen years, he stayed on in Calcutta, establishing quite a reputation for himself. Clearly, there was a market for his kind of academic work: figure studies and landscapes and romantic themes. Commissions started pouring in from rulers and politicians and the well-to-do, everyone looking for ‘life-like’ work that fitted into their ideas about what art should be like. There is mention of his having painted close to ten thousand works in those years.⁵⁴ His painting titled ‘Ganesh Puja’ was an object of attraction in the ‘Exhibition of Modern Indian Art’ opened by the Duchess of York in December 1934 in the New Burlington Galleries, London.⁵⁵ With the help of his friends, he succeeded in organizing the Punjab Fine Arts Society at Calcutta, whose first exhibition was held in 1926.⁵⁶ ‘The Punjab Fine Arts Society’ was also responsible for publishing his selected work in three volumes under the caption ‘The Art of S.G. Thakur Singh’ and another art album entitled ‘Glimpses of India- A composite of scenic and architectural beauties of India’.⁵⁷

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- 52 **Goswamy, B.N.**; December 12, 2010, *Risen from the soil*, The Tribune
53 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2
54 **Goswamy, B.N.**; December 12, 2010, *Risen from the soil*, The Tribune
55 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2
56 **OBE, Ranjit Singh**; 2008, *Sikh Achievers*, Hemkunt Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, p.158
57 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2

In 1931, he decided to come back to Amritsar and settled down there. In Amritsar, he kept his dream alive to help provide a platform for artists of Punjab, for which he established the 'Indian Academy of Fine Arts' and the 'Thakur Singh School of Arts'.⁵⁸ He had been associated with the activities of the Academy of which he was elected President with unanimous verdict in 1932. Under his brilliant lead, for over quarter of a century, this organization has been doing the wonderful piece of work in setting up aesthetic standards and popularizing art in the Northern India, with almost a fantastic zeal.⁵⁹

Among his princely patrons have been the late Maharaja of Udaipur, who commissioned two hundred paintings; the late Nawab of Bhopal, who commissioned one hundred paintings and the Maharaja of Kashmir, Dongarpur, Travancore, Nawanagar, Kotah, Bikaner, Kapurthala, Patiala and other states.⁶⁰ Lord Irwin (later Lord Halifax) and Lord Linlithgow, each became the owner of Thakur Singh's paintings 'Evening Lights on the Old Palace, Udaipur' and 'Valley of Gulmarg' respectively.⁶¹ Out of four reproductions of the painting 'After the Bath' one of them is owned by the Maharaja of Patiala.⁶² The President's residence (Rashtrapati Bhawan) in New Delhi has given a place of honour to his impressive painting depicting the assumption of office by the first Indian Governor General Sri C. Rajagopalachari.⁶³ S.G. Thakur Singh had also the privilege of painting a portrait of Late Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who honoured both the artist and Amritsar by inaugurating the Silver Jubilee Exhibition of the Academy of Fine Arts on 30th October, 1953.⁶⁴ The marvelous paintings 'Her

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- 58 **Dhillon, Gurdial Singh**; January 26, 1958, *Art Gallery at Amritsar*, The Sunday Tribune
 59 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2
 60 **Deva, D.**; April 20, 1952, *S.G. Thakur Singh and his art*, The Sunday Standard
 61 **Chaitanya, Krishna**; 1951, *The Art of S.G. Thakur Singh, Roopalekha*, Vol.22, No.2, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.20
 62 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.6
 63 **Singh, Shamsheer**; n.d., *Thakar Singh through his art*, Thakur Singh School of Arts, Amritsar, Punjabee Press, Amritsar, p.31
 64 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; October 30, 1953, *Indian Art Souvenir*, Amritsar, p.2

Last Desire’ and ‘Taj in the Evening Lights’ was acquired by the Government of U.S.S.R, now hangs in the National Art Gallery, Moscow.⁶⁵ The Scotland National Gallery of Art, one of the most selective galleries in the world, bought his painting of the ‘Qutab Minar, Delhi’.⁶⁶ He was invited by U.S.S.R and Hungarian Government in 1959 to hold one show of his paintings at Moscow, Leningrad, Budapest and Scotland.⁶⁷ In a rare honour, his painting titled ‘The Taj in Full Moon’ was selected by Central Lalit Kala Akademi and presented to High Commissioner of India in London for the Commonwealth Institute for the Blinds at London in 1965. Thakur Singh was nominated as member of Punjab Legislative Council in 1953.⁶⁸ He was honoured with Padamshri by the Government of India in 1973.⁶⁹ He also represented as an active Member of Executive Board of National Lalit Kala Akademi from 1959 to 1975.⁷⁰ His name and fame spread all over India and his magnificent works were acquired by Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad; Rajasthan Museum, Udaipur; Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi; Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh; Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar; Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar; Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi and Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi. He also enjoyed a royal status of “State Artist” of various states like Bhopal, Bikaner, Kotah, Patiala, Kapurthala and Malerkotla to name a few. This genius passed away on 2nd February, 1976, who made Punjab and India proud in the world of art and set

65 **Krishna**; November 4, 1967, *S.G. Thakur Singh- ‘Home-Coming’ Presentation Revives Nostalgic Memories*, The Tribune

66 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.27

67 **Singh, Shamsheer**; n.d., *Thakar Singh through his art*, Thakur Singh School of Arts, Amritsar, Punjabee Press, Amritsar, p.6

68 **Krishna**; November 4, 1967, *S.G. Thakur Singh- ‘Home-Coming’ Presentation Revives Nostalgic Memories*, The Tribune

69 **Singh, Kultar**; 1973, *S.G. Thakur Singh and His Landscapes*, The Tribune

70 **Krishna**; November 4, 1967, *S.G. Thakur Singh- ‘Home-Coming’ Presentation Revives Nostalgic Memories*, The Tribune

a benchmark for the new generation artists, to follow his spirit of enterprise and immaculate professionalism.⁷¹

S.G. Thakur Singh was a master of the magic brush and understood the intricacies and application of colours in vivid perceptions. He had a complete control in capturing the moods of Mother Nature in full splendour with virtuosity of a magician and a music conductor, who made the symphonies sing at his will. Whether he paints in pastel colours, the shy smiles passed of an innocent girl or the dignified demeanor of Netaji Bose or General Hari Singh Nalwa or the silent sunny vales of Gulmarg or the waves playing in child like intimacy with the shore- the tranquil beauty enlivens them all. The technique of Thakur Singh derived its ingredients from European traditions, but this it has done without detriment to the age-long traditions of own country's art. Nowadays when sheer academic jugglery in colour, light and shade is being practiced under new nomenclatures and styles, it is refreshing to find in this great artist's brush stress on the own eternal values of beauty. He had no patience with effervallent schools or styles of art, which take fiendish delight in distorting beauty out of shape in order to appear novel or bizarre. His art is at once a reminder and a warning to those claptrap, ultra modernists with so little work and still less patience, try to slink into envied temple of fame. Through the postern door to take seat their with the immortals, like Satan stealing into the sacred precincts of paradise and win cheaply a name which alone is granted to Martyr in a cause. S.G. Thakur Singh believes in going direct to nature for subject and inspiration but does not accept nature in her wild exuberance or superfluous abundance. He reduces her to strict order and coherence for art to him is 'Nature-methodized'. This is why there is in his works an eternal freshness of appeal, deep intuitive understanding and a breadth of vision- all balanced by a perfect technique. He speaks poorly of that art which arises hoarse for a critic to deliver laboured discourse on the beauties

71 **OBE, Ranjit Singh;** 2008, *Sikh Achievers*, Hemkunt Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, p.159

that exist nowhere. Art according to him is no more an intellectual jugglery but a language of the heart and must go straight to heart in order to be effective. It must completely overwhelm its beholder, be he a child or a philosopher, a barbarian or an art connoisseur.⁷²

Portraiture and landscape painting are the two provinces where he has achieved unrivalled excellence. He has to its credit many commissioned portraits mostly of ruling princes. His portrait study of **Gandhiji, Netaji, Sher-e-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh** (Plate-282) and **General Hari Singh Nalwa** (Plate-283) have been wildly acclaimed as masterpieces, as he has successfully endeavoured to capture in them the faithful historical truth of these great persons. They have the same solid virtues which distinguish the commissioned portraits of the royal academicians of Britain. In landscape painting, he is essentially a lyricist. Some of his scenes can without exaggeration, be styled as symphonies in colour. Like the Greek sculptor, who could carve in stone the movement of the wind and the breeze. Thakur Singh has captured and eternalized in his paintings the fleeting colours that play upon the maiden face of the awakening Morn or of the retiring Eve and the elusive wealth scattered by moonlight. The transporting power of the imagination is well illustrated in his famous work **Aurora** (Plate-284) which is the pictorial representation of the dawn on the sea beach. It is like the vision of a place in the mind, which one intentionally desires, but to which no human path directly lead. A peep into the picture is a peep beyond the borders of the finite, when all forms end and the spirit rules in all in its naked majesty. 'Parting Kiss' another of his famous paintings represents the icy solitude of the Mount Everest flushed golden with the touch of the dying day. Here, the Everest is no longer the awe-aspiring inaccessible peak. It is to the explorer or the scientist but a perfect vision of beauty with which the spirit of the beholder can hold endless

72 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2-3

communion and share a part of its glory. Among the architectural subjects, the beauty of the 'Taj' seems to have specially touched the tender fibers of his heart, for he portrayed it from several angles and under various atmospheric effects, every time revealing an aspect of its sublimity and grace hitherto unrevealed in colour. The actual 'Taj' is beautiful indeed but the vision of the painted in 'Her Last Desire' (acquired by U.S.S.R State Museum) under the golden rays of evening sun, with his fairy contours fading into the surrounding air, make it appear like the fragment of the forgotten dream.⁷³

S.G. Thakur Singh's variegated world of Indian Belles comes before us not conventional in form but throbbing with life-blood and revealing a firm individualistic presentation. Being the portrait painter of high caliber, he makes the face convincingly real and emblematic of the inner rigors of spiritual conflict, characteristic of the lower classes or the sophistry and snobbism of the upper ones. As such his figures are endured with a natural grace and comeliness. Having spent a major portion of his youthful life in Bengal, obviously he could not shake himself free of the impress of Bengali life and manners, which are too apparent in the character of the figures and the background effects, against which they are painted.⁷⁴

His most famous painting which he attempted in many versions is titled **After the Bath** (Plate-285) and which was bestowed with second prize in British Empire Exhibition, London, brought this artist a sudden fame and recognition, due to its high degree of technical competence. The tones of the flesh where it is bare and where the wet and dripping garment clings close to the body are graded with a discriminating colour sense and the characteristic pose brings out exquisitely the grace of the feminine figure. It is customary with Indian women

73 **Singh, Principal Shamsheer**; 1935, *Paintings of Indian Womanhood* (Introduction), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.3

74 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.4

more particularly in Bengal, to go for votive offering to a nearby temple and on their return to have a dip into a tank attached to the temple with the upper garment still wrapped around the body. This has provided the artist with a subject upon which he has profusely lavished his skill.⁷⁵ Predominantly his studies of women can be resolved into two categories: a frankly sensual almost titillating female figure usually with wet clinging drapery and various regional ethnic types. Inevitably, the works belonging to the first category became highly popular. The paintings in this series are **Morning Prayer** (Plate-286), **The Innocent Candle** (Plate-287), **Finishing Touch** (Plate-288), **Tulsi Seva** (Plate-289), **Old Memories** (Plate-290) and **Whispers of Love** (Plate-291). The “Woman” thus frankly became an object of gratification, the pretext of any narrative imperative being totally disregarded. It is interesting to see, however that for most of such paintings the prototypes are clearly Bengali, the typically worn *Sari* complete with a bunch of keys tied to a corner, reddened soles of the feet, red and *shankha* bangles, and never a Punjabi woman. Perhaps the explanation for this conscious choice should be sought in the background of Thakur Singh. There is nothing at all in his cultural and social background, which would have allowed him to use a Punjabi woman as his model. Eroticism and sensuality were the never intentions of the poets, writers and painters in their works, due to cultural ethos in Punjab. Such dimensions if ever attempted were indirect and low key hints or suggestions and their glamorization was a taboo. The depiction of the physical beauty was quite restrained, though there may exist a quantum of deep romantic feelings and thoughts in such creative works.⁷⁶

Apart from this frank avowal of ‘Woman’, Thakur Singh made other women as well, more demure and straitlaced, even as he painted a number of

75 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.7

76 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.127-128

different ethnic and provincial types, differentiating clearly in their facial features, sartorial fashions and their occupations. It is in these paintings that Thakur Singh's undoubted superior craftsmanship comes through his ability to capture his models in various visually advantageous poses, the felicitous handling of paint, a convincing anatomy, a meticulous capturing of details and textures and so on.⁷⁷

In the later section, Thakur Singh has explored his multi-faceted artistic capabilities in portraying ladies from different provinces of India, proving his mastery over the medium in truthful fidelity and ease. The **Punjabi Bride** (Plate-292) used to be popular choice for Punjabi artists, who treated it with varying degrees of success. Due to the emotive content, the Bridehood represents a sudden and lasting break with the past like the tender plants transplanted in a strange soil. It is also the occasion of fulfillment, which breathes warmth and gladness everywhere and transforms into beauty and bloom all that comes with the range of its magic touch. The bride is animated by a feeling of conscious pride of having acquired a little realm of love of which she is an undisputed queen. In order to subdue the overaught effect of jewellery, the artist has very cleverly treated the drapery with broad casual strokes.⁷⁸ 'Punjabi Bride' though a picture of muted strength and confidence, has sad alluring and reflecting eyes, where dreams and expectations are woven in a pattern of a mesmerizing grace. The colour of her dazzling *dupatta* and pale silken suit transforms this picture into a happy and magnificent glow, where the regal persona of the bride presents a magnetic appeal. In the background, authentic Punjabi carved furniture adds touch of solidity and robustness- the hallmark of everything Punjabi and lavishly embroidered cuffs of her loose dress add a peculiar richness to the attire's design.

77 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.129

78 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.17

In the painting titled **Indolence** (Plate-293), which is in the collection of H.H. Nawab of Malerkotla, has the sumptuously decorated interior of a room inhabited by an attractive type of feminine beauty. Half-aroused from her sleep but still chewing the cud of some beautiful love dream she has experienced and loathes to return to the world of consciousness and harsh reality.⁷⁹ The artist deserves credit for its technical excellence, the firm and realistic painting of the figure and extremely effective management of light and shade. There is an oriental quality in the linear rhythms, which flow and converge into no loose ends. The picture expresses with utmost force the artist's mind in which arouses no ordinary human responses but that rare state of satisfaction, which is styled as an aesthetic emotion.

The subject of the painting **Monzat** (Plate-294) is a noble minded, devout Muslim lady during one of her daily recitals of holy Kuran.⁸⁰ Her mind all of a sudden is captured by divine vision ineffably beautiful, and she falls into a trance. The world of the spirit is not far off but hovers unseen, surrounds us only to be visualized, more palpably than reality itself through reverence, simplicity and love. There is an expression of partaking of mystic experiences, which alone can open before us the golden road to bliss. The tranquil solitude, mysterious effect of light and shade dexterously manipulated, the wage effect of architectural background and above all, the characteristic pose of the figure, tend to create a consciousness of divine presence.⁸¹ Though we observe a sustained presence of spiritually potent atmosphere and deliverance of deep meanings yet it is revealed that these pictures were not painted for giving any solemn messages or for advocating certain moral values as the artist has primarily chosen to paint

79 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.25

80 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.129

81 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.26

them simply to record the fleeting movements and the fascinating vision, which he experienced after observing a particular subject.

Reflection of the various facets and moments of a day in extraordinary environs excited his senses to capture human moods and portray the undercurrents of the thought process of the subject. The hours of waiting are infact; the hours of prolonged anguish describe a painting titled **Expectation** (Plate-295). The woman embellished with jewellery and brocaded apparel with a rose of love blooming in her heart and her hand, is apparently waiting the arrival of her far way lover, long separated from her. Her expression reveals a mixed emotion of joy and sadness-joy in the hope of meeting and sadness born of uncertainty- sometimes the other gaining ascendancy. The artist's flair for painting drapery, architectural designs and acute colour sense is too apparent and is effectively used in this painting, to create an atmosphere of elegance and luxury. The light and shadow effect in the decorative interior has been judiciously devised in order to balance the overall composition.⁸²

Ganesh Puja (Plate-296) is such an appealing masterpiece which highlights the concept that through the symbolic worship of idols the communion of human spirit with the Universal Spirit is connected, that can lead the spirit to the higher self-realization. The worship of 'Ganesh'-the Elephant God prevails in nearly all parts of India. The lady standing before the God is completely lost to the external world. The expression of devotion and earnestness on her face is faithfully rendered. The classical folds of the drapery of her *Sari* and the architectural background entirely Indian in spirit, lends an added charm. Use of a decorative pillar in the foreground on the left hand side of the painting, has cleverly illuminated the background with a mystical glow which prevails in the religious shrines. Mellowed soft and tender markings rendered on the classical Indian

82 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Paintings of Indian Womanhood*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.21

pillars relates to structures created in Southern India. There is an air of divinity which lifts the painting to a plateau of intense visual delight. Thakur Singh's fascination with provincial dresses and jewellery is manifest in many works of everlasting beauty. He has depicted these essential elements in photo-precision and the prime importance of authenticity has been faithfully established. The other bewitching paintings in this genre are **At the Temple Door** (Plate-297), **The Secret Letter** (Plate-298), **Torments of Love** (Plate-299) and **Compassion** (Plate-300).

In the paintings of S.G. Thakur Singh lie a perpetual reminder of past pleasures and the spectacle splendour of India. While depicting colourful pageant of Indian life, the artist has left many fine pictorial records: pilgrims bathing in the early dawn in the sacred Godavari, fisherboats setting out to sea in the early morning at Madras and country sailing boats returning at dusk on the Hoogly.⁸³ To those who have not actually visited the country, the paintings will reveal something of the beauty and distinctiveness of the Indian scene, architecturally, naturally and humanly. This is not putting his work in the category of colour photography. But Thakur Singh has a gift of selection, arrangement and reserve in colouring that bears its testimony to his own vital and individual sensitiveness and delicacy of response to the visible world and his joy in unsophisticated depiction of beauty. The clarity and realism shown in these paintings have their affinities with western art but his work has a firmness of execution that puts him on the pedestal of achievements in competence at par with master painters of Rajput and Mughal era.⁸⁴ He had the power to freeze even moment in his works and his steady hand had the command to anchor a fleeting movement without making it tumultuous and boisterous. The elements of calm and quite were

83 **Chaitanya, Krishna;** 1951, *The Art of S.G. Thakur Singh, Roopalekha*, Vol.22, No.2, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.21

84 **Cousins, James H.;** n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties* (Preface), Writer: S.G. Thakur Singh, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.4

captured in dim fading lights and the backgrounds complement the compositions without interfering in the projection of the subject in focus.

“No doubt this ancient land of India, so vast in her extent, so varied in her loveliness, has lured from time immemorial, the footsteps of the greedy conquerors as well as the inquisitive visitors from lands far remote. But face to face with her irresistible magnificence, the conqueror found him disarmed in stead of ransacking her fair bosom was forced to lay at her lotus feet the best gift of his own exotic culture and civilization. The dazed visitor went back with his incredible tales of wonder and romance and was instrumental in manipulating fresh wave of invasion which results not a bit different from those in the past. This endless process of time has thus made India the treasure house not only of natural beauty but also of works of supreme artistic excellence. Even her minutest particle of dust is injected with some mystical, mythical or historical tradition or association”.⁸⁵ These are a few observations of Thakur Singh who seeped through the skin of the mystical India and yearned to touch her soul with the sheer magic of his sensitive brush. The paintings which have immortalized his love for rendering architectural marvels of India are entrenched in his wonderful control over line drawing and projection of perspectives and he truly had a keen eye for detail. Usually it is very difficult for artists to capture the architectural structures in their true element whereby the soul of the building is revealed but this master artist had a magic wand to turn the hard architectural structures into pleasing and emotive objects, breathing with enchanting mystical charm and a rare warmth in their appearance. The softened tones have a magical effect on the composition of such buildings, balanced by appropriate juxtaposition of foliage, alongwith required thickness of people as per the requirement of a specific subject. Each work of this nature and genre has an

85 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties* (Artist's Note), Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.7

aesthetic aura, which bewitches the eye and leaves a tender expression on the mind of the viewer. In spite of all these wonderful qualities, these works are a store-house of elegantly projected architectural patterns, embellishments and ornamental elements rich in authentic details faithfully recorded and rendered with utmost patience and artistic caliber.

In these series **The Golden Temple at Amritsar-I** (Plate-301) is a classical example, where artist has stressed upon the need to depict the holy shrine in a variety of moods with the support of background filled with clouds and hues, which enhance the main structure and represent it in a dramatic way. The grey wind swept clouds canopying the temple from above, the supportive waves rising in eternal homage to the presiding spirit of the place, instead of producing a disturbed effect, impart in the whole scene the visionary quality of a dream, which tends to create in the beholder a purely mystic feeling of devotional ecstasy.⁸⁶ In yet another composition, the central shrine of **The Golden Temple-II** (Plate-302) popularly known as 'Sri Harimandir Sahib' seems to glide like a majestic swan on the azure waters of holy tank. The scene draws unreserved admiration of the visitor. Dark clouds perched in the background lend an overpowering solitude to the atmosphere, empowering it with poetical as well as divine bliss. In a different mood **The Golden Temple-III** (Plate-303) in this painting is shown as an abode of Almighty where there is unrestricted excess. Here group of devotees are shown entering the gates early in the morning with prayers in their hearts. Figures depicted in mellowed tones are full of religious fervour and an air of serenity prevails in the painting.

The Qutub Minar in Delhi (Plate-304), a painting in collection of Col. W.J. Simpson of Scotland, done in oil on canvas in 1931, is a rare work of characteristic beauty of architecture, imaginatively depicted by the artist wherein

86 **Singh, S.G. Thakur**; n.d., *Glimpses of India- A Unique Collection of Landscapes & Architectural Beauties*, Punjab Fine Arts Society, Calcutta, p.2

a flat pale yellow background adds a touch of mystery. The surrounding ruins, the birds flying in the sky, the verdure in the foreground with a few casual visitors squatting there, are significantly introduced by the artist to reprove the vanity of the emperor, who himself alongwith the empire he founded has been made equal with the dust. In an unusual composition, Qutub Minar rises amongst the small temple like buildings in a lonely splendour like a king amongst his councilors.

‘The Taj’ is not only an edifice of supreme artistic excellence but also forms a confluence where art and nature meet. Both have bestowed upon it with the full splendour of wintry moon, in the grey dawn of the morning or twilight, to the fading evening under the star garnished light of the day, it reveals its manifold aspects of ethereal beauty. It is indeed the love dream of a beautiful soul realized in chaste marble. S.G. Thakur Singh has caught **A Glimpse of the Taj** (Plate-305), a rare vision of this ever changing, ever new monument of love radiating its heavenly graces under the first rays of the rising sun. It is as if we are beholding through Shah Jahan’s own eyes. Its fairy structure dissolving into the music of his love longings. The actual ‘Taj’ is beautiful indeed but the vision of it portrayed by the artist in the painting titled **Her Last Desire** (Plate-306) with the contours of its fairy structure fading into the surrounding air, make it appear like the fragment of a golden dream, or a gem of beauty, distilled out of pure imagination.⁸⁷ **Tear Drops** (Plate-307) is another gripping canvas, done in oil on canvas in 1928, which has envisioned the ‘Taj’ in a poetic parlance. Here the image of ‘Taj’ has been melted into the watery eyes of the emperor heavy with sighs of grief. He struggles with his tears and at last they recede into the bosom of nature. His eyes linger on the dim image of the ‘Taj’ in a melancholy mood. It seems that the sigh of the emperor has crystallized in snow white marble and the

87 **Chaitanya, Krishna**; 1967, *S.G. Thakur Singh*, Editor: Jaya Appasamy, Publisher: B.C. Sanyal, Secretary, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, The Caxton Press Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, p.7

lonely and sad moon hides itself behind the mists of mystery. The Yamuna flowing silently seems to be joining the 'Taj' in an exercise of consoling each other. The subject of 'Taj' continuously inspired the artist and he created wonderful versions of this symbol of love. Each painting has something new to offer by way of ever-changing enigmatic charisma.

