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## **Cultural Negotiation in Early Sikh Imagery: Portraiture of the Sikh Gurus to 1849\***

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This paper argues that Guru Nanak came to be painted in Hindu-like frontal in single portrait, which implies the preexisting custom of the production and consumption of images of the Sikh Gurus. The idea that he is deified in these paintings is based on the theory that a frontal view is used for worshipping the sitter. Although Guru Nanak's face was represented in three different modes, namely frontal, profile and three quarter face, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a three-quarter view of the face has been dominant in his images since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when his attire and accessories also changed from those of a Hindu ascetic or a Muslim saint to those of a Sikh Guru, exemplified by a turban. It is also noticeable that the later Gurus were painted primarily in portrait, a fact that may manifest their authoritative genealogy against other contemporary successors.

**Keywords:** Sikh art; portraiture; the Sikh Gurus; material religion

### **Introduction**

In the study of South Asian art, portraiture is a topic of growing interest among art historians. One of the earliest scholarly analyses was done by Coomaraswamy in 1939, who classified portraiture of South Asia into two categories: the realistic and the idealistic. This idea underpins common genres of Mughal and Rajput painting. Goswamy (1986) surveyed depictions of portraiture in ancient literature and historical accounts. He noted that the Sanskrit word *lakshana* means 'characteristic and cognitive attributes,' which portraiture is expected to bear in Indian thought (Goswamy 1986, 193). Desai (1989; 1994; 1996) claimed that in South Asia, the concept of portraiture or the realistic depiction of individuals derives from Western art. Its use in Mughal painting began in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast, Lefevre (2011) emphasised Spinicci's definition of portraiture, which does not require likeness. He argued that portraiture in South Asia originates in the ancient sculpture and relief of

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\* I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for suggestions.

Shiva and Buddha. For him, portraiture is not an artistic but a social category (Spinicci 2009, 50)

In South Asia, sculpture originally occupied a dominant place in the arts over painting, which relationship changed after Islamic conquests from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The Islamic artistic tradition was introduced, which, it is often thought, strongly forbade rendering an image of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali; that is to say, it more or less deterred idolatry although the new artistic style created a strong demand across the Middle East for precious, brightly coloured minerals that could be ground into paint. It is remarkable that things were different in Persia, where theologians argued that figures in pictures or *tasvir* had no shadow of their own, and that pictorial representation of individuals such as Muhammad could therefore be accepted as long as the faces were veiled (Dehesia 1997, 309). Persian portraiture, which flourished in the Safavid period in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, is a direct antecedent to Mughal portraiture. Their depictions of human faces are very similar, although format and posture are often different (Desai and Leidy 1989, 22). The issue of profile vs. three quarter view for portraits in Indian painting has been discussed by the following: Losty (1990), Koch (1997), Necipoglu (2000), Wright (2008), Aitkin (2010) and Gonzales (2015).

With regard to portraits of the Sikh Gurus, we know of some examples produced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Goswamy and Smith (2006, 30) state, ‘A 19<sup>th</sup>-century text mentions that “Guru Har Gobind, the Sixth Guru, had his portrait drawn by an artist at village Sur Singh near Kiratpur on the request of his relations’ (as cited in Randhawa 1971: 20). Again, when the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur (1621–1675), visited Dhaka (now the capital of Bangladesh), it is said the people welcomed him with great reverence; this was especially true of Bulaki, the mother of a local deputy. Since she respected the Guru, she asked him to stay there much longer than he had planned to. The Guru, however, said he had other things to attend to. Then, the old lady ‘sent for a painter, and had a picture of the Guru made. She hangs it over the couch on which he had sat. Thus, she was able to behold the Guru whenever her secular avocations admitted’ (Macauliffe 1963, 353).<sup>1</sup> However, nothing is later heard of that portrait.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Singh (2017).