He traveled far and wide to relish the ambience which satisfied his urge to paint various monuments and places connected to historical importance. The paintings which come to mind are **East Gate of Sanchi Stupa** (Plate-308), **The Minakshi Temple at Madurai** (Plate-309), **Victoria Memorial Hall at Calcutta** (Plate-310), **Manikarnika Ghat at Benaras** (Plate-311), **Dasaswamedh Ghat at Benaras** (Plate-312) and **The Vishram Ghat at Mathura** (Plate-313). A master of capturing candid expressions of common folks and their surroundings with unparalleled artistic charm in his free flowing lucid style, Thakur Singh seems to be most happy with the subjects of nature- rolling hills, flowing rivers, brooks and enchanting green glory of the Mother Nature. Here in his paintings of inimitable artistic excellence, he has proved himself to be the true worshipper of Nature, which earned him the title of 'John Constable of India',⁸⁸ who was lost in the glory of snow clad mountains and was attracted to the smell of the soil, where he befriended simple innocent and hardworking folks, peasants and shepherds, who were naturally very dear to his heart. He filled his canvases with these subjects and draped them in innocent and divine light. His artistic excellence burst into a joyful exuberance and a strange heavenly bliss in the paintings titled **In the Valley of Gods** (Plate-314) and **Heaven of the Poor** (Plate-315). **Women of Kangra** (Plate-316) done in 1963, depicts two Kangra Women engaged in gossip against the wall of a *Kaccha* house, is a marvelous study of rustic charm and truthful depiction of their ethnic costumes, complete with pieces of jewellery and animated expressions. Nature always gladdened his heart and refreshed his soul

88 **Bhatti, S.S.**; May 1, 2011, *Art under Attack*, The Tribune

as he painted countless scenes from various places he visited during his lifetime.⁸⁹

Parting Kiss (Plate-317) painted in 1928 in Sikkim, is in the collection of Sir Buta Singh of Amritsar, is a tribute to the majestic Mount Everest, where the soft glitter of rosy rays seems to be engaged in a parting kiss.⁹⁰ The range of the painting is so vast that it takes the viewer to travel miles and miles to relish the beauty of this painting- an abode of abundant nature dotted with far-flung tiny villages, inhabited by lonely shepherds and their herds. In a similar fashion, the artist has crystallized the bewitching Kullu Valley in a painting titled **Evening in Kullu Valley** (Plate-318) in a landscape of terraced fields and glistening mirror-like lake, surrounded by still and silent trees, hills and mountains, which catches the eye of the beholder and the overall composition presents a peculiar sense of serenity and joy. Artist S.G. Thakur Singh had set a benchmark in realistic painting and had raised the bar to such an extent that it is difficult if not possible to touch the level of artistic excellence and vision he had achieved. He has reserved a coveted place for himself in Sikh painting which will continue to inspire the new breed artists.

The most versatile and prolific painter of Sikh history **Sardar Kirpal Singh** (Plate-319) was born on 10th December, 1923 at village 'Vara Chain Singh', Zira Tehsil of Ferozpur district, Punjab. His father Sardar Bhagat Singh Panesar was a renowned craftsman and excelled in wood carving, engraving and designing.⁹¹ His mother Har Kaur was a pious lady. The Jain Temple of Zira has a wooden gate of exquisite beauty created by his father. Even as a child, he was sensitive to the beauty of colours and spent his spare time, watching village girls spinning and embroidering *Phulkaris* in the courtyard of his house. He felt

89 **Singh, Shamsheer**; n.d., *Thakar Singh through his art*, Thakur Singh School of Arts, Amritsar, Punjabee Press, Amritsar, p.43

90 **Singh, Kultar**; 1973, *S.G. Thakur Singh and His Landscapes*, The Tribune

91 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Artist Kirpal Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.513-514

inspired and wanted to do something creative himself and in his own words “*I was itching to utilize my fingers by drawing something or making some crude pictures*”. At that time, drawing was introduced as a subject in class fifth. Kirpal Singh spent many hours, copying pictures from his notebooks with a G’ nib and he passed the matriculation examination in 1939.⁹² Thereafter he joined Sanatan Dharam College at Lahore.⁹³ In 1940, he paid a visit to historical Gurdwaras of Bhai Taru Singh, Bhai Mani Singh, Dera Sahib and Shaheed Ganj in Lahore and became aware of the great sacrifices of the Sikhs. At that time, the Birth Anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was celebrated at Lahore. Though he was a science student, he spent much time in the study of history.⁹⁴ He was greatly inspired by the ‘History of the Sikhs’ written by Bhai Khazan Singh. Another book which made a mark on him was ‘Sundri’ a novel by Bhai Vir Singh.⁹⁵ After passing F.Sc. in 1941, he joined as a clerk in Military Accounts Department in Lahore Cantonment, Mian Mir.⁹⁶ In his spare time, he continued to paint landscapes and human figures in water colours. In 1941, he married to Kuldeep Kaur of village Kadyal in Tensil Zira. From Kuldeep Kaur, he has two sons and one daughter. The younger son Jarnail Singh paints and inherited the talent from his father. In August 1947 Kirpal Singh settled in Jalandhar, where his brother was a clerk in Industrial Department of Punjab Government. At Jalandhar, he had an opportunity to see reproductions of the paintings of the Russian artist ‘Repin’ - ‘Volga Boatman religious processions’ and ‘Cossacks writing a letter to

92 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

93 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.94

94 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

95 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.126

96 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.45

the Sultan of Turkey' in the Encyclopedia Britannica.⁹⁷ He also became familiar with the reproductions of the paintings of great masters of Italian Renaissance such as Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci and Rubens. He was deeply influenced by the realistic technique of these great painters.⁹⁸

Thereafter in 1952, Kirpal Singh migrated to Delhi and he earned his livelihood by designing book covers and drawing book illustrations.⁹⁹ Commercial art was not to his taste and in 1953 he came to Karnal and lived in the reclamation farm at 'Indri'. In the quite atmosphere of Indri, he started painting seriously. The subjects of his paintings were women transplanting paddy, caravans of gypsies and Guru Hargobind in Gwalior Fort.¹⁰⁰ In June 1955, he arranged the first exhibition of his paintings at Dyal Singh College, Karnal under the patronage of Principal Sant Rian Grover.¹⁰¹ Though the paintings were appreciated by the visitors but not a single painting was sold. The second exhibition of his paintings was held in January 1956 at Lyllapur Khalsa College, Jalandhar under the patronage of Principal Gurbachan Singh Talib, who purchased a few paintings for the college. On the recommendation of Professor Satbir Singh, a member of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Kirpal Singh was employed as an artist at Darbar Sahib at Amritsar at a salary of Rs.250 per month during the summer of 1956. From 1956 to 1962, he painted thirty-six paintings of subject relating to Sikh history which are now displayed in the Central Sikh Museum, Darbar Sahib at Amritsar.¹⁰² There include his famous

97 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

98 **Chitrakar, Ajajib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.103

99 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Artist Kirpal Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.513-514

100 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

101 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Artist Kirpal Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.513-514

102 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

painting of the Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as well as tortures suffered by Sikh men and women during the Mughal rule.¹⁰³ Kirpal Singh started donning 'Black Chola' from his 31st Birthday in 1958 after the fashion of *Sufi* poets and regarded this dress as a symbol of devotion and dedication to his self imposed renunciation of worldly matters. He was not happy at Amritsar as the curator of the museum could not understand his work and there were frequent quarrels. In sheer disgust, he left the service of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.¹⁰⁴ Some of his paintings of that period were displayed in Guru Tegh Bahadur Niwas at Gurdwara Sis Ganj. Later on these paintings were shifted to Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, New Delhi.¹⁰⁵ The Guru Gobind Singh Foundation requested Dr. M.S. Randhawa and Dr. Ganda Singh to select themes for paintings relating to Guru Gobind Singh and select an artist to paint on these subjects. Sardar Kirpal Singh was selected to paint these paintings which are now on display in Guru Gobind Singh Bhawan at Punjabi University, Patiala.¹⁰⁶

In 1967 Dr. M.S. Randhawa who was the Chief Commissioner of Union Territory of Chandigarh, made a scheme for allotment of building sites on concessional basis to settle scientists, writers and artists. In that scheme, a plot was allotted to Kirpal Singh who started construction of a house for his residence.¹⁰⁷ At that time the scheme of Museum of Evolution of Life for which paintings were required, Kirpal Singh and Jaswant Singh were commissioned to paint large paintings showing the progress of life in the geological past. This was not a subject in which Kirpal Singh was interested but as he was in need of

103 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.95

104 **Randhawa, M.S.**; 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

105 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.95

106 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.46

107 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.106

funds, he painted works relating to the Mesozoic period when dinosaurs ruled the Earth. He painted these pictures with good amount of perfection. While at Chandigarh, he was also patronized by Sardar Manmohan Singh, Managing Director of Punjab Marketing Federation. A scholar and connoisseur of art Sardar Inderjeet Singh of Punjab and Sind Bank also commissioned Kirpal Singh to paint Sikh themes so after many army officers also started patronizing him. Twelve of his paintings on the heroic deeds of the Sikh soldiers during Indo-Pak Wars were displayed in the Army Museum at Meerut Cantonment.¹⁰⁸

In 1973 a rare opportunity came for Kirpal Singh to paint Anglo-Sikh Wars Memorial at Ferozshah in Ferozpur district. The paintings show the battles of Mudki, Ferozshah, Subronon and Chillianwala. These paintings of 10'x 20' in size are the largest ever painted in India. These paintings could not be accommodated inside a residential house. Kirpal Singh had to construct a large tent outside his residence in Chandigarh, in which he worked on these paintings for a period of three years. He also painted portraits of General Gough, Sardar Sham Singh Attariwala and General Tej Singh. Kirpal Singh is at his best in war paintings where marshal ardour is displayed. In these paintings, he has paid tribute to the memory of valiant Sikh soldiers who fought the British army and almost defeated them in two battles. This Wars Memorial, which infact is a picture gallery of war paintings, was formally inaugurated in April 1976 at one of the biggest public gatherings in Punjab. Apart from over five lacs of people who came in trucks and lorries from all over the Punjab, Ministers of Punjab Government, Deputy Defence Minister of Government of India and Heads of all the three services- Army, Navy and Airforce saluted the memorial and thus paid homage to the memory of soldiers, who lost their lives in the first Anglo-Sikh

108 **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

War in 1846 and incidentally to the paintings which were greatly admired. Never before the work of an Indian artist had been recognized in such a manner.¹⁰⁹

Kirpal Singh as he was deeply interested in Sikh history maintained a private library of rare books on Indian history and art. Before starting a painting, he made it his habit to consult these books carefully to study the facts and acquaint himself with the military costumes and weapons used in the war. He ascertains the authenticity of the costumes as depicted in Mughal, Rajput, Sikh and Company Schools. Kirpal Singh was a staunch Sikh and derived his inspiration from the unparalleled heroism of Guru Gobind Singh.¹¹⁰ When Guru Gobind Singh was harassed by the Mughal army, he left Anandpur and took shelter in the *Garhi* of Chamkaur. Here his two sons Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh sacrificed their lives fighting the Mughals. In a painting by Kirpal Singh, we see Guru Gobind Singh carrying a bow directing the defense of the *Garhi*. His face radiates power and reckless bravery. We also see defiance and courage in the visage of Sikh soldiers drawing a bow and shooting an arrow. What a painting can convey, writing cannot convey as its impact is direct and even an illiterate can understand the message of the artist. A glance at a painting of Kirpal Singh provides the viewer a better insight into several aspects of Sikh history than he could get by reading history books. Kirpal Singh is truly the artist who made alive the history of Punjab.¹¹¹

Unlike other painters, Kirpal Singh made a conscious effort to stand away from the subjects which were being dealt by then prominent painters, he made his mark in painting Sikh wars and history with a heavy dose of rustic flavour and a definite direct approach and was usually successfully in the narration of a

109 **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

110 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.95-103

111 **Randhawa, M.S.;** 1963, *Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab*, The Tribune

particular theme or an episode from Sikh history by infusing his masterstrokes with the energy of a sword, so as to capture the moment in a befitting speed and movement. He aptly chose tumultuous and moving backgrounds to enhance the subject in truly dynamic dimension. The study of horses, weapons, costumes and the glow of fearlessness on the faces of brave soldiers engaged in the sacred duty of defeating the invaders captured by him on his canvas speaks volumes of the dexterity and virtuosity he had attained during his career as an artist.

Kirpal Singh was fascinated by the integrity of facts and fiction while simultaneously sensing clear points of convergence between the two and decided to use his sufficiently acquired skill in handling oils in the service of Sikh history. This purpose remained with him throughout his life, even as he made occasional forays into other themes. For the most part these paintings are simple in structure and narration, as the primary intention was to present the theme in an uncluttered and accessible manner. Two stylistic streams seem to run through his works, sometimes coalescing but more often sharp and distinct. He made a large number of paintings to be turned into prints and in these paintings there is plenty of clarity of forms and the use of such colours as would lend themselves easily to replication without much departure from damage to the original, a syncopated space and perspective in which elements of the composition would be entailed to each other in such a way that the whole would become not only an effective design but also a communicant. It is in other paintings, intended largely as murals that the emphasis changes as he seeks to capture not only the exact historical context but also, if possible the currents and cross-currents of intrigue and treason that usually underlay these events. In this context **Guru Gobind Singh at Chamkaur Sahib** becomes very significant where the essentially lonely fortitude of the Guru is almost poetically captured. In **Guru Ka Seena** once again he reduces the whole story to a shadowy wall in a corner while the entire surface of the canvas vibrates with infinite gradation of colour as a lone

horse flies out in the empyrean. The sense of time remains eschatological, but there is never a sense of the tragic. It is with such paintings that Kirpal Singh lifts a historical event beyond its physically measurable context and the image becomes a part of ethnic memory.¹¹²

Kirpal Singh was a perfect story teller in visual idiom and had the gift of narrating them in bold and powerful visuals. The way he narrated Sikh history depicting innumerable acts of Mughal tyranny and intolerance perpetuated against god fearing innocent yet brave devout Sikhs, sends a shiver in the spine as the gory acts of torture move every heart and soul. The paintings which caught the imagination of every Sikh are those of the Sikh followers like **Martyrdom of Bhai Mati Dass** (Plate-320), Bhai Mati Dass who was executed before the eyes of Guru Tegh Bahadur, was a man of strong faith and determination. According to Sikh tradition of sacrifice, when his body was being sawed into two pieces, voice reciting *Japji Sahib* was emanating from the sawed out parts. His brother Sati Dass was also burnt alive. He was wrapped up in cotton wool and set on fire. Both these brothers were great grandsons of Bhai Praga ji.¹¹³ This moving painting depicts a heartrending scene, Bhai Mati Dass's arms are tied to wooden blocks and two devilish and fierce looking Mughal soldiers are shown sawing his body into two halves and a blood stream flows through his face and chest. To create a sense of gloom and horror, the artist has chosen dark colours in the background and the whole scene is painted in dimly lit chamber. A Mughal executioner holding a javelin is shown supervising the whole gruesome act. The figures in the painting have been organized in such a manner that effectively project the subject in simple yet truthful style concentrating on the subject with utmost attention without adding any unnecessary elements. But this is a

112 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.126-127

113 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.48

remarkable picture which successfully highlights the supreme sacrifice of Bhai Mati Dass.

The Sacrifice of Bhai Subegh Singh and Bhai Shahbaz Singh (Plate-321) a father and son duo was committed in 1746 under the orders of Yayia Khan who was a great tyrant, by crushing between *Charakhdi* (spiked wheels) the bodies of Subegh Singh and Shahbaz Singh. The *Qazi* (Muslim priest) had asked Subegh Singh to convert to Islam and thus the life of his son would be saved. But the brave Sikhs refused to listen to this advice and preferred to lay down their lives by mentioning that their sacrifices are nothing as compared to the great sacrifices made by their Gurus and loss of a son was insignificant.¹¹⁴ This painting was painted in the year 1961 in oil on canvas medium. Again the emphasis is on the main subject and the Mughal architectural building shown in the faded background and there is the presence of the crowd with dazed expressions on their faces and fear in their eyes as two large wooden *Charakhdis* are being rotated by the Mughal *jallads*.

In yet another painting titled **Martyrdom of Taru Singh** (Plate-322), Bhai Taru Singh and his sister were arrested on complaint for providing meals to the underground Sikhs. The residents of Lahore secured the release of the sister by paying a payment of one lakh rupees but the brother insisted that he would sacrifice himself than seek pardon. Zakariya Khan ordered that his hair be removed alongwith the skull. Bhai Taru Singh quietly recited the holy hymns when his skull was being chopped off on 1st July, 1745 and thanked the Guru for providing him the courage to forego his life.¹¹⁵ Though this painting represents a horrible scene yet there is no fear on the face of Bhai Taru Singh or instead the

114 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharam Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.46

115 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.53

jallad who is holding the *Khurpa* (weapon) in one hand and the skull of Bhai Taru Singh in other, is an embodiment of fear and there is an expression of scare and disgust after committing this heinous crime against the faithful devout Sikh.

A scene showing the **Sacrifice of Bhai Mani Singh** (Plate-323) painted in 1957 by Kirpal Singh, evokes a sense of pride in the hearts of Sikhs as Bhai Mani Singh an old man of seventy-seven years with flowing grey beard is shown offering his limbs to be cut by the executioner of Zakariya Khan without a trace of fear or remorse on his face. Bhai Mani Singh led the Sikhs at such a crucial time when nearly everyone was hostile to them. He disciplined and organized them under one leadership. On the excuse that Bhai Mani Singh did not pay the promised amount, Zakariya Khan ordered execution by chopping off each limb of his body. The executioner took pity on his old age, but Bhai Mani Singh told him to follow the instructions of his chief just as he himself was abiding by the will of his Master. He kept on reciting ‘Sukhmani Sahib’ as the execution went on.¹¹⁶ It is with such paintings full of Sikh valour and bravery that Kirpal Singh achieved great admiration and was instantly propelled into fame, as these paintings touched the deep chords of devout Sikhs. The costumes of the Mughal figures and the narration of this episode in Sikh history in such truthful manner and impressive expression, undoubtedly recognizes Kirpal Singh’s talent in organizing scenes in a realistic and without even an element, which may take away the eye from the main subject. Dramatic rendering of the perspective in faded rustic colours infact surcharges the painting with added historical importance.

Continuing with the series of paintings on Sikh themes, Kirpal Singh envisioned the quantum of sufferings faced by the Sikhs during the reign of Zakariya Khan, who had unleashed a reign of terror and tyranny, in a painting

116 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.97-98

titled **Reward for killing Sikhs.** (Plate-324) People were rewarded for killing the Sikhs and payment was made to them by counting the heads of the Sikhs mounted on spears. In the depiction of this brutal act, Zakariya Khan is shown sitting on a platform paying for the heads of the Sikhs brought by the tyrant Mughals to his court. He seems to be pleased with the number of heads mounted on the spears. The artist has again captured the heartrending scene with amazing bold approach and successful in portraying the essence of the horrible atmosphere prevailing during the Mughal rule. Infact depiction of such scenes have strengthened the faith of the devout in Sikhism and there is an added zest for sacrifice as a tool to thwart the evil and beastly rulers. Zakariya Khan and Mir Mannu had given a call to throw out all the Sikhs from the province and had fixed a handsome reward for their prosecution and liquidation. Ten rupees for information, fifty rupees for killing and eighty rupees for bringing a severed head of a Sikh, although he wasted lacs of rupees like this, the Panth went on flourishing and multiplying.¹¹⁷

Faith above family (Plate-325) *Sidak Ton Santan Sadke* is a large painting done in 1959. This painting show Sikh Mothers who were forced to wreath themselves with the mangled limbs of their minced children but never let their faith be shaken up.¹¹⁸ Here in this moving picture, Sikh Mothers are shown sitting silently wearing the limbs of their butchered children but no one is shown crying or creating a hue or cry and a large crowd is shown looking at these brave mothers. Some executioners are engaged in chopping the limbs of the innocent children with large swords and some Mughal soldiers are pulling the children away from their mothers. The picture represents a gory scene and some vultures are shown eagerly awaiting for the minced body on the branches of a tree. Some

117 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.51

118 Ibid, p.54

dogs in the foreground are also relishing the human flesh but there is a strange silence and the ladies are entrenched in faith.

The other masterpieces of *Sikh art* by this great artist include some paintings of Sikh warriors prominent among them are **Baba Deep Singh Shaheed** (Plate-326), **Nawab Kapur Singh** (Plate-327), **Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia** (Plate-328), **Bhai Praga** (Plate-329), **Bhai Bota Singh and Bhai Garja Singh** (Plate-330), **Baba Banda Singh Bahadur**, **Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia** (Plate-331), **Bhai Sukha Singh and Bhai Mehtab Singh** (Plate-332). When Baba Deep Singh came to know that Jahan Khan, a general of Abdali had violated the sanctity of Sri Darbar Sahib, he set out in that direction immediately, accompanied by only eight Singhs. On the way, large batches of Sikhs joined him but at Sangrana, he drew up a line asked them to cross it over if they were willing to lay down their lives. Everyone jumped over the line without hesitation. Baba Deep Singh had his head chopped off in the fight but carries it on his hand and fought his way to the periphery of Darbar Sahib, where he finally breathed his last.¹¹⁹ This painting is a picture of supreme sacrifice and pays tribute to the valour, who never hesitated to lay down their lives for the cause of the faith in the Name of the Guru.

A painting of **Banda Singh Bahadur** (Plate-333) who was earlier known as Madho Dass Bairagi before his baptismation by Guru Gobind Singh, projects this great warrior who considered himself to be a humble devotee of the Guru. Sitting in a heroic posture with his sword and shield, bow and arrows against the backdrop of a fort where Nishan-e-Khalsa is hoisted and a cannon is lying near the boundary wall. A man of dedication and determination, the Banda Singh Bahadur after the occupation of Sirhind abolished Zagirdari (feudalism) from Punjab. He made Mukhlisgarh his capital and issued currency in the name of

119 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.56

Gurus. His official seal bore the mark of Degh Tegh Fateh (hail sword and free kitchen). He was tortured to death in Delhi.¹²⁰ He remained every inch a Sikh to the end.

Paying a befitting honour to the selfless unbiased services of Bhai Kanhaiya ji, a man blessed with such a charitable deposition that he did not see any difference between a friend and a foe, served water and applied balms to the wounded soldiers without discriminating against their army and religious status. In the battlefield, he served the wounded Turks with equal generosity as he served to his own Sikh soldiers, when someone complained of this to the Guru; he submitted '*Everywhere he saw none but the Guru himself*'.¹²¹ He is one of the pioneers of the tradition of social service and he believed that a saint who cared for materialism is not a saint but a mercenary.¹²² The even handed **Bhai Kanhaiya** (Plate-334) has been immortalized in Kirpal Singh's painting. He is shown serving water to a wounded Turk who is lying amidst a pile of many wounded soldiers in the battlefield. The horror and the chaotic atmosphere of the war engulfed in rising dust, has been graphically captured in a suitably adopted colour perspective which shows dim outline of a distant building or a fort and the soldiers have been merged with the background in an impressionistic style. Mere depiction of cannon in the foreground enhances the overall design of the composition.

The credit for painting the war scenes with justifiable historic perspectives and genuine conviction goes to this artist, in his remarkable works done in illustrating the sagas of battles where Sikh soldiers showed extreme valour and

120 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharam Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.40

121 **Shankar, Vijay.N and Kaur, Harminder**; 2005, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib- A Universal Scripture for Mankind*, Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, Haryana, p.49

122 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.36

performed humanistic tasks. In the painting **Singh- An Embodiment of Mercy** (Plate-335) is a visual account of the Battle of Panipat during which Ahmed Shah Abdali abducted 2200 girls. When the Singhs came to know of this, not only they rushed to their rescue but also enshowered their safety back home sometimes as far as Maharashtra. Historian M.J. Brown acknowledges that such an act was exemplary in chivalry as well as kindness.¹²³ Sikh soldiers were not only trained by the Gurus to fight the oppressors and tyrants but he also infused in them the virtues of kindness and mercy. They were always ready and available for performing tasks which were for the welfare of the mankind. Here in this painting, Sikh soldiers are shown surrounding the Mughals and rescuing the ladies from their possession. The artist had a great sense of colour and his pictures are pulsating with vigour and unmatched rendering of clusters of soldiers and creating a wonderful depth by diffusing the figures in the dusty backgrounds.

Two paintings narrating **Battle of Chamkaur** (Plate-336-337) from different angles establish Kirpal Singh as a master of war painting, due to his keen eye for detail and an effortless control over such compositions. He could visualize such scenes due to his love for going deep into the history and a rare grip on the subject as he consulted scholars and studied books which presented a blow by blow account of the battles fought by the Sikhs. These two paintings deserve special mention due to their overwhelming yet subtle visual narration wherein the *Sahibzadas* the central characters of these paintings are shown engaged in pitched battle with the tyrant Mughals. In spite of being surrounded by thousands of soldiers, they are showing exemplary bravery and are facing the onslaught with determination and pride even the enemies are shown astonished at their valiant disposition. Diffused backgrounds, foliage, forts and dark smoke screens

123 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.63

rising out of the pitched battle in fact grant an added essence to the battle scene without interfering in the cleverly organized and moving compositions. In the dim visibility, figures are merging with the background yet there is masterly use of highlighting which enables the main character to stand out from the rest of the crowd. In these battles, Guru Gobind Singh's eldest son Ajit Singh enters the battle at Chamkaur. He challenges the enemy with a rare spiritual strength and attacks the fierce enemy to run away. He fought to his last breath and attained martyrdom.

The valuable contribution of Sardar Kirpal Singh to *Sikh art* will always be acknowledged by the Sikh Panth as his works have not only recorded the factual contents of the Sikh history but has in his inimitable expressions motivated and inspired many artists to devote their creative talents in promoting *Sikh art* and culture. Reproductions of his paintings are in great demand and are being acquired by the Punjabis all over the world. These works have kindled a new light in the minds of the Sikhs regarding their glorious history and devotion of their forefathers in establishing Khalsa Raj which always stood for equality, love for all mankind and nurtured a deep resolve in their minds to face the tyrant and oppressors with iron fists. He passed away on 26th April, 1990.¹²⁴

Amongst the four artists- Sobha Singh, S.G. Thakur Singh, Kirpal Singh, G.S. Sohan Singh who were considered as four columns of *Sikh Popular art*, the name of artist **G.S. Sohan Singh** (Plate-338) will be remembered as the greatest and most popular painter of *Sikh Calendar art* due to his own distinctive painting style. G.S. Sohan Singh was born in August, 1914 in the house of Bhai Gian Singh *Naqqash*, a famous fresco-artist of Golden Temple at Amritsar. He had two brothers and one sister. His elder brother Sunder Singh, who was an equally gifted artist, started painting in his early childhood and created some magnificent

124 **Singh, Major Gurmukh**; 2004, *Artist Kirpal Singh*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.513-514

paintings. But he lost his life on 13 April 1919 during the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh.¹²⁵ His father Gian Singh discovered in him a flair for drawing and saw a spark in his eyes whenever he attempted a design exercise. He passed his eighth standard examination from Government High School, Town Hall, Amritsar as the young boy was always engrossed in drawing and painting.¹²⁶ His father sent him to the popular artist Sardar Hari Singh so that he may get the knowledge of the fine nuances of art under the gaze of a commercially successful artist. Sardar Hari Singh who had at that time been working in the famous Elphinston Theatrical Company, Calcutta. Later on in 1931-32 on the vending up of the company, the master and pupil came back to Amritsar.¹²⁷ The artist's father had by that time retired from his service in Golden Temple and both father and son started painting religious themes, preparing charts for students as well as framing pictures.¹²⁸ His stay at Calcutta was of utmost importance regarding his development as an artist and here he expanded his vision by viewing the works of many pioneer artists and he even got the opportunity to work with them on many projects.¹²⁹ This training which he received under strict discipline stood him in good stead as here he acquired an eye for detail and the use of vibrant colours while composing backdrops of numerous important productions of theatre. He also excelled in composing ornamental frames and this aspect was amply used in painting some fabulous Sikh calendars as they were always rich in content and narration. At pioneer film studios in Calcutta, he under his Guru's guidance developed a wonderfully appealing stylization of painting which was

125 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.24

126 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.63

127 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.24

128 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.64

129 **Verma, P**; n.d., *Revealing the Art of G.S. Sohan Singh*, G.S. Sohan Singh Artist, Punjabee Press & Tej Press, Amritsar, p.10

instantly admired by the people engaged in commercial painting. He experimented with many techniques and shortly, he discovered his own signature style which reverberated with vibrancy and aesthetics.

On his way back from Calcutta, he had a chance to visit Delhi, where the works of many popular artists influenced his work. Visiting museums and other places of artistic value always appealed to him and he made it a point to visit Lucknow, Allahabad and Bombay, to quench his artist's thirst by visiting art studios and by viewing the works of artists who had made their mark in 1931-32.¹³⁰ After such sojourns, he had obtained enough confidence in his art and in 1932 he made a portrait of Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia which fetched him a first prize at Ramgarhia Federation Conference at Kharagpur. This encouragement paved a path for his career and after this success he made a portrait of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur in a warrior pose. This first multicolored design that was got printed and marketed by the artist in 1932 was well received in the market and more than five hundred copies or reproductions were sold in a short span of time. Encouraged by its popularity the artist prepared about three new designs every year, got their blocks prepared at Lahore, printed and marketed them.¹³¹ After the death of the artist's mother in 1951 and his father in 1953 with the selfless help and guidance of P. Verma, he was able to publish a book titled 'Gian Chitrawali' in 1956 to commemorate his father's creative genius.¹³² This afforded the artist an opportunity of gaining proficiency in the block line. The printing and publishing work created for him a new wave in the market and thus he was offered orders which kept him going financially strong throughout the year. From 1931 to 1946, G.S. Sohan Singh created some paintings and calendars depicting *Sikh art* and history. He got them printed and

130 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.24

131 **Walia, Varinder**; December 1, 2005, *The rich life of an artist who was a pauper*, The Tribune

132 **Verma, P**; n.d., *Revealing the Art of G.S. Sohan Singh*, G.S. Sohan Singh Artist, Punjabee Press & Tej Press, Amritsar, p.11

sold the framed copies and thus had a lucrative business in this field.¹³³ He was also fascinated by European artists and successfully created some replicas of their works.¹³⁴ This enabled him to indulge in oil on canvas technique and he had the foresight to translate this newly acquired passion into the creation of some enchanting pictures pertaining to Sikh history. Thus he started taking keen interest in understanding in the ethos of Sikhism with added zest and researched his subjects with a scholarly eye. The printing techniques he had mastered have been passed on by him to his son Sardar Surinder Singh, who ranks among experts in line blocks, monochrome and tri-colour halftone blocks and photography etc.¹³⁵ As a result of this proficiency, they tackled multifarious subjects in the art field- *Calendar art* designs, oil and water colour paintings, commercial labels, book jacket designs, subject illustration designs, newspaper ad-designs apart from very fine themes in old Kangra, Pahari and Mughal style.¹³⁶

Landscape painting, paintings of monuments, portraits and imaginative subjects were near to G.S Sohan Singh's heart and he was a great admirer of Sikh school of art founded by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, which provided him with an opportunity to learn new techniques of painting and was able to handle even large works. He has to his credit dozens of gold and silver medals, cash prizes as well as commendation certificates won by him in a number of art exhibitions held from time to time throughout the country. The partition of the country came as a rued shock for this sensitive artist who lost many of his relatives in the riots and this affected his psyche and hence the themes which he had never attempted before such as reign of gloom, brutality and horror entered in some of his

133 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 64

134 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.25

135 **Walia, Varinder**; December 1, 2005, *The rich life of an artist who was a pauper*, The Tribune

136 **Verma, P**; n.d., *Revealing the Art of G.S. Sohan Singh*, G.S. Sohan Singh Artist, Punjabee Press & Tej Press, Amritsar, p.11-12

creations.¹³⁷ During this period, his business also got affected and he suffered quite a few financial losses but he worked day in and day out to make up the loss in such trying circumstances. To sustain his financial position, he started work with several newspapers as an illustrator, prominent amongst them are Daily Ajit, Veer Bharat, Lahore, Sher Bharat from Amritsar. He worked for magazines, designed pamphlets, many research books and periodicals. In addition to that, as he was expert in giving designs for boxes, labels and other commercial art jobs; he continued such projects and later on started the work of giving retouching and finishing touches to the already painted paintings in oil on canvas and acted as a restorer of art.¹³⁸ As no medium posed any problem that he could not solve. At the back of his mind, he always cherished a desire to paint some revolutionary paintings and create those works of art which caught his fancy. He also attempted painting in Kangra style but soon returned to his own style which was equally appreciated by artists and art connoisseurs as he had attained a mastery over the lyrical line.

G.S. Sohan Singh created several paintings in the praise of God glorifying His creations- mountains, lofty meadows and rolling hills, filled with magical flora and fauna, which have the eternal power to stir a divine symphony in the heart of a sensitive thinker. He always yearned for a place where there is no physical and mental pain and turmoil and envisaged some subjects which provided him peace and solace. In spite of being engrossed in commercial aspects of his career, he found time to pursue his first love for imaginative painting and he participated in several major exhibitions at Calcutta, Kharagpur, Bombay, Trivandrum and Delhi, where his works received huge acclaim and were awarded gold and silver medals. This fortified his resolve to continue painting

137 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.25

138 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 64

some unusual themes apart from his very popular paintings of *Sikh art*. An exceptional painting of Guru Nanak was bought by nearly five hundred Americans, who were very much impressed with the artist's flair of the brush. Sardar Swarn Singh, the Home Minister of India presented Sardar G.S. Sohan Singh with a *siropa* at the Maharaja Ranjit Singh Company Bagh at Amritsar in a ceremony inaugurated by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. Legendary writer Mulk Raj Anand and Principal Teja Singh had paid glowing tributes to this talented artist. The new generation aspiring artists who sought a career in art always flocked his studios to get guidance and inspiration. G.S. Sohan Singh was a very mild mannered man and a humble person. During the year 1970, he was acclaimed as the Master Artist of the year at Chandigarh and the same year at Ludhiana, he received a prestigious award from the Ramgarhia Silver Jubilee Conference. His studio at 27-Braham Buta Market, near Sarai Guru Ram Dass, Amritsar is considered a shrine for young and upcoming artists. In recognition of his towering artistic talents, he was made a life member of the governing body of Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar and he acted as a judge for the grant of awards on selected exhibits.¹³⁹ Though G.S. Sohan Singh faced many financial pressures and hardships during his life time but he was never disheartened and continued with his passion for painting the Sikh history in a style that truly reflected his inner sensitive mind and strengthened his pivotal role in furthering the cause of *Sikh Calendar art* both in terms of expanding the scope of the reproduced calendars and making it a financially viable enterprise. It is with his ingenuity that the calendars of Sikh Gurus are produced in large numbers. Following his footsteps his two sons- Surinder Singh and Satpal Singh Danish, also share the credit of promotion of this popular genre of art as his eldest son Surinder Singh is a well known Block Printing Engineer and Graphic

139 **Verma, P**; n.d., *Revealing the Art of G.S. Sohan Singh*, G.S. Sohan Singh Artist, Punjabee Press & Tej Press, Amritsar, p.11

Artist and his younger son Satpal Singh Danish has followed his father in keeping alive the family tradition of painting of *Sikh art*. G.S. Sohan Singh breathed his last on 28th February, 1999 at the ripe age of 84 years.¹⁴⁰

G.S. Sohan Singh after tasting considerable professional success in commercial art projects, trained his attention towards the painting of Sikh history, as this subject provided him a personal creative satisfaction as the episodes from Sikh history which he had studied in various books kept on egging his soul to devote his time to this work which was to him a source of inspiration and a sacred task. He created some magnificent paintings in his truly classical and appealing style as he had inherited the love of designing intricate jewellery items and objects with floral and geometrical pattern from his father who was a renowned decorator and Fresco painter in Golden Temple. G.S. Sohan Singh deftly utilizes these skills in his painting, which was a culmination of European and Indian classical painting. Due to this enchanting quality, he had been successful in carving a niche for himself in *Sikh Calendar art* world and lively colours added the additional charm to his works.

A painting of **Guru Gobind Singh on horseback** (Plate-339) and a falcon perched on his gloved hand became an iconic picture which is deeply etched in the minds of the viewers. This painting was done in 1954 in oil on canvas medium and is in the collection of S.S. Hitkari, New Delhi, rendered in simplistic style yet the portrait depicts very powerfully Gurus intrinsic personality, his thoughts and ideology. His face has an expression of divine solemnity and the softness of a child and his eyes have an expression of determination.¹⁴¹ This painting which is rich in design value clearly shows even the minutest ornamental details in jewellery and embroidery embellished on the costumes of the Guru. The horse gently treads on a path surrounded by deep green foliage and

140 **Talwar, Rashmi**; March 16, 2001, *Tribute to renowned artist*, The Tribune

141 **Daljeet, Dr.**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.56

is punctuated by flowers and herbs. Guru's eyes are set on a distant object in a gesture of a visionary and there is a royal persona to his erect posture, projecting a sense of absolute control of mind and body. Using the method of colour perspective, the artist has effectively added depth to the picture. The background is filled with a large mass of rising clouds in soft pale grey colours which reflects the filtered sunlight. The flapping of the falcon added sense of movement and a touch of realism. The painting is an example of a well controlled masterly disposition and its soul radiated strength and valour. Though there is pleasing play of light and shade which heightens the aesthetic value of the painting.

Another masterpiece done on the theme of **The Bounteous Guru Har Krishan** (Plate-340) the sixth Guru of the Sikhs. This work was done in 1976, is in the collection of Baba Baghel Singh Museum, Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, New Delhi. Guru Har Krishan was born of Guru Har Rai and Mata Sulakhni in 1656, succeeded to Gurugaddi only when five years of age. He was exceptionally intelligent and wise for his age. He was able to instruct and guide his Sikhs to resolve their issues and remove their doubts and possessed such spiritual strength that he could lead his Sikhs to salvation. He passed away when only eight years old yet he made his life and thus Sikhism, the highest ideal of service of sufferers, the seed of which Guru Arjan Dev had laid in constructing the 'Leprosarium' at Taran Taran, thereby declaring that service to mankind is the highest divinity.¹⁴² When Guru Har Krishan came to Delhi, the city was then in the grip of an epidemic. He went all over the city in narrow lanes and by lanes he gave succour to all in distress without any discrimination of caste, creed and religion. His very presence and the divine look would rid the patients of their

142 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.48

sufferings.¹⁴³ In this painting, the artist has depicted Guru Har Krishan seated in a palanquin and a large crowd of his devotees seeking remedy to their sufferings, gathered around the Guru. The Bounteous Child Guru Har Krishan is shown blessing them with something or the other. The picture has been composed in intelligent and calculated formation of figures placing the Guru in the central space and thus the overall impact is dramatized and moves the eye effortlessly from one object to the other in right sequence and the impact it leaves on the viewer is overwhelming and it soothes the tension in one consciousness. The hallmark of the painting besides being its humanistic theme is appropriately earmarked space, where the essence of the painting that is the service of lepers is placed on top of corner on the left hand side, suitably merged in a subtle manner which does not disturb the balance of the painting. His dimly lit picture lends a spiritual aura to the painting where each figure is engaged in some activity and the animated expressions on the faces of the figures and their postures highlight the narrative aspect in lucid manner. Artist's eye for detail and mastery of ornamental objects is adequately visible. The whole picture gently moves the beholder. Though the picture is draped in classical Italian Renaissance style, the elements of Sikh culture such as costumes, headgears and the skin tones of the figures make it an interesting specimen of *Sikh art*.

Taking inspiration from the *Janam Sakhis*, G.S. Sohan Singh narrated the episode of Guru Nanak's life, wherein a cobra shades child Guru Nanak from the bright sun and an astonished Rai Bular alongwith his servants and the villagers, looks aghast at this unusual sight. This illustrated three-in-one calendar painting on the theme of **Sarp Chhaya** (Plate-341) engulfs the painting into a dream-like spectacle and there is a hint of surrealism in controlled manner as the artist had

143 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharam Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.25

devised a novel method to design his painting in amazing geometrical divisions and such compositions narrate three different episodes in one picture. The unity of the painting is achieved by merging the three forms into a decorative panorama. Infact such stylization appeals to the masses, as it carries the message of the painting in lyrical concept. G.S. Sohan Singh was perhaps the first *Calendar art* artist, who understood the intricate elements and components of a visually pleasing work which was capable of attracting the attention of the viewer and on the other hand, it effectively carried the message in simple visual narration. In top left circular section, Nanak is sitting in the lap of his mother, a bright halo surrounds his head and a visitor to his house is surprised at this spectacle. In the second circle in the right hand side, the artist narrates the episode of Panja Sahib where Guru Nanak stopped a large stone boulder with his hand.

The artist's contribution to *Sikh art* is tremendous, as he has given to the Sikh world such fabulous specimens of *Sikh Calendar art* which adorn the walls of a large number of homes and business establishments. A rare calendar depicts **Bal Gobind Rai**_(Plate-342) Guru Gobind Singh dressed in extremely regal looking clothes with a *kalgi* and a small turban, sitting in the lap of a Queen who longed to have a son like him. Bal Gobind Rai detecting her wish went and intentionally sat in her lap like her own son, to fulfill her desire and ate from her hands.¹⁴⁴ In each *calendar art* painting, the artist has time and again demonstrated his control over the subject and the image he perceived in this is brought out in such a fabulous presentation that one is compelled to share his vision and shower praise and admiration. His work was never rigid in compositional aspect and there is a well channelized flow of artistic energy. An added element in his art is the inscription of the whole story in simple words, giving a cue to the viewer to

144 **Daljeet, Dr.;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.55

understand the content. The usage of such inscriptions in the paintings goes back to the times of illustrated manuscripts and *Janam Sakhis*, where the artists for the benefit of viewers, gave some details of the characters and the place where the scenes being executed. This quality increased the popularity of such kind of work and thus increased its circulation through the production of colourful calendars. Indeed it was a unique device to reach to the masses.

Another rare theme attempted by this artist, portrays the **Avatardharan of Guru Gobind Singh** (Plate-343) the Celebration of Birth of Guru Gobind Singh. Here Guru Tegh Bahadur is shown distributing alms to the people and Sikh followers are engaged in distributing clothes, sweets and other valuable items like coins etc. G.S. Sohan Singh was an ardent Sikh and possessed the humanistic qualities of humility, dedication and hard work. He was a frontrunner in propagation of the message of Sikhism through his intricate and absorbing paintings which highlighted the messages of the Gurus and the duties of the devotees- their selfless service and an ever ready mental resolve to face the oppressors. Dwelling on this subject, he painted **Guru Gobind Singh's call to the Sikhs** (Plate-344) which reads as '*Hum Is Kaaj Jagat Mein Aye*'. In this powerful painting, he urged his Sikh warriors to fight for justice and never shirk their duty in laying down their lives in the cause of truth and liberation of humanity. The tenth Sikh Guru is shown urging the Sikhs by raising his arm towards the sky in a valiant pose and in the background the outline of Anandpur Sahib with Nishan Sahib is visible. In the foreground, brave Sikhs are raising their hands in unison showing the solidarity with the Guru.

During Guru Nanak's *Udasis* (Religious travels), he came across a horrible cannibal named 'Kauda' who used to kidnap travelers and cooked them alive in large *karaha* (wok) to eat them.¹⁴⁵ G.S. Sohan Singh's powerful visual

145 **Gill, Ranjit Singh**; 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.58

narration of **Guru Nanak's encounter with cannibal Kauda** (Plate-345) has been illustrated in a dramatic presentation. The whole scene has been enacted with an emphasis on flawless depiction in well controlled compositional balance and there is a marriage of real and surreal elements. The overall visual impact is both interesting and self-explanatory and has a pleasing touch in colour scheme especially in the background where snow-clad heavenly mountains are glowing in the light of spiritualism, as beams of light from 'Ik-Onkar' placed on top of the composition. In the forefront, ferocious looking Kauda is shown carrying Mardana in his powerful arms, to immerse him in the boiling oil which is being heated by swirling flames. Nanak through the power of his discourse changed this cannibal and he promised to abandon his evil acts. The picture radiates with a pious and peaceful expression on Nanak's face. His calm persona overwhelms the cannibal and he becomes man of peace. The picture projects the victory of the good over the evil and has all the stunning features of an emotive and expressive calendar. It is truthfully narrated in straightforward approach without indulging in aesthetic complexities and the viewer instantly relates to the episode without confusion and doubt.

Guru Nanak's visit to Kuarudesh (Plate-346) While passing through 'Kuarudesh' during his *Udasis*, Guru Nanak came to know that this kingdom is inhabited by enchanting Female Sorceresses, who adopt the images of musicians and dancers to entice the travelers. They possessed the power of transforming men to animals, to ascertain this practice Guru Nanak asked Mardana to go to them to see what happens. These beautiful Female Sorceresses turned Mardana into a sheep with their magical powers, he begged them with folded hands to forgive him and turn him into a man again. But they laughed and danced in merriment ignoring his wails. Guru Nanak had to step in and he defeated them by

the power of the 'Divine Name' and they were forced to admit their defeat.¹⁴⁶ The people turned into animals were returned to human species. This episode narrates the slavery of man to the enchanting vices and temptations, thereby becomes an animal. Liberation and salvation by remembering the Name of the Almighty prevents his degradation. The philosophical message behind this episode stresses upon the control of one's heart and mind to protect him from succumbing to these temptations. This page from the *Janam Sakhis* is elaborately illustrated by the artist in beautifully rendered disposition. The whole atmosphere has been captured justifying the physical appearance of the wicked sorceresses, attired in magnificent clothes with flowing locks of hair. The clouds enhance the mystery and deceptive elements in the painting which attracts the attention of the viewer. Here the Queen of the sorceresses, wearing a bright red *dupatta* bedecked with glittering *tila sitara* is shown in an interactive posture with Guru Nanak, who with the gesture of his hand explains the futility of such acts and instructs them to shed such deceptive behaviour. They seem to be spellbound with his words of wisdom and agreed to become normal human beings. The whole concept of the story is inscribed on the clouds in simple Gurmukhi script as the rays of light being emitted from the word 'Ik-Onkar' dispels the darkness of ignorance. Such thoughtful calendars by artist G.S. Sohan Singh have carried the message of Guru Nanak to the masses and have recorded the historical events in appealing visual stylization. There is a bounty of theatrical expression and mannerism in bold, easy to intercept narration as it is being enacted on the stage. Colours are mostly vibrant and do not recede into the atmosphere but come alive in attractive interaction with the viewer.

G.S. Sohan Singh, a stalwart of *Sikh Calendar art* in an unparalleled decorative and ornamental calendar, has illustrated his creative dynamism in a

146 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.18

painting 'titled **Satguru Nanak Pargatya Miti Dhundh Jag Chanan Hoya** (Plate-347) a work rich in classical as well as intricately embellished and technically sound unique composition with illuminating oval and circular frames, narrating the events pertaining to the life of Guru Nanak Dev. The main circular frame depicts Guru Nanak in blessing gesture and below this frame is an oval floral frame which houses the sacred Gurdwara Nanakana Sahib. In the first small circle on top left side, the episode of 'Sarp Chhaya' is depicted. The composition is divided by two more circles to show the events of 'Sacha Sauda' and Nanak drawing milk out of Bhai Lalo's bread and blood from Malik Bhago's bread. The two circles at the bottom on left and right side depict portraits of two sons of Guru Nanak- Baba Sri Chand and Baba Lakshmi Chand. Near these circles the words 'Nirankari Darshan' are inscribed on ornamental background. The painting is mostly in primary colours, visually very appealing as there is stress on vibrant colours and iconic stylization punctuated by the pattern of flowers and leaves, to enhance the overall appeal of a calendar. This profusely decorated specimen of *calendar art* amply demonstrates its capacity to enchant and carry the divine messages of Guru Nanak in a befitting manner which is always the basic purpose of an art work of this genre.

G.S. Sohan Singh true to his love for narrating the enlightening episodes from the lives of the Sikh Gurus, has created another calendar projecting the importance of dedicated service to the Guru and the need for humility and meditation by illustrating a page from the life of **Guru Amar Dass** (Plate-348), the third Sikh Guru, who despite of his advancing age, served the Guru with utmost dedication and who used to fetch water everyday in early morning from a far off *baoli* at Sri Goindwal Sahib. Here in this painting, Guru Amar Dass is shown filling the pitcher with the water for his Guru so that he could bathe. The omnipresent symbol of 'Ik-Onkar' is always respectfully placed on top of the calendar and underneath the inscription '*Bhale Amar Dass Gun Tere Upma Tohe*

Ban Awe' is placed. In the sequence, Guru Amar Dass is shown carrying the pitcher of water on his head. The centre is decorated with floral patterns and bouquets of flowers, surrounded by the circular floral frame where the Guru himself is shown in a contemplative mood, slightly reclining on a *takia*. In the next illustration, Guru Amar Dass is shown meditating. He is standing and holding a loop of a rope, as he used to follow this meditative stance so that his attention is not distracted. Gurdwara Goindwal Sahib is presented here with two 'Nishan Sahibs'. The messages of Sikhism carried through these fascinating calendars, deserve appreciation as this genre has played its powerful role in the promotion of Sikhism and its ideologies in very effective manner by using visual concepts which are charged with spiritualism and divinity. In this painting, G.S. Sohan Singh has paid a tribute to Guru Amar Dass as he was an epitome of humility, kindness and an unwavering devotion. Performing his sacred duty of promotion of *Sikh art* and history through the medium of colourful calendars, G.S. Sohan Singh has devoted his attention to Guru specific calendars. In these calendars, he has illustrated the relevant and significant episodes from the lives of respective Gurus with their iconic portraits in the centre of the calendar, adding an ornamental and stylized look to such calendars. A prominent feature in all such calendars is the written word that is condensed details about the historic relevance of the painting which provides the viewer direct reference. Infact these works are illustrated episodes relating to the Gurus. Equal emphasis is laid on the essence and the message of a particular work. Thus their popularity can be gauged from the fact that viewers adore them and bow their heads in prayer as a bond is achieved between them instantly which is the hallmark of a good calendar.