Goswamy and Smith continue:

Again, one comes upon a reference to a portrait of Guru Gobind Singh, having possibly been made by a Pahari painter, for it is said that the ruler of the hill state of Bilaspur, with whom the Guru had to deal on many occasions in the course of his tumultuous career, once dispatched a painter from his court to bring back a likeness of the Guru. Whether the painter did indeed make such a portrait is not recorded. All that one knows is that no such portrait has survived. A somewhat coarsely made portrait, in the style that obtained toward the end of the 17th century at the hill court of Mandi – a town that Guru Gobind Singh did certainly visit – is sometimes said to be that of the great Guru. But certainly eludes one even here. (2006, 30)

Intriguingly, Goswamy (2000, 31) also claims there were previously only a few portraits of Guru Nanak (1469-1539). The Sikh doctrine against idolatry prohibited creating images of Guru Nanak, since he was the closest to an absolute entity or God among the Gurus as the founder and first Guru of Sikhism. However, single images of the Sikh Gurus, particularly with regard to Guru Nanak, were produced and consumed earlier than the British colonial period of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This paper highlights the iconographical features of images of the Sikh Gurus with Guru Nanak centred. Specifically, I analyse portraiture of the Sikh Gurus: Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishan, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and Guru Gobind Singh, in chronological order. This paper consists of three sections: Mughal and Rajput Portraiture; portraiture of Guru Nanak; and portraiture of the later Gurus.

### **Mughal and Rajput Portraiture**

Emperors Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan played a key role in the history of Mughal painting. Their new patronage of art did not only increase the number of artworks, but also brought about a radical change in the traditional style and attitude among painters in the Rajput states. Akbar's imperial atelier included many Hindu and Muslim painters. His artistic taste was militant and dominant despite his political tolerance for other religions. For instance, he commissioned

the album of the *Razmnama*, the Persian translation of the Mahabharata. Another change in Akbar's period is portraiture. According to an episode in the *Akbarnama*, he instructed his men to sit for portraits and stated, 'so that those who have passed away have received new life, and those who are still alive have immortality promised them' (Desai and Leidy 1989, 21). Early Mughal portraiture was normally compiled into an album and most of these portraits are single images of emperors, courtiers and visiting dignitaries; among these, Akbar is depicted differently from others (Desai and Leidy 1989, 21–22; Stronge 2002; Wright 2008).

In comparison with Akbar's reign, in which Mughal portraiture still maintained the Persian influence in style and composition, Jahangir's period saw a strong Western influence and the proliferation of portraiture due to regular contact with Christian missionaries from Europe. However, the Western influence on Mughal painting was evident earlier than their 1580 arrival (Desai and Leidy 1989, 22; Beach 1992, 55). Painters at Jahangir's atelier portrayed him as the rightful successor of Akbar (Beach 1992, 55). In this period, Mughal painters began to depict the sitter with careful observation, in both the physical and the psychological senses. Many figures and objects were painted into the composition, on the basis of either observation or sketches (Desai 1996, 232). Desai and Leidy (1989, 22) argue that Jahangir preferred more intimate and personalised renditions, which led to the popularity of portraiture in his reign. They point out two more factors: first, 'the gradual decrease in the production of large, illustrated narratives'; and second, 'the increased presence of Europeans and European art at the Mughal court' (Desai and Leidy 1989, 22). In Jahangir's later reign, portraiture is inclined to symbolism and allegory. For example, the flying putti and halo manifest Jahangir's holiness, which was a 'clear statement of absolute power' (Desai and Leidy 1989, 23).

Shah Jahan, the fifth emperor, had an interest in both Islamic and Hindu literature. He is known for having commissioned an illustrated manuscript of the *Padshahnama*. Beach points out, '...the text and illustrations of the first *Akbarnama* were a revelation of Akbar's physical and intellectual vitality, and the *Jahangirnama* showed that emperor's curiosity about the world and spiritual matters' (1992, 130). As for portraiture, the 17<sup>th</sup>-century reigns of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb were characterised with 'formalised, public representations of

Mughal royal figures,' the portrayal of the lesser courtiers and other noncourtly subjects (Desai and Leidy 1989, 23). Desai and Leidy maintain that these reflected 'a degree of direct observation, psychological intensity, a sense of informality, and a greater absorption of the Western techniques of chiaroscuro and articulation of diminishing perspective' (Desai and Leidy 1989, 23). They also state, 'A similar kind of freedom of expression is also seen in the images of ascetics, teachers, and other nonroyal subjects in Mughal from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century' (Desai and Leidy 1989, 23–24)

In using new techniques such as three-quarter view, decorative expressions with vivid (often blue) colours, shading and perspective, painters of the Mughal empire enhanced the artistic milieu in local Islamic and Rajasthani workshops in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, prior to the Pahari and Punjab workshops of the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In these circumstances, portraiture became an active domain where both Muslim and Hindu painters displayed their skill, intelligence and talent (Goswamy 1986, 193, 197). Desai states, 'One of the most important cultural consequences of the interaction between the Mughal and Rajput courts was the development of Rajput portraiture in Rajasthan, beginning in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.' (Desai 1994, 313). The following description refers primarily to Desai's work in 1994.