Continuing with the process of creating fascinating calendars, the one which portrays the supreme sacrifice and bravery shown by **Baba Deep Singh Shaheed** (Plate-349) who attained martyrdom, demands attention for truthfully

bringing alive the deep insight of this great warrior, who laid down his life for protecting the sanctity of Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. He kept on fighting the devilish enemies who were involved in the sacrilege of this holy place. During the fierce fight, his head got severed from his body yet he kept on fighting holding his severed head on his palm and a heavy sword in the other hand till he reached the *parikarma* of Sri Darbar Sahib and offered his head there and breathed his last.¹⁴⁷ The whole episode underlines the spirit of valour infused in the Sikhs by the tenth Sikh Guru, who never showed their backs in the hour of adversity. A sense of pride envelops a viewer looking at this calendar where **Baba Deep Singh** (Plate-350), the brave warrior is shown in full armoury like armlets, metallic breast shields, *Katar* (dagger), axe, *Kirpan* (sword), *Kada* (iron bracelet), *Chakkars*, *Kamarkasa* (waist-cloth), *Khanda* (double edged sword) and protective shields on arms and legs in a charging warrior pose. The battle ground is littered with the severed heads and bodies of the enemies and there is stream of blood spread on the ground. Blood dripping from the *Khanda* sends a shiver in the spine as the whole scene reverberates with roaring war cries of the Sikhs who carry the 'Nishan Sahib'. Typical of his style, there is a richness of colours and the projection of the main character stands out dwelling on the heroic content.

'*Tumre Greh Pragtega Jodha Jan Ko Bal Gun Kino Na Soda*' meaning 'In your home will appear a great warrior, whose power shall no one tame' were the words of Baba Buddha to Mata Ganga who used to bring food for him everyday, while he used to graze his cattle in the fields. He was so pleased with her humility that he gave her a blessing that very soon Waheguru- shall fulfill her longing for a son. Mata Ganga gave birth to Guru Hargobind who changed the course of Sikh history and added the concept of Miri Piri in Sikhism. This is the subject matter of a calendar by G.S. Sohan Singh, illustrated in a very appealing manner. The complete atmosphere presented in this calendar shows **Baba**

147 **McLeod, W.H;** 1995, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, The Scarecrow Press, London, p.73

Buddha accepting food from Mata Ganga (Plate-351) who is accompanied by another lady. This is a remarkable depiction of the scenic elements like the hut of Baba Buddha covered in the shade of various trees, plants and a few cows and buffaloes are shown grazing in the background, which also gives a peep of some snow-clad mountains and a pure blue sky. On left side top circle, there is a picture of an infant embraced by Mata Ganga. On the right side circle, Gurdwara Baba Buddha is visible. By adding essential elements of a village, the artist has illustrated a revolving *hult* (Persian wheel) and the presence of a well.

Taking inspiration from an illustrated manuscript in possession of his family, G.S. Sohan Singh duly analyzed its contents and was inspired to paint the painting of **Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia** (Plate-352), who was a leader of 'Ramgarhia Misl' whenever there was a threat to the Sikh Panth; he was the first to accept the challenge. Qazi Nur Mohammad writes that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia were very close friends and used to fight and win battles under one flag. The later had his surname after the Ramgarhia Fort, which was built in defence of Sri Darbar Sahib. Historian Khushwaqt Rai writes that he was a highly affable, intelligent and morally upright person.¹⁴⁸ This painting done in 1961, brought laurels to the artist in the form of first prize at the Ramgarhia Federation Conference Kharagpur. The painting speaks volumes of the creative talent G.S. Sohan Singh had in his artistic armour and aptly describes the scene of Maharaja Jassa Singh Ramgarhia alongwith his hundreds of warriors attacking the Red Fort, which was ultimately won by him alongwith Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The scene of this pitched battle narrated in a great detail that one can see highly motivated brave Sikhs in their battle costumes, armed with glistening swords, are shown in action that besides being visually powerful, pulsates with the resolve and blessings of the Ten Sikh Gurus which they carried in their hearts

148 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.58

and minds. The central figure of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia wielding a sword and riding a white horse bedecked with ornamental embellishments is a true picture of a motivated and fearless warrior. Storm like atmosphere in the background highlights the scene of this battle.

The artist has left us with memorable paintings and *calendar art* works as the artist on the very onset of his career, had envisioned the need and importance of a genre of art which may be commercially viable. He had successfully launched his career and pursued it with diligence and dedication. In the world of *Sikh Calendar art*, artist G.S. Sohan Singh can be considered as one of the foremost pioneers, his style of painting found innumerable admirers and he virtually laid the foundation of mass production of Sikh religious and historical calendars, being a forerunning commercial artist, he was well versed in the art of reproduction and commercialization of this genre of art.

In the year 1914 a bright child was born in the house of Sardar Gurdit Singh and Daya Kaur at village Jartauli, district Ludhiana, who was destined to paint the true essence of Gurbani, Sikh history and culture in such meaningful manner that perhaps no other artist had ever gone so deep into the fathomless ocean of wisdom embodied in the words of Sikh Gurus, their lives and their missions. His father was an engineer by profession who was employed in the East Bengal Railways and his mother passed away during his early childhood. Thus the young sensitive boy was brought up under the benign gaze and protection of his grandfather Baba Daya Singh, a practicing *Hakeem* who was known for his kindness, generosity and spiritual wisdom. Due to his grandfather's long stinted service to the poor and the suffering masses living in nearby villages, young **Trilok Singh Chitrakar** (Plate-353) learnt the first lessons of service to mankind which is one of the basic tenets of Sikhism from his grandfather. Thus this young child was initiated into the study of scriptures and Gurbani at an early age. His deep understanding of this subject is reflected in his

expressive paintings which are based in moving narration and remarkable expression, thereby vividly capturing the very soul of the Sikh religious subjects. His philosophical exposition has brought out the myriad manifestations of the Sikh religion, ethos and values.¹⁴⁹

Trilok Singh passed his Middle School Examination from Khalsa High School, Kila Raipur where he was very popular amongst his class fellows as a bright painter.¹⁵⁰ He devoted most of his time to the subject of drawing and painting. He used to be deeply engrossed in drawing and illustrating dancing peacocks and galloping deer besides figures of men and women- trees, flowers, huts and mountains on his notebooks and his classmates always encircled him in excitement and prodded him to illustrate their notebooks too, he enjoyed this task immensely. Another aspect which improved his drawing of plants, flowers, trees and herbs, was due to his closed contact with the nature, when his grandfather who was a famous *Hakeem* sent him to gather medicinal plants and herbs to make medicines for his patients. While picking and gathering these plants, the young artist would enjoy copying their shapes and textures and thus he perfected his drawing to such an extent that he could draw a particular variety of a medicinal plant from imagination thereafter.¹⁵¹ These practical lessons enriched and sharpened his artistic skills which were later on used in many of his works. He composed wonderful paintings with a balanced and realistic rendering. His compositions always came alive due to his deep interest in nature and a resounding knowledge of the balance of forms.

After the schooling, Trilok Singh shifted to Assam where his father had brought a large chunk of land during his service in the railways. Here Trilok

149 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.108

150 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.65

151 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.108

Singh learnt Assamese, Bengali and English languages and he tasted the exposure to fantastic styles of painting of many artists living in this area. This indeed was a turning point in his artistic career. He equipped himself with various styles of painting and tried his hand on water-colours, oil colours, tempera and sketching in a truly free manner. Here he attained the experience of a mechanical engineer. His father Sardar Gurdit Singh witnessed his keen and dedicated interest in painting and resolved to send him to the most popular Punjabi artist S.G. Thakur Singh, who was practicing in Calcutta at that time. Here in Calcutta, Trilok Singh learnt the fine nuances of art from the renowned Bengali artist Hamendra Mazumdar and created some extraordinary paintings.¹⁵² After attaining considerable professional skills and control over academic work, he established his art studio-cum-workshop namely '*Trilok Shilpa*' at Calcutta, Assam, Shillong and Meerut. At Meerut, he also worked as an Instructor in Art Shop of the 17 E.T.C. Meerut Cantonment, where he used to teach the art of drawing and painting to the army recruits. This was the period when his true artistic talent was exposed and he was instrumental in creating a large body of his works and relished the taste of name and fame.¹⁵³

During the period of 1932 to 1943, artist Trilok Singh was at his zenith in the world of painting and this period saw the creation of scores of wonderful paintings done by him on various subjects but the struggle for freedom movement acted as a magnet and a catalyst for him and he diverted his artistic skills and strengths in painting the pictures full of patriotism and national pride. This was his solemn contribution in the freedom struggle which was appreciated by the masses. After seeing his paintings drenched in the fervour of patriotism Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru remarked that '*We are proud that you are one of the*

152 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.66

153 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.109

most useful painters of India who have put dedicated efforts in the cause of India's freedom struggle through your art.' His sensitive heart was moved by the sad happenings in the Punjab during the freedom struggle movement as the people of Punjab were witnessing a social and political unrest of worst kind. There was repression and chaos prevailing in this region, which affected a large number of young freedom fighters who were bewildered at the injustices and mindless atrocities being meted out to them by the Britishers. The society as a whole was depressed and engulfed in gloom and hopelessness. He came to Punjab and resolved to kindle the spirit of freedom and fight injustices through his art so that the seeds of hope are planted in the hearts of the people. In order to instill a sense of national pride in the minds of the youth, he wholeheartedly devoted his time in creating paintings oozing with nationalism and freedom. Sardar Niranjana Singh Talib, the then President of Punjab Pradesh Congress in 1935 praised his work and regional and national leaders engaged in the freedom struggle showered appreciation and applauded his efforts. His vision was broadened and he created the paintings on subjects like Kashmir issue, Tibet problem, War with China and Pakistan, Victory of Bangladesh and Indian peace policy.¹⁵⁴ In the nutshell, he abhorred wars and aggressions. There is a glimpse of peace, harmony and joy in his works which advocates international brotherhood necessary for a peaceful world, where violence has no place and all nations live in perfect harmony without fear. This period projects him as a 'Peacenik' and a 'Nationalist' to the core.

In spite of all these above mentioned creations, the strength of his real art was based on the tenets of Sikhism. Being a painter of Sikh religion and history he always believed that his main task in life was to spread the light of the divinity and spiritualism enshrined in Sikh scriptures and Gurbani. He was an ardent

154 **Rani, Dr. Saroj;** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.660

believer in the essence of Sikh religion which always propagated peaceful co-existence, universal brotherhood, importance of service to mankind and dignity of labour. These are the hallmark ideals which inspired his innermost thoughts and he painted the paintings on Sikh subjects as a form of his true devotion and his sacred sole aim of life. The main source of inspiration for him, in his own words was the symbolism present in the form of imagery in Gurbani and he believed that there was a treasure of divine thoughts, which need to be transported to the canvas through his brush. He strove hard to accomplish this spiritual task throughout his life. This artist fully understood his duty towards the upliftment of society so that he could tackle many unsavory practices and traditions by way of his thoughtful and truthful depiction of preaching of the great Sikh Gurus. He practiced art for the betterment of a harmonious and healthy society and took it as a great weapon to fight the evils of corruption, dishonesty, indiscipline, evils and menaces of drugs and intoxication besides the social biases and discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, religion and gender.¹⁵⁵

Trilok Singh once remarked that the artist who influenced his works were many and foremost among these artists was Sardar Lahora Singh who painted the portraits of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and Hari Singh Nalwa. He was equally impressed with the works of Sri Ram, whose paintings were printed in a magazine called 'Phulwari'. The other important artists whose works were admired by him are historical paintings done by Master Gurdit Singh, Sardar Jodh Singh and Sardar Kirpal Singh. He owes his gratitude to Sardar Ganga Singh for his excellent contribution towards the Botanical drawings and paintings and to S.G. Thakur Singh for architectural masterpieces. He confessed his admiration for mysterious, lyrical and philosophical paintings of Allah Baksh. He had learnt

155 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.109-110

a great deal from the drawings of Leonardo Da Vinci in execution of mechanical devices and inventions. His most intense and innermost feelings and creative urges are influenced by the Almighty's bounty of elements such as the sun, the moon, the rivers, the mountains, endless variety of flowers, leaves, animals and birds, which always surround his senses, in appreciation of these natural bounties, he offered his humble creative homage to the absolute creator- the God. He was always absorbed in understanding the mysteries and surges of mysticism, which stirred his impulses. A true nature lover, he found solace in silence and meditation. Sardar Trilok Singh can be called a thinking artist, who had attained a grasp over clear perceptions after deeply studying the works of Bhai Gurdas.¹⁵⁶ Words of wisdom which were immensely useful in real life were adopted by this artist for the cause of social justice and fight against dark and gloomy evils of ignorance and prejudices. He took upon himself to uproot the causes of social evil, which were spreading like epidemics in the atmosphere of ignorance.

The literary works of Waris Shah, Firozdin Sharaf, Charan Singh Shaheed, Munsha Singh Dukhi and Hira Singh Dard provided him the additional impetus to strengthen his resolve to use art as a source of purifying the social and cultural set up, which was embroiled in the very traditions and practices, which divided and weakened the society. In broad spectrum, his works can be classified in following categories: The first and foremost subject dear to his heart was the visual description of the wisdom enshrined in the Gurbani which provided him a rare opportunity to explain in visuals the soul and the metaphors used in this great literary work. Another equally absorbing subject for this great artist was the narration of the events contained in the *Janam Sakhis* and here he excelled in visualization and compositional aspects and provided an aura of divinity to these works. He was also fascinated by the folklores and eternal tales of Punjabi lovers

156 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.110

like that of Heer Ranjha, Sasi Punnu, Mirza Sahiba, Sohni Mahiwal, Luna and others. In this series the important painting that comes to mind is titled '*Heer Di Kahani Tasveer Di Zubani*'. These moving and expressive paintings found instant admiration from the viewers. Yet the other interest which captured his attention was the paintings of Punjabi Cultural heritage and traditions. In these engrossing paintings, he projected the day to day life of the 'Land of Five Rivers', emphasizing on folk dances, customs, traditions, rituals and ceremonies. He was spellbound by the natural beauty of simple Punjabi villages and rustic surroundings. The most appealing works in this section are titled '*Dharan Kaddiyan Naaran Dudh Ridkadiyan Mutiyaran*', '*Bhangra Paunde Jat*', 'Maidens thumping the grounds with the powerful steps of *Giddha*', 'Individual paintings of workers, peasants, cart pullers' and 'Simple folk engaged in agricultural and daily rural chores' attracted his attention as he loved them immensely.¹⁵⁷ Infact the soul of Punjab resides in his paintings; he has hardly left any subject related to traditional Punjab which could not come under his gaze.

The other benchmark contribution of this sensitive artist is the paintings of Sikh Gurus, wherein he always added a new dimension to the work after carefully studying the qualities and historical aspects attributed to a particular Sikh Guru during his lifetime. This generated a spellbinding artistic vision to a painting, he used some elements in the background which were not earlier noticed or painted by other artists. Being a true Sikh and a patriot, he always took it as a sacred task to paint pictures of patriotic ambience and through these paintings, he urged the fellow citizens to honour nationalism. He exhorted the people to come forward to offer their energies for the upliftment of our country. He emerged as a successful commercial artist due to his skillful rendering and painting in vibrant and variegated styles and techniques. He worked for

157 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.110-115

Department of Languages, Punjab as State Artist and designed and illustrated scores of subjective and imaginative book covers and illustrations, which are aesthetically rich and appealing. The most prominent contribution in this department during his tenure of twenty years is the creation of designs and layouts for 'Dictionary Panj Jilda'. He also illustrated 'Punjabi World Dictionary' and 'Dictionary for children'. Not resting at his artistic laurels, he devoted his time to literary works also and wrote articles, essays and stories on a variety of subjects in popular magazines like 'Punjabi Duniya' and 'Jan Sahitya'.¹⁵⁸ The book 'Duna Laha' written by him is one of his remarkable works, which contains thirteen essays on 'Jin Loin', 'Bhula Bula', 'Boli Te Tuli De Mahan Chitrakar Tagore', 'Marjiuda Te Chanan Munara Chakravarty' and 'Sade Pyare Neta Jawahar Lal Nehru Di Wasiyat'.¹⁵⁹

Performing his duties as a social reformer, he created magnificent paintings and calendars on the necessity of social reforms in the society so that it can get rid off the diseased mentality and the people may breathe easy through fresh and progressive thought processes. The visually powerful work created in this connection is on the **Significance of respect to the elders and parents** (Plate-354) based on Bhai Gurdas's stanzas (37-13). Here he has attempted to impress upon the -newly-weds to pay due respect to their parents and serve them with devotion and earnestness. Yet another painting titled **Sarabi Da Maut Nu Sada** (Plate-355) delivering the message of evil effects of drinking on the youth is visually vocal and powerful using the symbolism of fire and destruction contained in a peg of wine. Here he extols the youth to shun this ever engulfing fire which has the power to burn and destroy everything. A symbol of snake is both shockingly eye-catching and projects dangerous venom contained in a bottle

158 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.66-67

159 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.116

of wine. The symbol of skeleton denotes imminent death, here is shown inviting the drunkard to the grave and the impact of this deadly potion is being borne by the family and children of a drunkard. They are shown wailing and crying inconsolably. In a similar style, yet another calendar titled **Jhutha Mad Mool Na Pijayi** (Plate-356) meaning- '*This is false intoxication never drink it.* Though these works may seem to be simplistic but they carry a useful message for the youth who indulged in intoxication and ruin their lives.

Artist Trilok Singh never hankered after name, fame and laurels. His admirers who are found in great numbers, have devoted an entire large room for his works in a beautiful museum at 'Sangriya Mandi' in Rajasthan. Besides his collections in Central Sikh Library and Museum at Amritsar, Moti Bagh Patiala, Baradari Palace at Patiala and Private Art Gallery Sardar Gurmukh Singh & Sons at Ludhiana. His paintings are found in permanent collection of many private art collectors in England, America and Canada. As his style was appropriate for *Calendar art*, Sardar Gurmukh Singh & Sons, Ludhiana reproduced a large number of multi-coloured calendars printed on offset. These calendars are immensely popular in many countries where his Punjabi admirers have settled.¹⁶⁰ His grip over versatility is visible in all styles in innumerable calendars done on varied topics and he had attained a mark of excellence in every style. His many admirers believe, he was a true diamond who could be fixed in any precious metal yet he always retained his individualistic values and luster.

A painting titled **Duniya Te Asi** was awarded Silver Medal in the Ramgarhia All India Federation, Kharagpur (Bengal) at the tender age of seventeen years. He participated in prestigious art exhibitions such as All India Ramgarhia Federation (1931), All India Ramgarhia Federation, Kharagpur (1932), All India Fine Arts association (1933), All India Fine Arts, Calcutta

160 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.133

(1935), Fine Arts Painting Center, Assam (1935), All India Arts and Industrial Exhibition, Patiala (1952) where he was awarded a gold medal, Ramgarhia College, Phagwara (1955), Gram Udyog Vidhyapeeth Museum's Annual Exhibition (1956), Punjabi University, Patiala (1967) and Chitralok Mandal, Patiala (1973). In recognition of his artistic merits and excellent contribution towards fine art Giani Zail Singh, the then President of India awarded him cash prize of Rs.5000 and named a street in Patiala after his name as 'Chitra-lok Street'.¹⁶¹

Presenting a poetical expression to his paintings artist Trilok Singh perceived his paintings in an extraordinary vision which borders on surrealism as symbols used in his works are unusual and visually very powerful. He strived hard to impact the viewer with a fresh vision and imagery as he had ample control over his medium and could express his views through fresh and aesthetical vocabulary. In his calendar titled **Dharam Chalawan, Sant Ubharan-Dusht Saban Ko Mool Uparan** (Plate-357) depicts Guru Gobind Singh appearing from the skies with a sword in one hand and a *simarini* of beads in his another hand. Mankind is shown being engulfed in roaring and thundering waves and a ship is shown caught amidst encircling torrents. Images of death and destruction are incorporated in such horrifying magnitude that the viewer is compelled to ponder over the reign of terror, perpetuated by the Queen of the Death against the saints. This is a very evocative and expressive calendar which arrests the imagination of the viewers and justifiably explains the message of the Guru in a credible manner.

In other painting titled **Bhai Jaita carrying the holy head of Guru Tegh Bahadur** (Plate-358), Bhai Jaita is shown amidst a strong storm surrounded by wild foliage and lost in a deep forest, where horrifying snakes are swirling around in

161 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.132-133

the bushes and thorns are piercing his feet. Bhai Jaita is calmly holding the holy head of the Guru, wrapped in a cloak protecting it from the vagaries of nature. An inner turmoil is surrounding him and Trilok Singh has painted the trees and tall grass bending under the mighty thrust of the winds against his body. This is a very moving calendar and the artist has been successful in capturing the mood of this episode in befitting manner.

An appealing calendar on altogether different subject reveals his love for the environment and saving it from destruction. Here in this painting titled **Trees as Protector** (Plate-359) shows his love for symbolism and a saint is shown protecting a tree where birds and animals have found their nests and its large roots are embedded in the soil. A man carrying a pitcher on his head and an axe on his shoulder is shown approaching this tree in a deep forest where animals and birds of different species are running about in a scare to save themselves from this person. There is a saintly expression in the execution of this painting in soft warm greens, ochres and browns. All his paintings and calendars point towards his personality as ‘True disciple of Sikhism’, a ‘True Patriot’ and a ‘True Reformer of society’.¹⁶² He channelised his art and creative skills towards the upliftment of mankind.

Jaswant Singh (Plate-360) can be considered the first and foremost surrealist and muralist due to his surrealistic stylization of paintings and with masterly handling of large mural-type works of art.¹⁶³ Being a quite and introvert personality, he devoted more time on the study of his subject and created artworks which speak of his high-end dexterity in the art of subjective painting and unmatched aesthetic appeal. He believed in the dictum of less talk and more work and religiously attended to his painting projects, devoting long hours as he

162 **Chitrakar, Ajai**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.114

163 **Randhawa, M.S**; 1971, *Portraits of Guru Nanak by contemporary artists, Roopalekha*, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.5

was a perfectionist to the core. He always thought the emerging artwork would be well tuned and of high aesthetic value. A master of the medium of oil painting, he has to his credit ten large murals in the size of 12”x15” on the theme of ‘Evolution of Man’, adorning the walls of the Museum of Evolution in Chandigarh. This is perhaps the largest project done by a painter of *Sikh Calendar art* and it was offered to him by late Dr. Mohinder Singh Randhawa I.C.S., the then Chief Commissioner of Chandigarh, who himself was a great connoisseur of art and culture.¹⁶⁴

In the adjacent building of this large museum, his twelve paintings of ‘*Raagas and Raginis*’ done in 1967, are in permanent collection of Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, which are breathtakingly fascinating and precious. These present a rare example of his depiction of the *Raagas* in vibrant colours and dreamlike symbols, aptly describing his love for surrealistic painting. These thought provoking and immensely captivating paintings are visually so bold and strong that they have the power of a magnet to pull the viewer. This is the result of his deep study of the *Raagas* as he was an accomplished musician and enjoyed playing *Sarangi*. He fully understood the fine nuances of Indian Classical music and had the capacity to visualize the *Raagas* in such wonderful forms. His close association with Sangeet Samrat- Bade Ghulam Ali Khan further deepened his sensitivity to music.¹⁶⁵ Similar large murals are also part of the collection of Mohinder Singh Randhawa Library, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. These were commissioned by Dr. M.S. Randhawa, when he was also holding the charge of Vice-Chancellor of Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana.¹⁶⁶

164 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.83

165 **Singh, Prem**; 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings (Catalogue)*, Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.3-4

166 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.83

Sardar Jaswant Singh was born in 1918 at Rawalpindi, now in Pakistan.¹⁶⁷ He was a self-taught artist and devoted his time to study the works of great masters and popular painters of his times. He was greatly influenced by the works of Allah Baksh, Abdul Rehman Chughtai, Sarfraz, Babu Balraj, Roshan Lal and Ishwar Chitrakar and they were amongst his best friends.¹⁶⁸ He started his early career as a commercial artist in 1936 and established his art studio in Lahore, the cultural capital of Punjab. Here he attained competence in doing signboard jobs and he had a flair for design work and illustrations, which provided him steady income but his heart was mainly in creative painting. He found time on Sundays to go out of the city and paint natural scenes in water colours and oil colours. This gave him creative satisfaction and broadened his vision as a painter of natural scenes alongwith figure drawing and other compositional variations of landscapes, cityscapes, fields and forests. This way, he attained considerable dexterity in handling all sorts of projects, be it book design, magazine illustrations, banner painting, scene painting, portraiture, lettering and designing in Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi and English. Soon he surpassed his compatriots in the field of commercial art and became popular Punjabi painter.¹⁶⁹ But his restless mind urged him to move on to Calcutta, the great center of art and culture. He worked there as a designer for a year. After attaining this useful experience in creative designing and painting which gave him much needed exposure, he returned to Lahore in 1941 and started his artistic career with a renewed zeal and confidence.¹⁷⁰

167 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.93

168 **Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh;** 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings* (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.5

169 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.83-85

170 **Singh, Prem;** 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings* (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.3

To expand the scope of his business he joined hands with well known commercial artist Sarfaraz and established a studio. But soon they parted ways and established their individual commercial art businesses. Once the task of earning good livelihood through art was accomplished, he pursued his other interest namely study of literature and music. He was fortunate enough to have a large number of friends and admirers such as novelists, story writers, poets, writers and musicians. He was enjoying this phase of life as he found new friends in Bawa Balwant and Ishwar Chitrakar, who spent hours in his company and discussed the fine and significant aspects of art. These art discussions and interactions were very fruitful and valuable for the fine tuning of his artistic sensibilities. They discussed the merits of colours, compositions and other technical and commercial features in popular and commercial art. During the period 1943-44, Jaswant Singh used to attend to his commercial art book jacket designing jobs during the day and dedicated his creative energies towards the study of old masters' drawings and paintings during the night. He studied the drawings and paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo and attained proficiency in drawing. He was considered a multi-dimensional artist and had the competence to work in water colours, tempera and oil colours.¹⁷¹ After partition of the country, Jaswant Singh shifted his base to Delhi and started a small studio. Here he came into contact with B.C. Sanyal, Dhan Raj Bhagat, Kamal Sen and Bimal Das Gupta who were associated with the Delhi School of art. They asked him to join the school as a teacher but he refused as he was interested in practicing as a freelance artist. Such a decision at a time when every migrated Punjabi was groping in the dark can only be attributed to a man who has a strong commitment and deep faith in his art.¹⁷²

171 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.83-85

172 **Singh, Prem**; 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings* (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.3

In 1956, he painted large size paintings in the 'Reception and Recreation Hall' of the Central Railway Hospital at New Delhi.¹⁷³ He put up his first solo show of paintings at All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi in 1959, which was an instant success in consolidating his career as a freelance artist. A number of small commissions followed soon, he had his own group of admirers who acquired his paintings. Encouraged with this success, he continued his artistic journey and held exhibition of his works from 1959 to 1987 at the prestigious galleries and became a well known figure in Delhi art circles and beyond.¹⁷⁴ Here some of his works brought him in contact with Dr. M.S. Randhawa, a patron of arts, who was engaged by Government of India in the rehabilitation of migrants from Pakistan in India as a 'Rehabilitation Commissioner'. Dr. M.S. Randhawa provided him with an opportunity to paint large paintings for 'Museum of Soil' at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. His fame grew from strength to strength. Soon he was invited to participate in a very large and prestigious exhibition of paintings done on the life and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, in which most of the realistic painters participated. The works in this exhibition were similar in style and fashion as these were normally painted in the usual style of 'Calendar art'. These were quite appealing for the common man and were popular due to their religious content. But Jaswant Singh seized this opportunity to showcase his seriously acquired mastery over realism and surrealism and painted the large paintings in unusual style projecting a new vision and imagery which was never witnessed before in such works. Artists and the viewers were spellbound and greatly admired and appreciated these works. These provided altogether a new dimension in their creation, depiction and perception. He opened new vistas for

173 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.93

174 **Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh;** 1992, *Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings* (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.5-6

the viewers and compelled them to think about new aspects in the philosophy of Guru Nanak Dev. The viewers feasted on the vibrant and skillfully handled conceptual compositions taken from the life of Guru Nanak Dev.¹⁷⁵ They were amazed at the skill and unique imagery of this artist and soon he became a household name in Punjabi households. Calendars of his paintings were reproduced in large numbers. Some of these original paintings are adorning the walls of Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh. The most imaginative work which was a major departure from the earlier painted themes of **Guru Nanak- An Eternal Pilgrim** (Plate-361), where he avoided showing Guru Nanak's face but concentrated on his wooden clogs, *simarini* and knee length *choga*.¹⁷⁶ This is perhaps the only painting which was based on the symbolism and qualities of Guru Nanak's mission as an apostle of peace and love. This painting is based on the Guru Nanak Dev's four *Udasis* (religious travels). Here his right foot is shown on the ground and the other foot is shown receding in the distance. This is an excellent example of colour perspective which the artist has skillfully adopted and conveyed Guru's mission by traveling and meeting people from all walks of life and from many distant lands. In the background, the deft handling of rocks and mountains in a photographic realism, adds mystic charm and presents the vastness of Guru Nanak's mission.

In a rare display of symbolism, Jaswant Singh attempted a painting of Guru Nanak which is perhaps the only painting where Guru Nanak has been personified in the shape of five hands that is the five main ideals preached by the Guru. The first hand represents 'Nanak-the Protector of the down-trodden', the second hand as 'Nanak-the Philanthropist', the third being holding a sickle is a symbol of 'dignity of labour', the fourth hand holding a *simarini* represents

175 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.85-86

176 **Daljeet, Dr**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.149-151

‘Worship and remembering the Name of the Almighty (*Naam Simran*)’ and the fifth hand denotes a pointing finger towards heaven thereby signifying the ‘Oneness of God and having faith on Him’.¹⁷⁷ This painting portrays the Guru Nanak’s concept of hard work and sharing with others whatever one has earned.

The other remarkable painting which has summed up Nanak’s persona is titled **Guru Nanak- the Devotee** (Plate-362). Here Guru Nanak has been painted in a meditative mood with eyes closed and lost deep in thought. He is gently holding the *simarini* and his head wearing a cap is slightly reclining towards left side shoulder. The palette here is unusual and different from the accepted iconography as this painting has soft tones of ochre, browns, sepia and burnt umber. A shawl is diagonally wrapped around his chest and shoulder and he appears more of a *yogi* as someone who is a commoner but dim light on his face sets him apart and the overall aura of divinity surrounds his face. Another noticeable feature of this painting is his short and grey beard and he is not wearing any additional *simarini* around his neck which is usually shown in the popular iconographic calendars. In ‘Guru Nanak as a Devotee’, the image is lifted above the merely sectarian, the message of oneness of God becoming aligned to that of oneness of humanity.¹⁷⁸

In 1973, artist Jaswant Singh painted a large canvas in oil on colours on the historical ‘Jallianwala Bagh Massacre’ which was commissioned by Government of Punjab and it forcefully brings out the scene of atrocities, torture and a reign of terror in this painting where hundreds of innocent people were gunned down by the Britishers on the day of Baisakhi.¹⁷⁹ This painting is a moving portrayal of this historical event and the viewer is filled with sorrow and

177 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.87

178 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.124

179 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.85

unfathomed gloom and anger. The scene is so vividly captured that it presents a first hand account of the massacre in photographic detail.

Another series of paintings for Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Museum, Anandpur Sahib, depict events from Guru Tegh Bahadur's life but these paintings are uniquely individualistic in interpretation and bear the mark of his stylization. He selected those moments as would easily lend themselves to be heightened in dramatic expression- **The Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur**, **The Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev** (Plate-363), **Bhai Jaita taking the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur from the place of Martyrdom** (Plate-364) and **Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur in Spiked Cage** (Plate-365) are some of the main themes of these paintings.¹⁸⁰ Emphasis on details and background are his hallmark elements and the palette is very mature and warm. He has avoided bright and vibrant colours and has chosen a palette which highlights an event according to its historical significance. But being a surrealist at heart, he has never forgotten to dramatize the whole scene with magnificent use of highlighting and a moving and pulsating composition.

The series done on '*Raagmala* Paintings' are considered his masterpieces, as these provided him the necessary creative satisfaction and a sense of elation. The paintings on prominent '*Raagas*' and '*Raginis*' include **Raag Dipak** (Plate-366), **Raag Mal Kauns** (Plate-367), **Raag Hindol** (Plate-368), **Raag Bhairavi** (Plate-369), **Ragini Bhopali** (Plate-370), **Ragini Bhairavi** (Plate-371), **Ragini Bagesari** (Plate-372) and **Ragini Gaud Malhar** (Plate-373). Jaswant Singh devoted his whole life to painting and study of music and Sikh scriptures, besides doing the normal commercial art projects in his studio in Delhi. He kept himself busy in painting the pictures which were close to his heart and sensibilities. He viewed and perceived different

180 **Kessar, Urmi**; June 2003, *Twentieth-Century Sikh Painting: The Presence of the Past*. In Kavita Singh, Ed. *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Marg Publications, p.125

aspects of life in his own inimitable style and there was a lyrical dimension and dramatization in them, which are the true basic elements of a surrealist work.

Jaswant Singh has to his credit more than thirty-seven solo shows of his works which he held in Bombay, Chandigarh, Calcutta and Ludhiana. He established a five room large Art Gallery in his house in Delhi where most of his paintings are displayed.¹⁸¹ The collections of his works are spread all over the globe and in India major museums and galleries have acquired his works for permanent collections such as National Gallery of Modern Art at New Delhi, Government Museum and Art Gallery at Chandigarh, Indian Academy of Fine Arts at Amritsar, Punjab Agricultural University at Ludhiana, National Gallery of Yugoslavia and several private collections in India, U.S.A., Australia and Canada.¹⁸² In appreciation of his art, Government of India has conferred upon him six President Awards.¹⁸³ Jaswant Singh is a major Sikh artist whose contribution towards *Sikh Calendar art* is of great significance and has helped the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* to achieve novelty and individualistic approach, which was akin to contemporary idiom in art.

Master Gurdit Singh (Plate-374), who can truly be referred in *Sikh Calendar art* as the harbinger of Sikh renaissance in art, had the good fortune of studying painting at Royal School of Art, London, under the guidance of stalwart western style European painters.¹⁸⁴ He had achieved an unmatched skill and deftness in works as is mostly associated with European classical painting style. Art education in England was fully geared for professionalism and sound technical competence with emphasis on 3-dimensional compositions and use of figurative

181 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.88

182 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala**; 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.93

183 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.88

184 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; 2008, *Exhibition of Paintings of 'The Great Masters of Amritsar'* (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.3

elements from life. At the same time, European art education also stressed upon the elaborate use of background, architectural objects, landscapes and the other paraphernalia such as furniture, household objects, curtains etc, to highlight a given painting and enrich it with life-like tints and tones. Gurdit Singh was exposed to these finer elements and features and had achieved a considerable mastery in presenting a theme in soulful realism and superb rendering. Influenced by the European masters while studying in the art school in London, he had a flair for organizing the compositions with thickly inhabited and well organized characters and had remarkable knowledge of hues and colour perspectives. Portraiture was his forte. He used his skills and technique to paint Sikh historical events and portraits of Sikh personalities in befitting manner. There is a touch of classical appeal in his compositions.

Gurdit Singh was born in 1900 at Amritsar and was deeply interested in *Sikh art*, literature, culture and traditions.¹⁸⁵ He was endowed with wonderful qualities of head and heart and was an efficient organizer. He resolved to establish a 'Sikh Museum and Art Gallery' on the lines of the museums he had witnessed in Europe. He firmly believed that art education should be imparted in a systematic way and paintings of Sikh and Punjabi artists should be displayed in such a museum, so that the artists may also get the required encouragement and due appreciation. This way art of the Sikhs will be preserved and propagated. Another mission in his mind was painting on the themes of Sikh wars, valour and sacrifices and he strove hard to accomplish the sacred duty of propagating the ideals of Sikhism through visually powerful paintings. An establishment of an academy in Amritsar, which was already a renowned center for *Sikh art* and crafts, was a pioneering work. He was able to establish Indian Academy of Fine Arts in Amritsar in 1928, which saw the association of other great Sikh artists

185 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; 2008, *Exhibition of Paintings of 'The Great Masters of Amritsar'* (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.3

like S.G. Thakur Singh and prominent personalities from various fields like Dharam Singh Engineer, Dr. Gopal Dass Sarpal, Dhruv Dev Arora, Durga Das Bhatia and Sunder Das Oberoi. Later on, S.G. Thakur Singh was made President of the Academy in 1932. This academy was religiously involved in promotion of *Sikh art* and organized regular art exhibitions, workshops and seminars where artists from all over India were invited to participate and display their work. This was indeed the first cultural art institution in Punjab.¹⁸⁶

In recognition of his artistic talents, humility and dedication in furthering the cause of the Sikh religion through his wonderful paintings and documenting the personalities through his life-like portraits, Master Gurdit Singh was offered the post of Chief Artist of the Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar situated in Sri Darbar Sahib, the holy premises by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar.¹⁸⁷ This was a befitting reward for someone who possessed great organizational qualities and had the experience of establishing an academy. Infact the major contribution of Master Gurdit Singh to *Sikh art* is the compilation and documentation of Sikh personalities like poets, martyrs, Generals, warriors, thinkers and philosophers. These portraits painted by him now adorn the large galleries of this magnificent museum and are visited by thousands of devotees from all over the world.

Due to his deep interest in Sikh history and literature, he familiarized the viewers with many not so popular life events of Sikh Gurus. The noticeable paintings done by Master Gurdit Singh which are in the collection of the Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar include **The Valour of Moti Mehra** (Plate-375) done in oil on canvas medium in 1965. He has narrated the story of Moti Mehra, a water carrier who came to know that the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh- Baba

186 **Sharma, Shivani**; November 14, 2009, *City set to get haven for budding artists*, The Tribune.
187 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; 2008, *Exhibition of Paintings of 'The Great Masters of Amritsar'* (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.3

Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh alongwith their grandmother Mata Gujri, were lying hungry and interned in Thanda Burj (cold tower). He did not bother about royal displeasure and threw up his scaling ladder and returned only after having offered milk to the young *Sahibzadas*.¹⁸⁸ This painting speaks volumes of the in-depth study of the subject and how skillfully Master Gurdit Singh has captured the cold wintry night and the gloom of this Burj. The painting is remarkably composed with emphasis on the central characters accentuated by appropriate surroundings. Dim light of a small lamp with flames waving in the wind lighten up the dark room but there is peace and serenity on the faces of Mata Gujri and the young *Sahibzadas* are attentatively gazing at Moti Mehra. The subject of this unique painting pays tribute to the valour of Moti Mehra and also narrates the suffering of the young *Sahibzadas* at the hands of tyrant Mughal rulers.

The other painting titled the first holocaust which occurred in 1746 at Kahnuwan in District Gurdaspur. The scene of this painting depicts the **Ghalughara**’ or **‘Massacre of innocent Sikhs** (Plate-376). Yahya Khan and Lakhpat Rai had taken a pledge to wipe out the Sikhs. They chased hiding columns of the Sikh army in the woods of Kahnuwan and besieged them. Nearly ten thousand Sikhs were liquidated in the following clashes. Retreating regiments of the Sikhs braved an onslaught under the command of Nawab Kapur Singh. Even though they were hungry, they did not lose their determination and fought on in the scorching heat. The Sikhs call this carnage ‘*Chotta Ghalughara*’.¹⁸⁹ The painting is witness to the difficult terrain where Sikhs fought this pitched battle as this area had thick growth of thorns and bushes, swamps and muddy rivulets.

188 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.44

189 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.45

The overall effect of this painting is very absorbing as Master Gurdit Singh has painted thousands of warriors on horsebacks and cavaliers on foot, engaged in the battle with Mughals.

The artist exhibited his creative strength in capturing a page from Sikh history on **Bhai Dyala** (Plate-377), who was brother of Bhai Mani Singh. At the bidding of the Mughal rulers, he was executed when he was asked to sit in a cauldron of boiling water at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi. Panth Prakash describes that Bhai Dyala neither protested nor cried: no matter that the executors kept the fire burning.¹⁹⁰ The martyrdom of Bhai Dyala in such brutal and barbaric manner throws light on the cruelty of the Mughal rulers, who mated out innumerable atrocities on disciples of Sikhism. But with the grace of God and the blessings of the Gurus, they never wavered and kept their dignity alive for the sake of freedom of worship. This painting was well received by the viewers and innumerable calendars of this painting were reproduced by many printing houses and some new generation artists also attempted this important theme of *Sikh Calendar art*.

Carnage of Nankana Sahib on 21 February, 1921 (Plate-378) was the subject matter of other important paintings by Master Gurdit Singh. Mahant Narayan Dass, Manager of Gurdwara Nankana Sahib trapped two hundred Akali Singhs in connivance with police. They had come to visit the shrine and he had them hacked into pieces by his hired mercenaries. Later the mangled and mutilated bodies of the Singhs were burnt in kerosene oil. This episode is considered to be one of the bloodiest of the 20th century massacres. The Gurdwara however was handed over to Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak

190 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.47

Committee the following day.¹⁹¹ Another historical painting depicts **The Sacrifice at Panja Sahib on 30 October, 1922** (Plate-379) which was done by the artist in 1975. On hearing that the Sikhs arrested at Guru Ka Bagh, were being escorted in a train to Naushera Jail (Attock), the Sikh Sangat (devotees) of Panja Sahib decided under the leadership of Bhai Pratap Singh and Bhai Karam Singh, to offer them refreshment come what may. When the station master expressed his inability to stop the train, Bhai Pratap Singh and Bhai Karam Singh alongwith hundreds of others lay on the railway tracks. The train stopped and *langar* was served to the arrested Sikhs. But not before the train had crushed both under its wheels.¹⁹² The painting displays the deep resolve of Sikh devotees in offering their lives for the sake of service to fellow beings and no power could deter their determination in performing their holy tasks. Expressions on the faces of the devotees have been portrayed in true-to-life precision. The painting is infused with a spirit of valour and dignified struggle.

Continuing with his series on martyrdom of Sikhs, Master Gurdit Singh painted **Massacre of Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April, 1919** (Plate-380) in 1968. The painting is in the size of 48”x 79”. Thousands of Punjabis assembled on Baisakhi Day at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, they were caught unaware when General Dyer ordered fire at them without warning. Nearly 1500 people were either killed or injured out of which 347 were Sikhs. The killings at Jallianwala Bagh evoked strong reaction of anger and grief throughout the country.¹⁹³ Most of the deaths occurred when the gathered people started running incoherently and fell into the

191 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.76

192 **Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharam Prachar Committee, New Delhi**; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum's Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.62

193 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.75

deep well or some of them jumped into the well intentionally to save themselves from the bullets. The narrow alleys surrounding this Bagh were blocked by the armed soldiers so that the people may not escape from the raining bullets. This episode shook the soul of the country and added a saga of valour which changed the course of freedom struggle in India. Each of the painting done by this master artist is laden with minute detail and dramatic use of colour perspective. He is very successful in capturing the mood of the moment with magical use of light effects and the palette is carefully chosen to suit the soul of the painting.

Two remarkable full length portraits of Bhai Gurdas and Sain Mian Mir deserve mention, as very few artists have attempted portraits of these two towering personalities. **Bhai Gurdas (1543-1637)** (Plate-381) was the first preacher in Sikh tradition. He assisted Guru Arjan Dev in compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. His own poetry according to Sikh traditions was deified by Guru Arjun Dev as key to Granth Sahib.¹⁹⁴ This portrait was done in 1975 and illustrates Bhai Gurdas as a pious learned and humble man who had intense understanding of Indian classical music and mentioned suitable *Raagas* for the singing of Gurbani enshrined in the Adi Granth. This painting is in the collection of Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi and has been reproduced in many calendars. This is an extraordinary example of a realistic portrait and Master Gurdit Singh has showered his artistic skills and bounties on this portrait by providing it with high-end features in composition and space organization. Angular position places the main figure in the center of the painting, seated on a *Takhtposh* (throne) surrounded by scriptures, lamps and writing desk. He is shown deeply engrossed in meditative stance and looking in the distance that is pondering or contemplating on a thought. Strengthening the fact that the artist had great sense of design, the *agarbati* metallic stand shown in the painting depicts a swirling cobra with raised hood while a glimpse of an animal skin is also visible where

194 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.119

Bhai Gurdas is sitting cross-legged wearing a milky-white *choga*, turban and *parna*. The colours are very soothing and harmonious. The whole picture oozes a peaceful atmosphere. The overall ambience in this painting projects a noble person, dutifully engaged in performing the sacred duty of compiling the Adi Granth with pious mind and religious dedication.

Sain Mian Mir (1550-1633) (Plate-382), a *Sufi* Saint was born at Sistan and belongs to the lineage of Khaliph Umar. He laid the foundation stone of Sri Harmandir Sahib. He was a great devotee of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Hargobind Sahib.¹⁹⁵ Gurdit Singh painted this painting in 1976 and it is found in the permanent collection of Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi. The artist painted this painting to project the fundamental ethos of Sikhism that there should not be any discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, colour, creed and due reverence should be paid to the pious and holy people of all religions. In this painting, Sain Mian Mir is shown in sitting pose with his left arm resting on the *Takia* (a large pillow) and 'Kuran' - the holy book of the Muslims is placed on a wooden stand. Decorative metallic lamps prevalent during the period have been incorporated in the composition. The *Sufi* Saint has a *simarini* made of transparent beads and wearing a brocaded woolen robe and stylish headgear. Such emphasis on detail has been given that even the veins of his hand are visible and the overall impact of the painting is of warmth of a benign dignitary.

Gurdit Singh died in 1981 and the artist throughout his life remained focused on the paintings of Sikh history and Sikh Gurus and was instrumental in the establishment of two major institutions. Thus his contribution to *Sikh Calendar art* is of phenomenal value. As through his calendars, the true elements of Sikhism were propagated and he occupies a coveted place in the history of *Sikh Calendar art*. He was a great teacher, an organizer and above all a guiding

195 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.118

spirit who inspired innumerable new generation artists engaged in this genre of painting.

Renowned Sikh artist **Amolak Singh** (Plate-383) was born on October 2, 1950 at Amritsar. His father Sardar Balwant Singh was employed in the Post and Telegraph Department, who nursed the ambition that his son may get employed at some good position in government job. But contrary to his father's dreams and wishes, he was destined to be an artist of great repute as right from his early childhood. Amolak Singh invested his sensibilities to drawing and painting and yearned to achieve success in the field of art. Till the time he passed Middle Standard Examination, he was always engrossed in drawing and his drawing teacher Mohan Lal always encouraged him as he saw the spark of a master in his pupil. After passing class tenth examination, Amolak Singh had to shift to Delhi alongwith his family, here he continued with his art and joined the evening college for further studies. Visit to Delhi proved very fruitful to Amolak Singh as he got the golden opportunity to meet many young and established artists and visited numerous museums and art galleries, workshops and studios of other artists, which widened his scope of artistic vision. After these visits, he sincerely felt that without proper teacher it is rather difficult to attain proficiency in this vast field, as painting demands dedicated and sustained efforts to go deeper into the essence of art and academic art training. He joined as apprentice with Master Jagiri Lal and kept on working on his paintings day and night. But his parents were disillusioned with his choice of profession and wanted to make him an engineer. Their repeated efforts to dissuade him to abandon this profession failed as he had firmly resolved to make painting as his profession and worked hard to make a niche for himself.¹⁹⁶

196 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.157

To sustain his painting, he adopted commercial art and worked for some studios and art agencies. This exercise brought him in touch with banner painters who painted for film advertisement and during the course of his earlier pursuits he had to shift to Bombay for a while. Here he perfected the art of large banner paintings and painted full length portraits of Bollywood actors and stars. He earned his livelihood from 'Banner Painting' from 1970-1974. Besides learning new techniques and styles in painting, he also experimented with brush and knife painting. In Bombay, he came in contact with famous professional artists and was amazed to see their works which were done in a variety of styles and techniques and on contemporary subjects. The use of impasto technique gave him an added expertise in producing enchanting paintings, as this technique was appreciated by a large number of artists and laymen alike, due to the richness in textural content, which enhanced the overall appeal of even an ordinary subject. He practiced this technique and used it skillfully in most of his paintings; we see them in the collection of *Sikh art* galleries. It is a matter of great honour that he produced nearly two thousand paintings in oil on canvas medium and about two hundred of his paintings have been reproduced in the form of multi-coloured calendars done on Sikh historical events, life events of the Sikh Gurus and Sikh battles.¹⁹⁷

Sardar Amolak Singh worked fourteen years as Curator of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee and renovated Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar in Sri Harmandir Sahib Complex after 'Operation Blue Star'. He did pioneering work in restoring this museum by bringing it back to the original condition and organized it efficiently with innovative display work. He had been honoured by different organizations and individuals for his work. His works used to be published in daily newspapers on regular basis. Thus he became a people's

197 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.158

artist, who had immense popularity due to the subject matter of his remarkable paintings. Amolak Singh had the honour of working under the guidance of Sardar Sobha Singh at Andretta (H.P.). Here he created more than four hundred paintings and one can see his works at the Punjab and Sind Bank, PNB Finance, Bank of Punjab, Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar and Baba Baghel Singh Museum, Chandni Chowk, New Delhi.¹⁹⁸

In 1980, Principal Satbir Singh, a renowned Sikh author brought him to Amritsar thus he was appointed curator of the Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar. He was the third person to be appointed to this post, previously held by likes of Kirpal Singh and Master Gurdit Singh. This museum contains hundreds of his paintings which are beautifully displayed there. He also improved Baba Baghel Singh Museum, New Delhi within three years with new paintings. The year 2001, saw him working for Bhai Mati Dass Museum, Chandni Chowk, New Delhi, where he also made efforts in building plan of this museum. His efforts paid well and the result was the museum on the Sikh history. He is one of the most prominent painters who made rich contribution to Sikhism by portraying the Sikh history with his brush. He was also engaged in establishing Sikh Museum at Paonta Sahib while portraying Sikh history on canvas. Many organizations had honoured him for his works and his death was mourned by Chief of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar and other dignitaries of Sikh world. He passed away in sleep at the age of fifty-six at Batala in 2006.¹⁹⁹ Initially, he was influenced by the creations of masters like Sobha Singh, S.M. Pandit, Repin and Rembrandt. But after meeting Sobha Singh, he mainly concentrated on painting Sikh historical events and acquired the habit of going deep into the historical as well as spiritual aspects of Sikhism. The authenticity of the subject matter is the result of deep study and discussion with

198 **Walia, Varinder**; October 16, 2006, *Artist Amolak Singh dies in sleep*, The Tribune

199 Ibid

scholars and authorities on Sikh history. While working in Delhi and Bombay, he was tired of painting repetitive works for pure commercial consideration and felt suffocated and dissatisfied. Thus he used to take short trips to Andretta and be in the company of Sobha Singh, who inspired his works and gave him fresh lease of creative life with new found strength and enthusiasm. He used to go back and start working on fresh ideas and improved his perceptions and mode of painting by adopting more aesthetic approach. Life and works of Sobha Singh were his real ideals and he considered him as his guiding force.²⁰⁰

With the publication of large number of his paintings, he was patronized by many organizations chiefly among them are Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar and PNS Bank. Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, Delhi also acquired his paintings for their museum. In the early stages of his career, he used to participate in all major art exhibitions but he soon realized that the art of painting for him is a mission and there is no need for fame and name as he gets the spiritual and divine satisfaction by offering his humble services as an artist to the Sikh Panth and considered himself the chosen one to do this sacred task. Other prominent subjects which were his source of inspiration is the vibrant yet simple rustic life of the villages, its people, ceremonies, customs, folk songs and festivals.²⁰¹ He enjoyed painting these images with great aplomb and relished the rustic aroma of the soil.