First, Desai (1994, 313) points out that Rajput painting presumes 'connections with the past and the eternal qualities of life.' Tod (as cited in Desai 1994, 313–4) argues that Rajput portraiture aims to represent the king's genealogy and munificence, for Rajput rulers were expected to protect their successive land and subjects. Desai reveals the characteristic, timeless virtue of kingship. Such an attitude among artists originates in ancient Hindu thought, which incurred the lack of both 'a ruler's absolute authority' and 'physiognomically specific royal portraiture' (Desai 1994, 314).

At the same time, Desai classifies Rajput portraiture into three categories: 1) portraits rendered in the Mughal style with Mughal tastes; 2) portraits rendered in the Mughal style, but with Rajput tastes; and 3) portraits rendered in the Rajput style, but with Mughal tastes (Desai 1994, 315). In addition, she coined the term *contextual portraits*, in which 'rulers are shown hunting, watching performances, sitting in a festival' (Desai 1996, 232). In contextual portraits, painters aim to embody 'conceptual rather than perceptual interest in

the subjects', or 'a sense of timelessness' (Desai 1994, 338). Aitkin also states, 'they (contextual portraits) depict the ruler and his courtiers as recognisable individuals' as 'documentary evidence' (Aitkin 2010, 111). Moreover, she points out, 'contextual portraits individualise places as accurately as people' (Aitkin 2010, 123). However, Desai accepts the geographical and political reasons why Mughal influences vary in ateliers, and stresses a selective process by which Rajput painters can absorb Mughal conventions. It is seen as a sort of resistance to the new regulation, namely to 'the temporal power and the historical position of rulers' in the Mughal idiom (Desai 1994, 319–21).

However, there was a trend in the 18<sup>th</sup> century towards the purpose of recording. In both Rajput and Mughal portraiture, only the emperor is sitting and others are standing to exhibit their respect to him (Desai 1994, 322). This formula complements the traditional idiom of Rajput portraiture, in which the rulers were the 'first among all'. Rajput painters strived to depict what they knew rather than what they saw, that is to say, they converted the latter to the former. Another purpose they had was to 'to create a conceptual rather than a perceptual view of the world', namely 'universal' rather than 'temporal visual symbols' (Desai 1994, 325). Goswamy also claims, 'one senses that in rendering a moment the painter is not losing sight of the moments that have gone by and those that are yet to come' (Desai 1994, 326). Their view of a sense of timelessness makes individual figures divine, for both are free from 'historical or linear time' or 'ageless conventions' out of 'the harsh political realities of their times' (Desai 1994, 326).

In contrast, another version of Rajput portraiture is evident in the Pahari painting produced in the hill area of the Punjab. Portraits in Mandi and Bilaspur are similar to those of Mughal ateliers. Instead, the local style is evident in Basohli, Mankot and Chamba, which shows 'the ruler bursting with strength and vigour, set against strongly coloured backgrounds' (Crill 2010, 34). Intriguingly, Goswamy claims that the image in Pahari painting seems to be bigger than as it is, despite its actual small format. The figure's limbs, ornaments and instruments seem to penetrate the borders (Goswamy 1986, 197). Moreover, the figure is rendered realistically for his 'spirit and memory', as if he were alive, even if he had passed away (Goswamy 1986, 198). Crill claims that this expression is 'to emphasise his uncontainable strength and presence' (Crill 2010,



34). Goswamy regards those of Balwant Singh of Jasrota and Sansar Chand of Kangra as the best examples of Pahari portraiture (Goswamy 1986, 200). Moreover, Desai points out two characteristics of the portraits: 1) the flywhisk is most likely used; and 2) the absence of the halo (Desai 1994, 331). She also demonstrates that Pahari portraiture is closer in style to Mughal portraiture, although the Pahari area is further from Mughal power than the Rajasthan plain. She suggests that Rajasthani rulers under the critical political situation demanded their strong and determined authority, whereas Pahari rulers seem to have been relatively rural and flexible (Desai 1994, 332).