Amolak Singh's other major contribution to Sikh Panth and Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar is portraits of Sikh Gurus in many different poses, besides frontal portraits to profiles and till torso and many of them have been shown in seated positions with elaborate backgrounds, costumes and objects related to the Gurus. This is perhaps for the first time, any artist has ventured to portray the Sikh Gurus apart from the normally popular iconography. In large portraits of

200 **Chitrakar, Ajaib**; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.158

201 *Ibid*, p.159

Guru Hargobind Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Ram Dass, a discerning eye can easily detect Sobha Singh's influence on this painter as even the palette used by him mostly resembles with the master artist of Sikh Gurus. These paintings have been made more interesting and elaborate by depicting in the background some religious places, Gurdwaras, shrines, forts, simply a terrain of a particular place peeping behind a curtain or a *Mehrabi* door. He has paid due attention to the painting in the front as well as the relative scenic background in the back. Close inspection of the painting titled **Guru Ram Dass** (Plate-384) shows the holy pond in the background, where the episode of '*Kago Hanse Kare*' was revealed. Here in this pond, the artist has shown crows bathing in the pool and flying out as pure white cranes. Behind the pool in the distance, a village with muddy houses is skillfully painted and shows some figures who are astonished at the sight of this miracle. In this portrait, another noticeable feature is that Guru Ram Dass is holding a rose and some Jasmine flowers and rose petals are also lying in front of him in the foreground. Costumes of Guru Ram Dass painted in pure white and pale colours are reminiscent of renaissance paintings.

Portraits of **Guru Gobind Singh** (Plate-385), **Guru Hargobind** (Plate-386) and **Guru Har Rai** (Plate-387) have been done in similar fashion and due attention has been paid towards their majestic and exalted positions. Amolak Singh has presented them as royal and regal personalities, sitting on the throne with sword in one hand and falcon perched on the other gloved hand. A casket of arrows, a bow and swords are also lying nearby and at the back lavish curtains are draped in vibrant colours. A portion of the fort with '*Nishan Sahib*' is visible in Guru Gobind Singh's painting and galloping white horses are shown outside the door of the room in Guru Hargobind's painting. The Gurus are shown wearing the true royal symbols usually associated with kings and warriors that is layers of necklaces and a *kalgi* worn over brocaded silken robes.

A large painting titled **Khalsa Mero Roop Hai Khaas** (Plate-388) done in 1982, depicts Guru Gobind Singh at Chamkaur Fort and he dresses up a Sikh Bhai Sangat Singh who resembled him in his battle outfit, with turban and crest and himself quietly makes his way towards Macchiwara. Bhai Sangat Singh waged the battle in Guru's place and finally laid down his life reciting Waheguru Waheguru!²⁰²

Guru Nanak curing a Leper (Plate-389) - during his first *Udasi* (religious travels) Guru Nanak Dev alongwith Bhai Mardana visited Goindwal, district Amritsar. He called on a leper and asked him to permit him to spend a night in his cottage. The leper was amazed and filled with joy and said "*Even the animals would not come nearby because of the grace of God I have come cross a human being.*" Whereas at the very sight of the Guru Sahib, the leper was cured of the leprosy. These are the ways of Men of God who by way of compassion cured the ills of humanity.²⁰³ The scene is so well composed that it immediately attracts the viewer and the highlight of the work is fantastic brushwork with an eye for detail, supported by mastery of still life painting and knowledge of colour perspective. The meticulous competence is revealed in superbly handled light and shade process projected in realistic manner.

In another painting, his high artistic caliber comes alive, which is titled **Compiling of Guru Granth Sahib** (Plate-390). In this painting, Guru Arjan Dev and Bhai Gurdas are engaged in the compilation of Granth Sahib. After the completion of sacred task, Granth Sahib was taken to Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar with reverence and installed there.²⁰⁴ As this was a very prominent occasion in Sikh history, the artist has vividly captured this sacred process by accentuating

202 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.37

203 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.16

204 **Singh, Taran**; 2004, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.239-252

the building of this holy shrine, the pond that surrounds it and the tree under which Guru Arjan Dev, Bhai Gurdas and a disciple carried out the compilation work, finalizing the manuscripts and giving the required touches.

Amolak Singh also painted some relatively unknown episodes from the lives of the Sikh Gurus and in one such specimen **The Invincible Guru** (Plate-391) depicts an episode from Guru Hargobind's life. Several fruitless efforts were made on the life of Guru Hargobind, right from his infancy. A snake charmer was bribed who let loose a poisonous snake but the great Guru overpowered the snake gently and easily.²⁰⁵ The artist has narrated another anecdote from Guru Hargobind's life in a painting titled **Bhai Bidhi Chand** (Plate-392), when a Sikh of Kabul wanted to present a horse to Guru Hargobind Sahib. The governor of Lahore forcibly took away the horse. Bhai Bidhi Chand, brave and dedicated soldier of the Guru, volunteered himself to bring back the horse. He disguised himself as a grasscutter, reached the royal stable and managed to come out of the stable with one horse. Second time, he dressed himself as a fortune teller and reached the royal stable. He roared the horse and jumped over the wall of a fort and galloped away to Amritsar, to present the horse. Guru Sahib was pleased with him and showered his blessings upon him.²⁰⁶ This painting describes the resolve and valour of Sikh disciples as Guru always appreciated the brave soldiers because during this time Sikhs were facing hostilities at various fronts.

Guru Hargobind giving audience to Noorjahan (Plate-393) is yet another magnificent painting. Queen Noorjahan, who was an ardent disciple of Mian Mir, once went to Lahore to seek the blessings of Guru Hargobind. Giving answer to one of her queries, Guru Sahib enlightened her by saying that one should never forget Death and should always remember God. Guru Sahib counseled her not to engage herself in the pursuit of worldly things, but instead she should try to

205 **Singh, Fauja**; 2004, *Guru Hargobind*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.232-235

206 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, P.68

comprehend truth and discharge the duties of a true wife.²⁰⁷ This painting is a case of factual historical discovery from Sikh history and painted in inimitable style of this artist, who was who was at ease in organizing the composition with a large number of figures, without loosing sight of the main subject. He emphasized the main characters by placing them in the forefront and methodically organized the space in sound deftness.

Mutual conflicts result in utter destruction (Plate-394) is the subject matter of a painting wherein the artist has narrated the story of Raja Chankardhawaj of Assam and Raja Ram Singh, who were great enemies. Guru Tegh Bahadur brought about peace between these two kings by offering them his wise discourse. As a result, the fighting forces of both Rajas erected a monument of peace with their weapons lying own, thereby vindicating the Guru's exhortation that '*Hatred divides and love unites and all disputes can be settled through mutual discussions and peaceful negotiations*'.²⁰⁸

Sardar Amolak Singh has to his credit a large number of illustrated books explaining the Sikh tenets where he through his powerful illustrations has depicted the basic fundamentals of Sikhism, Sikh Gurus, Sikh symbols, Gurdwaras, significant events relating to Sikh martyrs, Sikh wars and pictures of unmatched brutal atrocities of tyrant Mughals on Sikh disciples. The book titled 'Ardas' presents first-hand visual information about the prayer of the Sikhs and its contents have been illustrated in expressive and lucid manner by giving the wording of whole 'Ardas' stanza-by-stanza with suitable illustrations. It appropriately explains what Khalsa stands for and what are the ideals and ethos behind its establishment. These books are very popular and have been published by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar. These are in great demand and devotees carry them to various countries. The other notable

207 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.59

208 **Banerjee, A.C.;** 2004, *Guru Tegh Bahadur*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.331

publication illustrated by this artist is titled 'Guru Hargobind Sahib' which has a collection of meticulous illustrations depicting the life and times of Guru Hargobind Sahib and how the concept of 'Miri' and 'Piri' was established by Guru Sahib.

With an intent on bringing forth the numerous noble qualities of Guru Gobind Singh besides being a 'Saint' and a 'Soldier', the artist has expressed through his paintings Guru Sahib's compassion for his disabled and blind followers, who wanted them to overcome their disabilities in a painting titled **Helping the Helpless** (Plate-395). He even taught several of his blind disciples, the art of music and made them expert in instruments such as *Tabla*, *Saranda*, *Rabab* and *Taus*. The Guru bestowed his blessings on the handicapped without discrimination.²⁰⁹ This way they were encouraged to serve the Sikh Panth through their own musical contributions.

The Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Plate-396) is one of Amolak Singh's finest works. In this painting, the artist has delivered the message that Maharaja Ranjit Singh- the Sikh sovereign of Punjab treated all alike and made no discrimination between men of one faith and another. In his court, Muslims, Hindus and Christians received equal treatment. The 'Lion of Punjab' had even issued an edit in the name of Faqir Nurruddin that the Faqir could reverse his own royal order if it in any manner impeached on the rights of a common citizen. The painter shows the 'Lahore Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh' filled with ministers, courtiers, generals and warriors dressed in royal and regal dresses with weapons and even a tiger is shown lying in the ground alongwith some guns and swords. The painting presents a majestic splendour of the riches of this mighty emperor who was a kind ruler at heart.

Another aspect of glorious Sikh history is visualized in a painting titled **Kesri (Saffron) Flag on the Red Fort (March 11, 1781)** (Plate-397). Between 1765

209 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.77

to 1781, the Sikhs conquered Delhi 15 times. In 1781, Sardar Baghel Singh hoisted Kesri flag on the Red Fort and Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia graced the throne of Delhi.²¹⁰ This painting was done in 1975 and shows a cavalry of Sikh warriors on horsebacks right in front of the main gate of Red Fort. The painting amply suggests that the artist has achieved considerable expertise in painting the architectural buildings and monuments in photographic realistic style. The artist through his sheer hard work and unmatched dedication has carved a niche for himself in the *Sikh Calendar art* and he ranks as one of the pioneers of painting Sikh religion and history. Though he died young when he was in 50s yet he had received honours and recognitions and it is no mean an achievement to be appointed as a Curator of the finest Sikh Museum at Amritsar.

Bodhraj was a prolific and versatile artist whose magical brush strokes and deep understanding of Sikh history and culture, culminated in the production of hundreds of appealing and expressive paintings done specifically on the theme of Sikh culture, Gurus and history. He was patronized by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar and his distinctive style caught the attention of even popular artists engaged in the similar themes. So profound was his control over the brush that he produced painting after painting in a free flowing manner which gave an added charm to his compositions. He had an eye for landscape and environmental elements and most of his paintings are pleasing because of the harmonious colour schemes and in-depth knowledge of perspective. Arrangement of figures in his paintings was profoundly given due importance to avoid the static stagnation of the composition. Each figure seems to stir with calculated moment and gesture. Capturing the features and moods on his subjects was his artistic merit and expression reins supreme in these remarkably fluent and effortless paintings. His academic acumen was of superior

210 **Singh, Principal Satbir**; Ed. 1991, *Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar*, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.64

scale and he had professional competence to compose these paintings, due to his skills in drawing as well as control of his hand in the medium of oil colours. Devoting long hours to every painting, he always upgraded his study of costumes and the characters to be shown in the paintings and perfectly understood the whole episode from history, for which he sat down to paint.

Bodhraj basically hailed from Jalandhar district but he worked at Amritsar for many years in the early stages of his career. He admired artist Hari Singh and requested him to accept him as his disciple, who was sure that this young man has a flair for drawing and painting. Hari Singh also admired his humility and a deep resolve and earnestness to learn from his Guru. Sardar Hari Singh was himself a stalwart who was born in 1894 and died in 1970. Hari Singh traveled a lot to acquaint himself with the novel techniques which were being adopted by Bengali artists and other artists especially in Bombay. He secured a job with Maiden Theatrical Company in Calcutta as a scene setting artist for 14 years and he had the credit of designing the sets for a very first Hindi movie 'Alam Ara'.²¹¹ Learning from such a pioneer was a matter of great pride and honour for Bodhraj and his master showered all techniques on his disciple which he had acquired after decades of doing commercial work. For many years Bodhraj worked in Hari Singh's studio and his creative talents were noticed by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar and many patrons of *Sikh art* and printing presses as he could design books, illustrate suitably and paint fluently in any medium. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar provided him bulk orders for paintings on Sikh themes and most of these paintings were published in the booklets, catalogues and brochures, produced by this institution in an exercise to spread Sikh way of life to the

211 **Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar**; 2008, *Exhibition of Paintings of 'The Great Masters of Amritsar'* (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.2

devotees. Using vibrant colours, he produced paintings which were adored and accepted by the masses and the classes.

As his popularity grew, Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi engaged him to paint paintings for them on a variety of themes so that these paintings could be converted into calendars for wider circulation. The themes he attempted includes **Cobra provides the Shade** (Plate-398) taken from a *Janam Sakhi*. Once young Nanak had taken his cattle for grazing in the field, he lay resting there and the sun rays fell on his face. After some time, a Cobra crawled out of its hiding place and spread its hood to provide shade over young Nanak's divine face. The local official of the village Rai Bular noticed this miracle as he was passing that way. He had sent for Nanak's father Mehta Kalu and told him '*Kalu! Don't curse your son. He is a great being. My village survives because of his grace. Both of us are blessed as he is born in our village*'.²¹² The artist has perceived this painting in a realistic way and the richness of aesthetic qualities of his skillful rendering comes alive in true spirit of a masterpiece. There is unmatched quality of landscape painting endowed with natural colours in this work which can be compared akin to the works done by European Landscape painters. Though young Nanak and the Cobra have been superbly painted with suitable highlights but this does not distract the attention from the cleverly handled background; it only enhances the mysterious charm of the scene.

Bhai Mardana receiving Rabab from Bebe Nanaki (Plate-399) has a distinctive subject matter which was hardly attempted earlier. A sister's love for her brother is a perennial theme of Punjabi folklore. *Janam Sakhis* tell us of several stories depicting Bebe Nanaki's love for her brother Nanak. Bebe Nanaki was the first to recognize Nanak as One blessed by God. She is seen here with her husband Jai Ram. Mardana- the minstrel had received the *Rabab* from her, on

212 Gill, Ranjit Singh; 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.28

which he played, while accompanying Guru Nanak, singing songs of divinity. This was before Guru Nanak set out on his preaching odysseys accompanied by Bhai Mardana.

A brilliant painting titled **Eradication of Poverty** (Plate-400) on the unusual theme by artist Bodhraj has projected Guru Nanak's mission. Guru Nanak preached that poverty can be eradicated by 'Self-help' and self-initiative alone. Once he went to a village and was distressed to see the dirty slums. He was appalled to see the miserable and unhygienic condition in which the poor people were living. He set on fire that *basti* and helped in building a new and clean village in its place.²¹³ The painting is self-explanatory in its content and well executed and comprises of all the minute details related to a '*Shramdaan*' or 'Self-help' concept.

The basic philosophy of Guru Nanak is the **Selfless service to Mankind** (Plate-401) or '*Nishkaam Seva*' and this idea was kindled in his disciples and the other Sikh Gurus who religiously followed it. Stressing upon this ideology which is based on humility and spiritualism, Guru Amar Dass following the Sikh traditions of service, which is also considered as 'Supreme Worship' served his master Guru Angad Dev for 12 long years, wading through rain and storm. When a weaver's wife observed sarcastically '*Amru- the Homeless*', Guru Angad Dev blessed the devotee instead with the title '*Niasareyan Da Aasra- A shelter for the Homeless*'.²¹⁴ Such lofty ideals of Sikhism have been painted in wonderful style, which at once impact the mind and leave an indelible mark on the soul of a viewer. Deft handling of the composition wherein the artist has captured the pitch dark night and Guru Amar Dass is struggling hard to save the pitcher of water placed on his shoulder, for the sake of his Guru as he stumbles in the darkness. A dim light is coming out of the poorly-lit hut of a weaver where

213 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.21

214 **Gill, Ranjit Singh;** 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.114

the wife of the weaver is shown staring at the falling Guru. Bodhraj, who was himself a simple and humble person, had great fancy for such high ideals of Sikhism and directed his creative talents in capturing such episodes, which stir a sense of duty and devotion in one's mind.

Continuing with such series, he painted a painting titled **Blessing** (Plate-402) which narrates the life of a poor leper named 'Prema Chaudhari', who fell at the feet of Guru Amar Dass. Guru Sahib gently blessed him and gave him a bath with his own hands, restored him to good health and called him 'My Son Murari'. He got him married to a lady called Matho and made them an ideal couple.²¹⁵ Learning from such acts of service, the Sikh disciples were not only overwhelmed but they too followed in his foot steps and practiced in real life what Guru preached. They devoted their self wholeheartedly to the upliftment of the needy and the downtrodden. The artist had great respect for such deeds and always selected these themes for his paintings, whereby he could in his own humble way project the divine and spiritual tenets of Sikhism.

A painting displaying a rare gesture of sweetness and humility is aptly titled **A Gurumukh is always humble** (Plate-403). It describes the story of Datu, son of Guru Arjan Dev, who considered himself to be the claimant of *Gurgaddi*, which he however could not ascend to. Deeply frustrated Datu struck Guru Amar Dass with his foot, when he was seated on *Gurgaddi*. With a rare display of sweetness and humility, the Guru kept seated on the *Gurgaddi* and did not utter a word of anguish rather he observed that '*Your foot must have been hurt by my hard bones*'. Guru Sahib did not act by way of coercion but displayed his compassion.²¹⁶

Bodhraj delved deep into the treasures of wisdom contained in 'Sukhmani Sahib (Psalm of Peace)' and brought out pearls of wisdom in his visually charged

215 **Dil, Balbir Singh**; 2004, *Matho Murari*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.66

216 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.61

images which were full of competent authenticity. This fact is superbly established in his works and the way he narrated a painting was indeed astonishing and impressive. He successfully created the overall atmosphere of a specific era supported by deep knowledge of building structures, trees and landscapes. In the painting titled **The Guru's Word is the Panacea for all ills** (Plate-404), Guru Arjan taught his disciples through his 'Psalm of Peace (Sukhmani Sahib)' that our life is worthless if our soul is not moved at the sight of pain and agony in fellow human beings. Rendering them the service in the hour of their need is of prime significance. At the town of Taran Taran, he himself alleviated the sufferings of lepers, for whose treatment he also built a 'Lepers-Home' there. The Guru and his disciples did not only preach but practiced in real life and devoted their lives in removing the sufferings and diseases of abandoned poor people.²¹⁷ Bodhraj's paintings are a kaleidoscope of the godly deeds of the Sikh Gurus and their devoted disciples. These paintings have generated great interest in the minds of the devotees and moved their hearts to perform 'Seva' or service in their own lives. These idealistic topics from the Sikh history can only be chosen by a person who himself was full of compassion and a kind being. He had done utmost service to *Sikh art* and it is not surprising that calendars of his paintings are in great demand due to their artistic merit and powerful spiritual content. Each painting is though realistically done yet an air of spirituality and divinity surrounds each of them, due to the choice of ethereal palette. Greys and blues have deftly been used alongwith white and pale shades.

The artist has selected very carefully the landmark occasions in Sikh history and recorded them in his versatile style. The other important painting by this artist is on the **Installation Ceremony of Granth Sahib at the Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar (1604)** (Plate-405). Instead of feeling proud in

217 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.37

bringing out such a unique scripture, Guru Arjan Dev remained humble and as a mark of respect to the holy book, always occupied a seat on the floor in the presence of Granth Sahib. Baba Buddha, the first Granthi would read from Granth Sahib and the audience would enter into trance.²¹⁸

A unique painting titled **Tread With Care** (Plate-406) which describes Guru Hargobind's love for nature narrates the story that once the child Guru Har Rai was strolling in the garden, a rose fell down, when it got struck with the fringe of his robe. Guru Hargobind, symbol of sympathy and humility told his grandson Har Rai to take care while strolling since flowers and plants are also living organisms, lest the act is repeated. Guru Har Rai followed his advice throughout his later life.²¹⁹

Bodhraj's other valuable contribution are the paintings of Saints, *Bhagats* and *Faqirs*, whose verses are enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Amongst the prominent personalities included in these series is **Baba Sheikh Farid (1173-1266 A.D.)** (Plate-407) who was a great *Sufi* saint. He was an epitome of humility and lived an austere life. His only blessing from the God was that a life of prayer and meditation. His following *saloka* forms the subject of this painting-

*"Sweet are candy and sugar and honey
and Buffalos' milk*

*Yea, sweets are these but sweeter by faris God."*²²⁰

Painting of **Bhagat Kabir** (Plate-408) is also specimen of his superb visualization and depiction. Bhagat Kabir (1398-1494 A.D.) was a revolutionary saint and poet of Bhakti Movement. He emphasized on the equality and fraternity of all mankind. Once Bhagat Kabir was going to sell a piece of cloth woven by

218 **Singh, Taran;** 2004, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.239-252

219 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.60-61

220 *Ibid*, p.92

him, he met some *sadhus* on his way, to whom he gave the entire cloth free of cost. Kabir's 541 hymns and *salokas* are included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.²²¹

Swami Ramanand who was born in 1359, was also one of the pioneers of Bhakti Movement in Northern India. He has also been regarded as a bridge between the Bhakti Movements in the South and the North. Though a Brahmin by birth, yet he did not entertain any sense of pride because of his caste. **Bhagat Pipa (b.1425 A.D.)** (Plate-409) received divine enlightenment by the grace of Swami Ramanand. 1 hymn each of both the Bhagats is included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.²²² Here in this painting, Swami Ramanand is shown blessing Bhagat Pipa. He is surrounded by his disciples and *yogis* and a peaceful atmosphere has been created where they are standing in front of their hut or *ashram*. Depicting the pioneers of Bhakti Movement, Bodhraj also painted a painting of **Bhagat Namdev** (Plate-410). God's name was always on the lips of Bhagat Namdev who was born in 1270 A.D. He was asked to show miracles by the king. He refused to do so and he was thrown before a drunken elephant to be crushed to death. God saved his own saint Bhagat Namdev. He spent last days of his life in village Ghuman, now in district Gurdaspur. 60 of his hymns are included in Guru Granth Sahib.²²³

The services of artist Bodhraj will always be remembered as his works are distinguished in the sense that he stressed upon discovering unique episodes in Sikh history and did full justification in narrating them through powerful visual language which had a spark of masterly treatment and a philosophical and spiritual flavour emitting from them. These works are considered as a significant source of *Sikh Calendar art*. The other works including designing of booklets,

221 **Alag, Dr. Sarup Singh**; 2003, *An Introduction to Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Swami Printers, Ludhiana, p.99

222 **Bahri, Hardev**; 2004, *Pipa*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.342

223 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.95

brochures and information material on Sikhism is also noteworthy and worth appreciation. He passed away in 1992.

Mehar Singh (Plate-411), a true disciple of Sardar Sobha Singh, imbibed most of the qualities of his master as he spent a considerable amount of time with him and devoted his artistic sensibilities in touching the soul of the subject and capturing the essence of a given topic by peeping deep into its layers as this was the major lesson from this great artist. A great work of art does not linger on the surface but it has the inbuilt qualities to touch the innermost undercurrents, thoughts and manifestations pulsating in the veins of the masterpiece. Valuable discussions with Sobha Singh sharpened his intellect and enriched his understanding of apparent layers of art work. He was born in 1929 at Lahore and had discovered that he had in him what it takes to be an artist. His sustained hardwork, dedication and open mind in absorbing and learning new techniques and styles, equipped him in attaining good proficiency. But after passing his Intermediate Examination from Panjab University, he felt that it was a futile exercise to continue with further education and waste the valuable time which he always wanted to spend on improving his drawing and painting. After thoughtful consideration he thought most appropriate to request artist Sobha Singh to accept him as a disciple. Years 1946-48 were more crucial in his art career as he in the company of his master crafted his life's precious jewel. This was the time he wholeheartedly offered his entire intellect and served his Guru to sharpen his talents. This opportunity also provided him with a new insight into the spiritual and divine content of the paintings being done by Sobha Singh and opened his mind's eye by providing new vistas in perception and symbolism. He came out from his adopted master's studio as a young artist full of excitement and enthusiasm which was the result of the confidence, he received from Sobha Singh. But sadly this part of India was in great turmoil due to the partition of the country in 1947 and there was an air of uncertainty and desperation as lacs of

people had lost their homes, hearths and their dear ones. They were penniless and bewildered at this unfortunate happening in the history of India. The uprooted Punjabis migrated to various parts of India and started gathering their broken lives. This was the time that young Mehar Singh too shifted to Delhi.²²⁴

From 1949-54, he joined Delhi Polytechnic and received formal art education to equip himself with finding some government job. Here he had an opportunity to study the fine nuances of Indian and European art from his teachers and art history books. He was in contact with many practicing artists and observed their paintings with a keen eye. Coming to Delhi was a turning point for his career as the exposure he got from many art exhibitions widened his scope of art appreciation and also provided him livelihood as a commercial artist. The expertise he had attained while he was under apprenticeship at Sobha Singh's studio, withstood him in good stead as he had developed a flair for portrait painting, illustrations, magazine and book designs. Later on, he joined American Embassy, New Delhi as an artist and worked there from 1958-72. Here he attained knowledge in all departments of art designing, printing and publishing. The stint at American Embassy was fruitful in the sense that Mehar Singh had the first hand account of seeing some contemporary art works which set him on the way to establish him as a truly versatile artist by emboldening his creative vision. As he was professionally confident of his capabilities as a commercial artist and an expert in portrait painting, he decided to establish his own studio in Delhi and do freelancing in art. This satisfied his thirst for doing quality work besides being financially sound. During this period, there was a great demand and scope for commercial art and advertising. He carved a niche for himself as a top-notch portrait painter and was commissioned portraits of leaders, generals and other famous men. But his love for painting portraits of Sikh Gurus and the

224 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.116

Sikh historic moments, always lingered in his subconscious mind. He soon devoted his attention to the paintings of Sikh history, art and culture as local Gurdwaras initially offered him projects to paint on these themes. The seeds of his creativity were sown in his early years as a young boy and he received several awards and a prominent award was bestowed upon him for his artwork by YMCA, Lahore in 1946. Consequently Government of Punjab also awarded him in 1948-49 for his services to art as during this period art institutions were being set up by the government which were earlier based in Lahore and other parts of West Punjab. Punjabi artists were busy learning and adopting new techniques and trends in art from their counterparts in Bengal and elsewhere.²²⁵

Recognizing his high caliber of painting, he was awarded by Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar in 1948-49 and 1970 as 'Best Artist'. The renowned artist S.G. Thakur Singh, who was the patron and President of this academy prophesized that '*Mehar Singh would be an artist of great acclaim due to his deep understanding of realism in art*'. The portrait of President of America- Richard Nixon, painted by him in 1969 was so appreciated by the President that he sent him a letter of commendation. Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi awarded his works for the three consecutive years that is from 1981-83. He was honoured by All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi in 1993 and the society described him as the leader of new school of painting. Another prestigious award was bestowed upon him by the Punjab Government in the name of 'Sobha Singh Memorial Award' in 2001. Besides awards and laurels, he continued to receive art commissions and projects from Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee, Amritsar, Bank of Punjab, Punjab and Sind Bank and Dr. Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendra, Dehradun.²²⁶ The artist was involved in creative contemplation to such an extent that he used to prepare for months

225 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.117

226 Ibid, p.51

before doing a particular subject in his painting and tried his level best to reach the bottom of the subject to understand it in totality so that the outcome of his work is both historically authentic and its philosophical and other perspectives are perceived well. In short, such dedicated endeavours brought out the best in him as an expert and skillful artist. At the same time, the pictures were well balanced and complete in all aspects both creative and aesthetically sound. He made it his habit to search for new facts and events in Sikh history, which provided uniqueness to his work and polished his paintings with a sparkle of imagination and a heavy dose of technical extravaganza. Each work seems to be a masterpiece as he provided full attention to his work be it a portrait of a personality or the court scene of the majestic 'Lion of Punjab'- Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Mehar Singh's preferred palette was composed of warm, vibrant and majestic colours, which upgraded the works to new heights of artistic magnificence. To describe his works in short, there was an abundance of spontaneity, directness, naturalness, simplicity and boldness.²²⁷ The vigour in his drawing is visible in most of his compositions done on the theme of Sikh history as they are a moving description of the glorious chapters of Sikh history. Figures over-laden with jewelry and embellishments have been avoided by him and only bare essential decorative articles, ornaments etc have been used while depicting a historical personality, a Sikh General or a warrior. But due consideration has been given to the costumes, postures and gestures of characters in a painting. His achievement lies in the faithful depiction of Sikh characters with a glow of light on their faces as inherent in a Punjabi face, eyes sharp and deeply set on the object, define the determination and resolve to succeed in a struggle. The spirit of valour alongwith humility and spiritualism infuses the paintings with a certain

227 **Rani, Dr. Saroj**; 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.51

strength and enlightenment. Due to his mastery of handling of light and shade, use of highlighting and selection of suitable colour palette, his paintings are bewitching to the eye and hold attention of the viewer due to striking freshness, lucid movement and rhythm. He visualized the complete Sikh history right from birth of Guru Nanak to the life of Sikh Guru Gobind Singh and threw light on social, historical, cultural, economic and political milieu of Sikh history in his own distinctive style. Though he confessed that his main source of inspiration was European art which enabled him to adopt new and fantastic mannerism and mode of visual narration. But at heart, he was a true Indian whose consciousness was embedded in traditions and social manifestations. Spiritually, he was attracted towards the ever flowing spring of wisdom and divinity of Sikhism.

While portraying the glimpses from Sikh history, Mehar Singh has done some impressive works which acquaint the viewer with the noble virtues and lofty ideals of Sikh Gurus. Prominent amongst these works is painting titled **Robe of Honour** (Plate-412). Baba Amar Dass served Guru Angad Dev with utmost devotion and dedication. Besides fetching water from the river Beas for his master's daily bath everyday, he would also serve in the *langar* throughout the day. Every year the Guru acknowledged his services by conferring upon him a robe of honour which the great Guru wrapped around his head. Baba Amar Dass was decorated with the *siropa* 7 times. 'Seva' (Selfless Service) is one of the main tenets of Sikhism exemplified thorough the lives of the Gurus.²²⁸ In this painting, Guru Angad Dev is shown wrapping a *siropa* on the head of Baba Amar Dass and the congregating disciples are watching this exercise with kindness and gratitude lit large on their faces. In the background of the painting, Gurdwara Sahib is visible alongwith some hutments. Serene and calm environment presents a scene of the divine solitude and the mood has been accentuated with floating soft clouds. The painting demands attention as it

228 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.25

focuses on the sacred task of honouring a person who is genuinely engaged in serving the humanity without any selfishness.

Depicting a leaf from Sikh history, the artist has captured the **Visit of Jahangir to the Golden Temple** (Plate-413). Jahangir visited Amritsar to pay obeisance to Guru Hargobind Sahib; the emperor entered the *parikrama* and bowed before Sri Darbar Sahib. He made an offering of 500 Mohras (ginnies). Listening quietly to the *kirtan* (devotional song) sung by Bhai Satta and Bhai Balwand. He was so enthralled that he himself was engrossed in the holy recitation of the Gurbani for a long time.²²⁹ Episode like this have brought out the ideals of secularism in Sikhism as each religion and sect received equal respect and devotion. It also underlines the fact that in Sikhism no one is above anyone when he comes to a place of worship. Kings and beggars are considered equal in the eyes of the God. Paintings on such religious fervour have been attributed to this artist's popularity as the purpose of painting on such themes provided him a humble chance to contribute to a lofty cause and it was not a mere exercise to earn a livelihood. Through these paintings, the propagation of divine spiritual strength contained in Sikh religion touched the hearts of the Panthic followers.

Mehar Singh also paid his artistic tribute to portray the equality of women with men as preached by the Sikh Gurus during their lifetimes. In a painting **Mai Bhago- the Fearless Lady** (Plate-414), the artist has immortalized her persona as a mirror to virtuous and fearless warrior. Her blood boiled at the timidity of those who, smitten by the ravages of a prolonged siege, disclaimed Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib and wanted to return to their homes. Mai Bhago charged these with cowardice and lack of faith and led them back to fight with the armies of Wazir Khan of Sirhind at Khirdiana (now Muktsar) in the year 1705 A.D. She herself fought with valour and redeemed the faithless. The forty deserters, who lay dead on the ground, were blessed by the Guru Sahib as 'Forty

229 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.56-57

Immortals (Muktas)'. The spear that Mai Bhago used in the battle is still preserved at Sri Hazur Sahib.²³⁰

Paintings of *Janam Sakhis* done by this artist offer a mellowed down and subtle presentation and his distinctive hand is apparent. Thus they qualify in the category of *Sikh Calendar art* though they are not reproduced in large numbers and were used by Banks and other such establishments for making small table calendars and folders.

A noteworthy creation by Mehar Singh is the painting **Nanak di Chaddar**. The news spread that Guru Nanak was ready to embark on his last journey. The disciples began to arrive in large numbers without a distinction of Hindus or Muslims. The Guru sat under an acacia tree. The withered tree burst into bloom. New leaves and flowers appeared. He pacified them that no one should weep. Holy music filled the air. The Guru went into a trance according to *Puratan Janam Sakhi*. The Muslim wanted to bury him while the Hindus wanted to cremate him. Guru spoke '*Put ye flowers on the right and left whose flowers were fresh in the morning shall have the right to dispose off his body*'. Then he drew a sheet over him and passed away. The assembly paid obeisance. When the sheet was lifted, there was nothing but the flowers. The flowers of both the Hindus and the Muslims remained fresh. The Hindus took their flowers respectively. The whole *sangat* fell on their knees and this moment has been well represented by the artist. The painting related to this subject is true to the text of *Janam Sakhis*. The Hindus and the Muslims are shown folding their hands in a mark of respect to this sheet of cloth. Baba Buddha held the sheet in his hands and advised them to pick the flowers. The green trees full of yellow flowers surround this place. Bhai Lehna stands at the back of Guru Nanak.

230 **Padam, Piara Singh**; 2004, *Mai Bhago*. In Harbans Singh, Ed. *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Second Edition, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.323-324

Portraits of **Maharaja Ranjit Singh** (Plate-415) and his sons- **Maharaja Sher Singh** and **Maharaja Dalip Singh** are the other noticeable works which deserve mention. In these portraits, he has skillfully captured not only the features of these royal entities but has forcefully brought out their inner strength as majestic rulers. These regal portraits are laced with elaborate details in the shape of accessories and ornaments worn by these rulers. The artist has projected them seated in the ambiance of well researched pieces of furniture and other royal embellishments. Brocade work and silken clothes emit dazzling luster and sheen. The viewer instantly comes face to face with the regal and majestic past of Sikh rule. The artist has done full justice in bringing alive the famous personalities of Punjab such as **Faiz Ahmed Faiz** (Plate-416), **Prithvi Raj Kapoor**, **Gurmukh Singh Musafir**, **Sobha Singh (his Guru)** (Plate-417), **Balraj Sahni** and various actors, poets, writers, army men and other dignitaries from divergent walks of life. These can be considered as his best works as he had the skill and the artistic capacity to infuse life into these portraits. These portraits have brought him a lot of fame and name. Famous author and columnist Khushwant Singh has mentioned his name along with his picture in 'The Tribune' in his weekly column and described him as an astonishing portrait painter.

The artist is still religiously engaged in the service of art and contributing his valuable share to enrich the world of *Sikh art*. In a rare gesture, the Punjab Government also appointed him as President of Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi and during this period, he established a 'Portrait Gallery'. He was also instrumental in organizing art workshops and artists' camps besides holding exhibition of paintings of other Punjabi artists from time to time.

Devender Singh (Plate-418), known for his illustrious work in Sikh religious art is the most effervescent and widely published Sikh artist. He has a rich legacy of both religion and art behind him; he could not have stayed away from art even if he wanted to. But becoming an artist exclusively in the area of Sikh religion

was just a stroke of luck as far as Devender Singh is concerned. He was born in Amritsar on November 6, 1947 and painting came as inheritance from his father Sardar Sewak Singh, a commercial artist but the son turned the art into one of transforming Sikh religious history in delightful compositions in pastels. He received his formal education at Bombay, Amritsar, Ludhiana and Chandigarh.²³¹ A dropout from the Government College of Art, Chandigarh, Devender Singh does not believe that one has to have a professional degree to be an artist and he further justifies that *'One needs guidance, which I had plenty from my father but never felt that I had to complete my diploma to become what I wanted to become.'*²³² Work never eluded Devender Singh ever since his first collection of paintings on Sikh women was brought by Punjab and Sind Bank for their calendar in 1972.²³³

Though he had never been out of work ever since, he started working at the age of 7 years with his father Sewak Singh. Illustrations being his first love and he started his career as an illustrator for popular 'Amar Chitra Katha Publications' in the early 70's and illustrated colourful comics containing stories of 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh', 'Guru Nanak Dev' and other Sikh Gurus. This was followed by 'Guru Tegh Bahadur- an illustrated biography' published by the Punjab and Sind Bank, a book on 'Guru Amar Dass' and then 'Child Heroes of Punjab'. Later, the orders for calendars year after year placed by the Bank of Punjab, Punjab and Sind Bank and Markfed kept up the trend, giving him the signature style, he is today known for. The walls of the Sikh museums in Paonta Sahib, Guru Tegh Bahadur Museum, Anandpur Sahib, Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, Punjab Arts Council, Chandigarh, Punjab Vidhan Sabha, Chandigarh, Markfed house, Chandigarh and Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi are adorned with his works.

231 **Menon, Rathi A**; June 22, 1998, *The hand that gives form to Sikh history*, Indian Express

232 **Rashid, Parbina**; April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune

233 **Menon, Rathi A**; June 22, 1998, *The hand that gives form to Sikh history*, Indian Express

He is not only popular at the regional scene, his paintings have been well appreciated and have been acquired by museums abroad- Sikh Museum, USA, Shri Deshmesh Sikh Temple, Birmingham, England, Central Sikh Temple, Singapore, Guru Nanak Satsang Sabha, Singapore and Museum of World Religions, Taiwan. Recently, he bagged an assignment of painting forty paintings on events of Sikh history from Sikh Museum, London.²³⁴ This amply demonstrates that his work has been accepted and being appreciated by art lovers and connoisseurs outside India too.

Devender Singh showcased his creative talent in painting a series on 'Baramaha' based on compositions on seasons by Guru Nanak Dev in 'Raag Tukhari' and Guru Arjan Dev in 'Raag Majh' which were made into calendars by Punjab and Sind Bank and Markfed in 1972.²³⁵ However these calendars gave the glimpses of cubism in his style but with pleasing tones, colours, sharp curves and angular forms, they presented a captivating look and this way the artist has managed to integrate a contemporary stance in a subject, which was highly lyrical and full of symbolism. Figurative drawing with imaginative distortion used in these compositions, attracted the attention of even many creative contemporary artists, who were practicing only modern idioms in their paintings. This work is unique and distinctive in the sense that very rarely such themes are attempted in *Sikh Calendar art*. This project propelled his career to greater heights and many institutions noticed his artistic caliber and saw a spark of versatility and an air of freedom and freshness in his works. He was asked to paint on diverse topics in Sikh history and culture and continued this exercise with a vigour and deep dedication. Overlapping of shapes and forms and use of monochromatic colours alongwith calculated angular lines became his hallmark and signature style. He attempted other themes concerning Punjabi culture,

234 **Rashid, Parbina**; April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune

235 **Rashid, Parbina**; May 6, 2004, *Golden Temple model to adorn US museum*, The Tribune

traditions, customs and folk dances in semi-realistic contemporary style. But due to commercial compulsions, he abandoned his earlier cubistic style and started concentrating on realistic paintings on Sikh history and Sikh Gurus. As patrons of such paintings were more interested in narrative and historical contents, which are understood well by the masses as the sole aim of such paintings, is the preaching of Sikhism and recording the history of the Sikhs. This offered him a steady flow of art commissions and regular financial support. An ever increasing popularity of the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* is primarily its direct contact with the viewer who is transported to the times of a particular historic period through visually mobile narrative. It is no wonder that calendars on such religious themes are reproduced and bought by a large number of people and it is a flourishing printing and publishing business besides being a mode of advertisement for many enterprising commercial establishments and institutions.

Devender Singh's interest in Sikh painting was kindled after he saw works of Sardar Sobha Singh and paintings of Sikh Gurus became his main source of inspiration. A close brush 'both literally and metaphorically' with religion has not only strengthened his deep abiding faith in the ways of God, his most ambitious dream project hovers around a religious subject. To recreate the momentous moments in the glorious past, the epic battle scenes, he however often delves deep into the voluminous pages of history and at times frequents the relevant places where the events had occurred hundreds of years ago. Another remarkable opportunity arrived, when a film written, directed and produced by famous Punjabi actor Mangal Dhillon, included the illustrations done by this artist on popular historical events in Sikh history.²³⁶ Thus his paintings reached the overseas audience.

Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi duly recognized his contribution and awarded him a 'State Award' for his painting titled 'Lone Woman in a reflective mood' in

236 **Singh, Nonika**; August 6, 1999, *Brush with Sikh history*, The Tribune

its Annual Art Exhibition.²³⁷ As the number of admirers and lovers of his art grew in Britain, where he displayed his works in Gurdwaras and other cultural centers, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Punjabi Service, approached him for making a documentary on his life and works, which indeed was a great honour for this unassuming introvert artist.²³⁸ In the year 2004, he embarked upon an altogether new journey and created a replica of 'The Golden Temple' for the prestigious Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C. For this artist, it is a dream come true. He expresses his excitement and enthusiasm in the words that '*I have never visited the museum myself but to know that my creation will now adorn one of the finest museums in the world, gives me a sense of worthiness as an artist.*' The replica is made of pure silver and gold. He further informs that '*He had studied each part of the 'Golden Temple' and made a film on it so that he could capture the true essence of the temple.*' The main temple is placed on a 4 feet by 4 feet painted glass framed with wooden planks that creates an illusion of the *sarovar*. This fantastic replica was made at the cost of 5 lacs.²³⁹

Devender Singh feels more tempted towards using the technique of semi-abstract with major concentration on the choice of palette as he relishes blending rich colours with feathery strokes and it results in vibrant rhythmic compositions draped in dreamy effects. Despite his busy engagements and rush of assignments, he still devotes the right amount of time to a particular painting and puts his laborious efforts in achieving aesthetic excellence after giving due thought to the essence of the subject and confirmation of authenticity of the event from various historical perspectives and sources. Though, he considers painting to be an obsessive preoccupation that stems from within One's being- 'a voice of One's soul'. He accepts assignments for all sorts of paintings but leaves the mark of his sensibilities in his own preferred style, whereby satisfying his creative urges and

237 **Menon, Rathi A**; June 22, 1998, *The hand that gives form to Sikh history*, Indian Express

238 **Rashid, Parbina**; April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune

239 **Rashid, Parbina**; May 6, 2004, *Golden Temple model to adorn US museum*, The Tribune

at the same time eking out his livelihood. He believes that '*Artworks should be simple and self-explanatory and not weighed down under the pseudo intellectual burdens.*' He would rather paint a picture which is easily understood by a viewer without the need of explaining it for an hour. He does not relish explaining his paintings to the viewers because basically a painting is a visual exercise. There should be enough content and directness in its narration that it is easily understood and the messages are carried to home in a befitting way. These are the qualities usually associated with works of *Sikh Calendar art* as they directly interact with the viewers and infuse the gist and moral which is socially relevant with such works.

In the genre of *Sikh Calendar art*, there certainly exists a restriction that artists are not free to afford the visually and aesthetically free trends and messages. Painting on a topic automatically restricts the mind of a creator as these works are created for a purpose. In this case, his paintings have been done for the patrons who are engaged in the preaching of Sikhism and are also duty bound to record the historical aspects for the future generations. But there is no iota of doubt that this artist is extremely sensitive and responsive to his surroundings and social responsibilities. He yearns to paint in a much freer manner and religiously believes in the words of Henry Ward Beecher that '*Every artist dips his brush in his own soul and paints his own nature into his pictures.*' On a philosophical note he muses, '*If we were to follow Guru Nanak's one-line teaching- Kirt Karo, Naam Japo, Wand Ke Chhako (work, pray and share) - life would be a utopian dream.*' Since for us ordinary, selfish mortals all this seems a tall, impossible order to emulate, Devender Singh has little option but to capture the utopian paradise on his canvas.²⁴⁰

In Sikh tradition most of its values have been attained in practices whether than in preaching. The oldest institutions effective are '*Sangat and Pangat*' and

240 **Singh, Nonika**; August 6, 1999, *Brush with Sikh history*, The Tribune

later on ‘*Langar*’ gave Sikhism most of its social values and perception of humanism. ‘*Sangat*’ effected spiritual elevation through devotion and guided the self to liberation. To portray this concept, artist Devender Singh has painted two paintings in 1980 where **Mata Khiwi, wife of Guru Angad Dev is shown preparing *kheer*** (Plate-419) and distributing it to the *Sangat*, thus the concept of *Langar* gained credence. It also taught the value of sitting together with humility and eating together without any consideration of caste, creed, colour, sect and religion. In these wonderfully painted expressive paintings, the artist has shown **Mata Khiwi distributing *kheer* amongst the people sitting in rows** (Plate-420). He has depicted Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, *Yogis*, *Faqirs* and Saints, to underline the significance of a casteless society and equality of mankind.

In yet another significant painting titled **Women Parishes** (Plate-421), where the artist has drawn the attention of Sikh devotees, is the basic need to treat men and women as equal persons without any favour or gender bias. Here he has portrayed an episode in which Guru Amar Dass, the third Sikh Guru, appoints a woman preacher as parish. He asked them to conduct Sikh missionary and parish work. Districts under the charge of men were known as ‘*Manjian*’ from ‘*Manji*’ - a string bed. Those in the charge of women were known as ‘*Pirhian*’ from ‘*Pirhi*’ - low sitting stools, on which they sat to minister to the disciples. Their selection for this important task indicated the faith of the Guru in the capacity of women for organizational work.²⁴¹

Behold on the noble thoughts of Guru Amar Dass, the artist has painted a painting titled **Behold all Human Race as One** (Plate-422) as Guru Amar Dass conferred equal status on men and women and disapproved of gender discrimination. He forbade the practice of ‘*Sati*’ - burning of wife at the pyre of

241 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.28

husband, as it was considered an insult to human dignity.²⁴² Historical instances like this fully justify artist's own concerns on gender discrimination. Describing Guru's love for the weak and the needy, a painting titled **Guru's Blessings** (Plate-423) narrates the episode of Gangu Shah who was unemployed and who sought help for his livelihood from Guru Amar Dass. The Guru blessed him and he flourished as a banker in Delhi. But he had a setback when he turned away a needy person sent by the Guru. Gangu begged for pardon and fell at the Guru's feet in Goindwal. Thereafter, he never sent back any needy person, who deserved to be uplifted.²⁴³ This underlines the fact that Guru preached the mankind that our actions and deeds even in our business should be for help and upliftment of the weak and the needy.

A painting recognizing the utmost devotion of a devotee **Bhai Manjh** (Plate-424) is a rare leaf from Sikh history. Bhai Manjh, an ardent disciple of the Guru Arjan Dev used to bring dry wood everyday for the *Langar* to be cooked. One day while carrying wood, he tumbled into a well following a storm. Guru Arjun Dev found that despite his predicament Bhai Manjh had saved the wood from getting wet. The Guru honoured his disciple by saying '*Manjh is beloved of the Guru and the Guru of the Manjh.*'²⁴⁴

Devender Singh's other two noteworthy paintings are **Baba Buddha blessing Mata Ganga** (Plate-425) and **Guru Arjan Dev helping the peasants** (Plate-426). In the first painting Mata Ganga is shown seeking blessings of Guru Arjan Dev to bear a child. Guru Sahib advised her to invoke the blessings of Baba Buddha (1506-1631 A.D.), the most revered Sikh. Going to Baba Buddha, to pay her respects, she carried with her *Missi Roti*, an onion and *Lassi* (buttermilk). While breaking the onion, Baba Buddha pronounced, '*Soon you*

242 **Bhatia, H.S. and Bakshi, S.R.**; 1999, *Encyclopaedic History of the Sikhs and Sikhism*, Deep & Deep Publications Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.14

243 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.31

244 **Daljeet, Dr**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.66

*will be the mother of a child whose gallantry and valour will be unmatched.*²⁴⁵

In the second painting, Guru Arjan Dev is helping the peasants. The economic wellbeing of the country was closely linked with the monsoon. With a view to alleviate the sufferings of the peasants, Guru Arjan Dev helped the villagers in digging six-channel Persian Wheel (*Chhcharta*) wells to irrigate their fields. '*Chhcharta*' is a living monument of his efforts in this direction.²⁴⁶

The story of **Bhai Banno**(Plate-427) is described in one of Devender Singh's paintings. Bhai Banno's services in the construction of Sri Harimandir Sahib are significant. On completion of Sri Harimandir Sahib, someone asked Guru Sahib as to who should be served the platter first according to the establish practices. Guru Sahib said, '*Whoever has done service everyday by remaining modest and keeping his low profile.*' Guru Arjan Dev honoured Bhai Banno by placing the first platter of feast before him.²⁴⁷ This painting aptly justifies the value of modesty and dedication in the service of the Panth and encourages those who devote their selfless service without feeling proud.

Devender Singh has selected the subjects for his paintings after carefully studying the basic significance of a specific Sikh ideal. A prominent painting **Bandi Chhor Guru** (Plate-428) expresses the lofty ideals of Sikhism and coming to the assistance of those who need immediate help and protection. In this episode, Guru Hargobind ordained the Sikhs to arm themselves to resist injustice and tyranny. This annoyed Emperor Jahangir who ordered incarceration of the Guru in the Gwalior Fort. Soon realizing his mistake, the emperor ordered his release but the Guru refused to accept the offer, till 52 innocent Rajas were also freed. Instructions were issued that whosoever holds the Guru's dress will be freed.

245 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.38

246 **Gill, Ranjit Singh;** 2007, *Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)*, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.136

247 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.44

Guru Sahib wore a special apron with 52 strings attached to it. Each Raja held one string and walked into freedom.²⁴⁸

Devender Singh painted a painting in 1975 about the historic event of **Kashmiri Pandits meeting Guru Tegh Bahadur** (Plate-429). A delegation of 500 Kashmiri Brahmins led by Pandit Kirpa Ram met Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur Sahib. Pandit Kirpa Ram told the harrowing tales of torture initiated by the orders of Aurangzeb, for converting them to Islam. Guru Sahib was mentally occupied with the issue when the child Gobind Rai happened to be there and asked as to what was the matter. Guru Sahib told him that the sacrifice of some great soul is called for. ‘*Who else than you can serve the cause?*’ was child Gobind Rai’s spontaneous reaction.²⁴⁹

In a heartrending moving painting **Rangretta: Guru Ka Beta** (Plate-430), the artist Devender Singh has portrayed Guru Tegh Bahadur’s supreme sacrifice to protect the religious freedom of oppressed Kashmiri Pandits. Guru Tegh Bahadur’s head was severed from his body by the execution at Chandni Chowk, Delhi in 1675 A.D. There was great consternation and confusion. At that time, Bhai Jaita, a devoted Sikh came forward and picked up Guru’s severed head swiftly, covered it respectfully and slipped out of the crowd. He struggled hard and managed to reach Anandpur Sahib and laid the sacred head respectfully in front of Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru embraced Bhai Jaita and said, ‘*Rangretta: Guru Ka Beta- Rangretta is the son of the Guru.*’²⁵⁰

The artist has brought to light many anecdotes from Gurus lives which establish the fundamentals of Sikhism and the values of humanism. Most of the paintings have been narrated from day to day incidents but are significant due to the in-depth meaning and ideology symbolized through simple terms. In a

248 **Daljeet, Dr**; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.43

249 **McLeod, W.H**; 1991, *Popular Sikh Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.71

250 **Bains, K.S**; 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.69

painting, Devender Singh has expressed that even as a child Gobind Rai through his innocent gestures underlined the universal truth. In the painting **All Human beings are Equal** (Plate-431), there is description of child Gobind Rai's spark of spiritualism and divinity. The moment child Gobind Rai was born in Patna, Pir Bhikhan Shah of Thaska, offered his prayers facing east instead towards the west, contrary to his daily practice. He left for Patna immediately. On arrival at Guru's residence, Pir placed two bowls of milk and water before the divine child. The new born divine 'Being' put his hands on both the bowls thus signifying: *The entire humanity springs from the same divine fountain: How can some be good and others evil?*²⁵¹ The artist has a knack for discovering and demystifying universal gems of wisdom from simple incidents in Sikh history and lives of Sikh Gurus. A similar painting highlighting the virtues of hard work is described in a painting **Hard and Soft hands** (Plate-432). Guru Gobind Singh once declined to drink water offered by a wealthy young man because he had never served the *Sangat*. When the young man brought water, the Guru discovered that his hands were soft and tender. Answering the Guru's query, the youth confirmed that he had never done any work with his hands to serve others. He was overtaken by a sense of shame and guilt and vowed before Guru Sahib to help the needy and the suffering people.²⁵²

Devender Singh's work done in contemporary style **Tukhari Chhant Mahala-1 Baramaha** (Plate-433) is most expressive and establishes him as an artist of many shades. Guru Nanak Dev recited 'Baramaha' at Kartarpur (Ravi) soon before his merger with the light Eternal. The artist has drawn paintings based on 'Baramaha' - depicting different seasons. The pangs of separation, longing for the divine lover, the intense desire for union of the soul with the Supreme Being are some of the themes, portrayed in these paintings of magical charm and using

251 **Daljeet, Dr;** 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.55

252 **Bains, K.S;** 1995, *Sikh Heritage in Paintings*, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.77

mystical metaphors. These possess superb artistic merit and abound in aesthetically rich splendour. His vision and imagery carefully mingled with appropriate colour palette and well balanced compositions mesmerizes the viewer and compels the viewer to contemplate and taste the divinity and spiritualism of Nanak's poetry. These paintings are based on Nanak's verse for traditional Indian months such as **Chetu** (Plate-434), **Vaisakhu** (Plate-435), **Jethu** (Plate-436), **Asaru** (Plate-437), **Savan** (Plate-438), **Bhadau** (Plate-439), **Asuni** (Plate-440), **Kataki** (Plate-441), **Manghar** (Plate-442), **Pokhi** (Plate-443), **Maghi** (Plate-444) and **Phalguni** (Plate-445).

Kar Sewa (Plate-446) can be considered as one of his pragmatic paintings done in remarkable detail and mastery over architectural as well as figurative drawing. The Sikhs long for a dip in the holy tank at Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. The periodic cleaning of the *Sarovar* in Sikh tradition is called 'Kar Sewa'. The 'Kar Sewa' of sacred *Sarovar* inside the 'Golden Temple' brings forth the ennobling spirit of brotherhood. The people join in this service to undergo the process of elimination of ego.²⁵³

A landmark project of painting a series of paintings on **Twelve Great Sikh Women** (Plate-447) engaged in a wide range of activities, having a visceral effect that inspires spirituality, courage and wisdom, has been recently completed and the reproduction of these works have been completed in a form of a calendar for the year 2012 by the 'Sikh Foundation International'. Its paintings by the artist Sardar Devender Singh depict events deeply etched in the consciousness. From 'Bibi Nanaki' to 'Maharani Jindan', we witness 3-dimensional figures contributing vitally to the dynamic Sikh tradition. The style employed in these paintings is a unique fusion of traditional *Popular art* with modern Cubism. Pastel colours dominate the artist's palette. But the yellows and blues offset by the dark brown and grey hues render a dramatic quality to the historic scenes.

253 **McLeod, W.H;** 1995, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, The Scarecrow Press, London, p.119

Alongwith the Gurus, the women are foundational to Sikh institutions, so the calendar offers a balanced view of our history. Each month of the year has been devoted to a prominent lady and these include- 'Mata Sahib Kaur', 'Mata Khiwi', 'Mata Gujri', 'Mai Bhago', 'Sada Kaur', 'Maharani Jindan', 'Bibi Nanaki', 'Bibi Bhani', 'Bibi Amro' and 'Mata Ganga'. This rich collection of paintings instinctively shows that spiritual quest and action are not disparate or antithetical; rather they are complementary states. For Sikhs today, these twelve historic females prove to be a self-affirming phenomenon. They serve as role models to build self-esteem and encourage fulfillment of individual potential. Simultaneously they provide insights into Sikh theology and ontology. The commitment and spirituality of the women displayed in these calendar images on our walls will guide us to recognize those qualities in all the women, we are in touch within our own lives, and our lips will utter the Granthian exaltation '*Dhan Janedi Maia*- blessed are the mothers (GGS: 513)'.

In today's world, where lifestyle and traditions are rapidly changing, there exists a void in the field of art especially which relates to preservation and propagation of Punjabi culture and traditions. The man who filled this gap is artist **Jarnail Singh** (Plate-448), son of an illustrious artist Sardar Kirpal Singh, a renowned painter of Sikh history. Jarnail Singh has took upon himself to devote his life and creative impulses in bringing alive the vanishing cultural traditions of Punjab, as a large body of his work portrays various elements of Punjabi culture and traditions associated with Punjabi weddings, customs, fairs, festivals, ceremonies, rituals, daily activities of Punjabi life and men and women engaged in daily chores. It is an irony that despite Punjab's monumental contribution towards stalling of foreign invaders to India and emerging as 'The Sword arm of India' due to its location as most of the invaders try to enter through Punjab and this state lagged behind in formulating cultural ethos like the southern states. Punjabi's have a zest for life and their day to day activities are mostly concerned

with agriculture. The 'Green Revolution' and the amazing quantities of agricultural produce have earned this state the title of 'The Granary of India'. Though these two important epithets are enviable yet they may have lamently relegated other significant achievements of this state, so much so that many people seemed to believe that the only culture that Punjab can legitimately claim about is agriculture. Yet art, folklore, ballads of love and war, fairs, festivals, music and Punjabi literature, are what form characteristic expression of the state's robust cultural life. Notwithstanding the enviable martial cultural art and religious traditions of the state, there is a pitiable dearth of pictorial material of Punjabi way of life and its exemplary history. It is this inspiring background which impelled Jarnail Singh to attempt preserving what may soon will be lost to posterity, due to the rapid onslaught of industrialization. Thus Punjabi paintings are an artist's pictorial record of the glorious history and rich cultural heritage of Punjab.²⁵⁴

Jarnail Singh is the youngest of those few Punjabi artists who have been attracted to the state's lifestyle, art and culture. Perhaps, this is due to the influence of his artist father under whose competent guidance Jarnail Singh had his art training. He otherwise did not have any formal training and never joined any school of art as earning a livelihood through art was purely professional exercise. Jarnail Singh was born on June 12, 1956 at Zira, a small town in district Ferozpur, Punjab.²⁵⁵ He graduated from Panjab University, Chandigarh and initially adopted his father's style of painting Sikh history depicting warriors and legendary personalities of the Sikhs.²⁵⁶ Soon he realized that he cannot make his mark as an individual artist and he preferred attempting unique and varied themes pertaining to culture and traditions of Punjab, as his style reflects

254 **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune
255 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.91
256 **Matharu, Archana;** March 17, 2011, *Cultural Strokes*, Hindustan Times

mellowed and decorative stance due to his temperament for more harmonious and peaceful phase of life. He devoted his time in having a good grasp on portrait painting too, which fetched him large assignments and artistic projects. Besides this, he continued participating in Annual Art Exhibitions of Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh since 1975 A.D. He held his three Solo Shows afterwards and is more convenient in painting in oils on canvas in the size 3'x4' and 2'x3'. The artist believes that there are three major categories in 'Punjabi Painting'- 'Historical', 'Punjabi way of life' and 'Portraiture'. Painting on historical themes requires deep study of the relevant reference material, costumes, weapons etc and an artist should have a general perspective of those turbulent times so that he could recreate the whole atmosphere and design the paintings in such a way that they infuse spirit of the event in the paintings. Characters should be painted in an idealistic manner so as to inspire the viewer.²⁵⁷ Focusing on these important elements, he has succeeded in recreating the atmosphere of those turbulent times. In his paintings of historical themes based on battles so valiantly fought by the Sikhs under the distinguished leadership of the 'Saint Soldier'- **Guru Gobind Singh**. (Plate-449) His other important paintings are connected with the life of the Gurus.

Paintings of his **Punjabi Brides**(Plate-450) and **women engaged in the act of spinning wheel (*charkha*)**(Plate-451), **ladies working on embroidery work (*Phulkari*)** (Plate-452) and doing early morning chore of churning the milk for making butter, have become iconic 'Punjabi Paintings'. Though he was never short of work due to the subject of his paintings and a flair for fluent brushwork as most of his paintings are bought by Non-resident Indians especially Punjabis living around the world. They carry them as 'Souvenirs' of *Sikh art*. It is hardly a surprise that such works have been replicated and reproduced in a big way and turned into calendars for sale in emporiums, galleries and even in stalls, being

257 **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune

run at the fairs and festivals. His work has generated a new interest even in the laymen who proudly display these prints on the walls of their houses. The other major impact of his paintings in bringing the third generation Punjabi settlers in the west is to acquaint them with the fast vanishing Punjabi culture.

Jarnail Singh shifted to British Columbia Canada in 2000 and is presently settled in Surrey and recognizing his talents as a preserver and promoter of Punjabi art, he received 'Artist of the Year' award from Indo-Canadian Cultural Association, Canada. Vancouver Sun's list of one hundred South Asians who are making a difference in British Columbia include this artist as he is appreciated for his endeavour to paint Punjabi culture for those who are forgetting it. His work has helped the young generation sons and daughters of migrants from Punjab to view it frequently and associate with their culture. Exhibitions of his vibrant paintings and reproduced calendars have been shown in many international exhibitions such as 'Diversity of local art' at Lanley Centennial Museum, British Columbia Canada and at 'Discovering Punjab' at Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry (U.K.).²⁵⁸ His works have also been displayed at the Central Sikh Museum at Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar, Maharaja Ranjit Singh War Museum, Ludhiana, Museum of rural life of Punjab, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Sardar Bhagel Singh Museum, Gurudwara Bangla Sahib, Delhi, Embassy of India, Washington D.C. (U.S.A.), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjabi University, Patiala, India Tourism Development Corporation and Headquarters Western Command, Chandimandir, Haryana.²⁵⁹ Despite producing only Sikh and Punjab centric paintings, he has sold so many paintings across the globe that he has lost count. Surviving as an artist has always been tough, but he was fortunate enough because of the quality of his work which reflects cultural heritage of Punjab as he saw an opportunity at

258 **Matharu, Archana**; March 17, 2011, *Cultural Strokes*, Hindustan Times

259 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala**; 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.91

the right time, to focus his artistic endeavours on creating paintings on this genre, for Punjabis settled abroad.

After shifting his base to Canada, he grabbed the opportunity to showcase his creative talents and also his Punjabi roots. Canada offered a big platform for such ventures and he offered the Canadians a glimpse of Punjab. His other major artworks include 'Mural Painting' which has its traditions in Punjab and he was asked to replicate such murals in Gurdwaras of Punjab as this tradition did not get the necessary encouragement and popularity in Punjab. He started painting murals for Canadian Gurdwaras and drawing rooms of many Canadian homes are adorned with his works. Many Canadians of Indian and Punjabi descent have approached him to create detailed murals showing scenes of rural Punjab. As art runs in his family, his wife Baljit Kaur is also emerging as an artist. His daughter is a graphic designer and his son is a creative photographer. For the last 6 years, he had been annually organizing painting workshops under the 'Kirpal Singh Kala Sath', Zira, Punjab- an organization, he established in the memory of his father. His paintings are displayed in the Surrey Art Gallery titled 'From the Land of Five Rivers' and his major art project is on the story of 'Kamaghatamaru', which is showcased at Newton Cultural Center, Surrey.²⁶⁰

Jarnail Singh was honoured by many art organizations and his prominent awards include Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi Awards in 1979 and 1980, 'Award of Honour' by Sabhiacharak Manch- 1989, 'Sardar Sobha Singh Memorial Award'- 1991, 'Prof. Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation Award'- 1991, International Punjabi Sahit Sabha, London- 1992, 'Dr. Ravinder Ravi Memorial Award' by Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle- 1993, 'Dr. M.S. Randhawa Award'- 1995, 'Punjabi Sath Lambran', Jalandhar, 'Central Association of Punjabi Writers',

260 **Matharu, Archana**; March 17, 2011, *Cultural Strokes*, Hindustan Times

Canada, 'Indo-Canadian Cultural Association', Canada and 'Maharaja Daleep Singh Centenary Trust', U.K.²⁶¹

In a rare gesture, prominent corporations and establishments have reproduced calendars of his fascinating paintings and these calendars are in great demand and have become a collector's item. Amongst these corporations are 'Markfed, India', 'Bank of Punjab', 'Bank of India', 'PSB Finance, Punjab', 'Punjab and Sind Bank', 'Punjab Small Scale Industries & Export Corporation, India', 'The Ajit Daily (newspaper), Jalandhar', 'Punjab Health System Corporation', 'Mann Printers, Vancouver (B.C. Canada)', 'Van City Printers, Vancouver (B.C. Canada)', '35 Printers, Burnaby (B.C. Canada)', 'Vakil & Sons, Bombay', 'Red Cross Society, Punjab', 'Punjab Health System Corporation, Punjab' and 'Punjabi University, Patiala'.²⁶²

Jarnail Singh has been exhibiting his works at regular intervals in India and Abroad. The major art exhibitions include- 'Harrison Arts Festival, Ranger Station Art Gallery, Harrison', 'Painting Demonstration at Spirit of BC Celebrations- ARTS 2006', 'Juried Show, Surrey Art Gallery 2005,' Jarnail Singh- Discovering the Soul of Punjab, Surrey Art Gallery-ARTS 2003', 'VISAGES: The Human as Image Canadian Institute of Portrait Artists Show, Surrey Chamber of Commerce, December 2002 to January 2003 (Solo Show)', 'Artists at Work Event, Cloverdale Library, Cloverdale B.C. 2003', 'Surrey Public Library, Whally Branch, October 2002 (Solo Show)', 'June Juried Show, Federation of Canadian Artists, Vancouver 2002', 'World Punjabi Conference, Prince George B.C. 2000', 'Slide Show/Lecture on Punjab, University of California, Berkley, USA 1999', 'World Punjabi Conference, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, USA 1997', 'Jubilee Auditorium, University of Alberta,

261 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala;** 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.91

262 **Rani, Dr. Saroj;** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.73-82

Canada 1995 (Solo Show)', 'Rhythm of Life Exhibition of Photographers, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh', 'Hotel Samrat Teej Festival Exhibition, New Delhi 1994 (Solo Show)', 'Sikh Art Exhibition , St. John's Museum, Warwick, UK 1992', 'Punjabi University, Patiala 1992 (Solo Show)', 'Calcutta Information Center, Calcutta 1991 (Solo Show)', 'Phulkari Exhibition, Jahangir Art Gallery, Bombay 1989', 'Punjab-History & Culture, Taj Art Gallery, Bombay 1988 (Solo Show)', 'Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana 1984 (Solo Show)', 'Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar 1982 (Solo Show)' and 'Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh from 1979-1989'. Jarnail Singh has not only wielded the brush but has also used his pen to write a book on 'Punjabi Painters' published by Punjab State University Textbook Board and other articles on 'Painters of Sikh History', 'Punjab Museums', 'My Favourite Paintings and Painters', 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh' and 'Creation of Khalsa' published in 'Ajit Daily' and 'Punjabi Tribune'.²⁶³

Jarnail Singh's own liking is for a painting which portrays **Guru Hargobind in a combat with Pande Khan** who has betrayed him despite the fact that the Guru had himself trained him in the martial arts. The diagonal placement of the horse, figures and their contrasting colours creates a palpable visual tension so appropriate to the battle scene. But more than that, it is the expression of quite nobility on the Guru's face which brings into focus the treacherous fright of the impending doom on the Muslim betrayer's tense visage. Yet another painting belonging to the historical theme is the **Portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur**. Jarnail Singh has painted the ninth Sikh Guru, highlighting his mastery in martial arts more than his holy qualities. This is quite unusual because all other artists have painted the Guru as a 'Saint' absorbed in deep meditation. 'Tegh Bahadur' was a title which Guru Hargobind Sahib gave to his son who had

263 **Incharge, Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala**; 1998, *Catalogue Museum and Art Gallery, Punjabi University, Patiala*, Impressions Printers, Mohali, Punjab, p.91

fought so valiantly against the Mughals even as a young boy. Impressed by his virtuosity in swordsmanship, the sixth Guru has called his son 'Tegh Bahadur' which means 'Gallant Swordsman'. Garments, sword and other details of the portrait are noteworthy.

Another commendable point of Jarnail Singh's paintings of the Punjabi way of life are the typical mud hamlets of the state's villages, wall paintings on mud walls, storage bins, indigenous shelves for household wares, 'Wicker-work' baskets, the biomorphic fenestration- above all a placid timelessness which pervades the Punjabi rural habitat. An impressive painting in this category which shows **A Village Belle wrapped in Phulkari** (Plate-453) sitting on an uncovered 'Wicker-work' *charpoi*. The composition, the colour scheme, the expression, the exquisite detailing, makes this work a masterpiece.²⁶⁴

A typical **Punjabi Village House** (Plate-454) has been painted by Jarnail Singh with an eye on authenticity and carefully executed details. The mud hamlet with wall paintings, oil lamp niches, open-air kitchen, a spacious front courtyard, the central tree and an outhouse for the cattle, etc brings out the robust authentic and infectious charm. In the similar category, Jarnail Singh has depicted various aspects of the zestful lifestyle of a Punjabi village. **Embroidery of Phulkari** (Plate-455), **Open air group-baking of loaves of bread (roti)** (Plate-456), **Indigenous mud ovens (Tandoor)** (Plate-457), **A Banjara selling glass bracelets to young girls** (Plate-458), **Curd Churning** (Plate-459), **Group singing on Dholak** (Plate-460), **Swinging in the Sawan**, **A Bride's make-up** (Plate-461) and her reception by the ladies of the in-laws house and so forth, present a fairly wide range to capture the colour and variety which characterize the Punjabi lifestyle.²⁶⁵ In all of these paintings, the most beautiful objects are the 'Wicker-work' baskets, indigenous sofa (*Pidha*), fans (*Pakhis*), and other household

264 **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune
265 **Chitrakar, Ajaib;** 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.193

furniture and utensils. These studies of folk motifs and handicrafts are evocative as well as original and authentic. The artist enjoyed portraiture work and handled the paintings of **Punjabi Brides** (Plate-462) in true to life realism laying stress on traditional Punjabi outfits and *Phulkari* work *dupattas* and shawls with intricate embroidery work. He excelled in drapery work and spent long hours giving authentic touch to the embroidery motifs and designs. His technical virtuosity and unfailing patience is visible in most of his work as he is a keen observer of Punjabi way of life and has used red, maroons and blues against the dull and rustic mud walls, beautifully depicted in ochres and variety of browns. Other noticeable feature in his paintings is the true depiction of sharp features of the girls and other characters, which clearly project the rugged and hardworking character of its people. The brides are shown in pensive mood and they are shy and coy, lost in the dreams of the future of their life. As he has a keen eye, the ornaments which he has painted depict ‘*Saggi Phul*’ (head ornament), ‘*Tikka*’ (forehead ornament), ‘*Kante*’ (earrings), ‘*Nath*’ (nose ring), ‘*Gani*’ (necklace), ‘*Chuddian*’ (bangles) and ‘*Jhanjhar*’ (foot ornament) are also visible in a few paintings.

Coming to his paintings on historical perspectives, a painting titled **Maharaja Ranjit Singh on Elephant** (Plate-463) sparkles with the splendour of ‘The Lion of Punjab’. His elephants are decked with golden seats and are laden with fascinating jewelry and silken covers (*Jhull*). Attendants and his bodyguards on the horseback are dressed in smart uniforms and carry the weapons and the ‘Nishaan-e-Khalsa’ (The Sikh flag). A beautifully embroidered brocade umbrella is being carried by an attendant standing at the back of Maharaja, who is engaged in shaking hands with Lord Bentick at Ropar. The picture portrays the majestic might of the Sikh army and rich formation of elephants and soldiers on the horseback. A few other paintings on the same subject project the grandeur of ‘Sher-e-Punjab’ - Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Jarnail Singh can be considered as an authentic pictorial chronicler of the matchless history of the people of Punjab, their art & culture and their unique life style, which is intense, robust and earthy.²⁶⁶ His keen observation and love of the detail is matchless and he possesses uncanny sense of colour and composition and will be remembered as someone who revived the traditions and customs of Punjabi life.

It is a sincere and humble effort to demystify the true characters, lifestyles, achievements, awards, contributions and work ethics of front running artists whose contributions towards *Sikh Calendar art* is phenomenal and highly outstanding. These artists have pictorially chroniclised all major aspects of Sikh history, culture, traditions, spiritual and divine ethos, true tenets of Sikhism with the magic wand of their brush and have also done their sacred duty through art to project the lives of Sikh Gurus with an accent on portraying authentic historical episodes and events. They are the most popular amongst a large number of Sikh painters, whose individualistic and unique artistic contributions have enriched the *Sikh art* and have propelled the popularity of *Sikh Calendar art* to new dimensions. The credit for taking the *Sikh Calendar art* to distant lands around the globe is both an ennobling task and a way to spread the light of spiritual flame which was lit by Guru Nanak Dev and other Sikh Gurus and countless disciples.

266 **Bhatti, S.S;** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh's 'Punjab Paintings'*, The Tribune