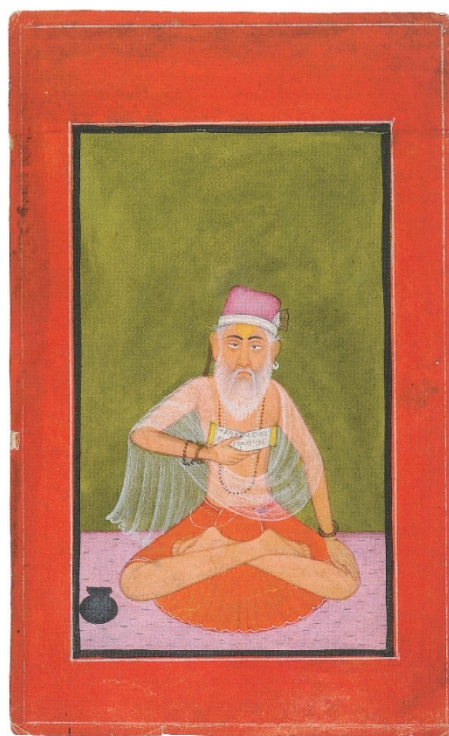
The Pahari style originated in Muhammad Shah's atelier in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This is particularly evident in the Seu-Nainsukh workshop of Guler. Khandalavala (1958, 117) points out that Guler painters travelled to the plain and learned from Mughal artists; Goswamy and Fischer (1992, 214-217) believe they collected Mughal paintings and developed their style for themselves. Nainsukh's naturalistic and realistic technique is prominent in the Pahari region. His interest in portraits of ordinary people is unusual and its origin is unidentifiable (Desai 1996, 232). His portraits were often left as unfinished sketches, partly because they were 'simply exercises in drawing, perhaps to be used in later compositions' (Crill 2010, 38-39). He even produced some self-portraits (Crill 2010, 35-36). His closest patron, Balwant Singh of Jasrota, was an exception in that he was often depicted in informal situations in comparison with Mughal and most Rajput portraits, in which a royal figure was preferred in formal settings (Desai 1996, 232; Crill 2010, 36-37).

Given the above, this research scrutinises portraiture of religious persons that blur the boundaries of portraiture and idols. This paper studies portraits of the Sikh Gurus, who are perhaps one of the best-known subjects for portraiture in contemporary South Asia. Portraits of the Sikh Gurus are an overlooked field in the study of portraiture in South Asia, for it is contentious to regard them as portraiture. The Western concept of portraiture is most likely to represent secular people such as royalty, nobility and even ordinary people as subjects. Religious icons of the Christ are not called portraiture; rather, they are considered devotional images. In contrast, the Sikh Gurus are basically seen as holding attributes of both the worldly and the sacred. They are sometimes

represented as a Hindu ascetic or a Muslim Sufi, in other cases as a king or a warrior. To examine them bridges the traditional distinction between the portrait and the devotional image.

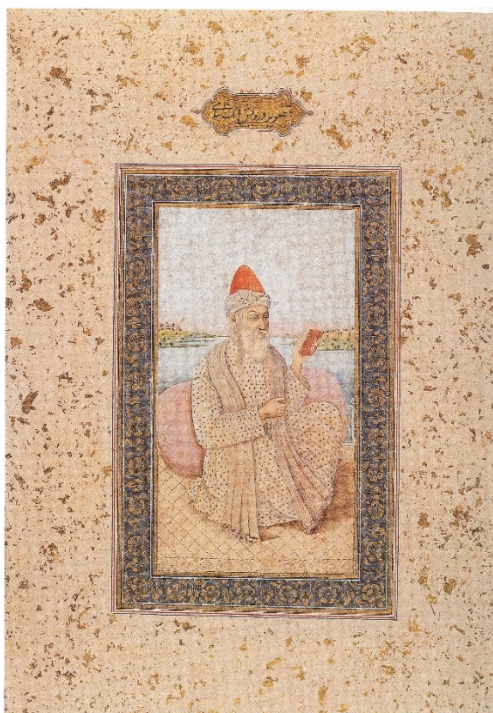
### Portraiture of Guru Nanak

Portraiture of Guru Nanak dates back to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The tradition of such portraiture differs from images of him in Janam-sakhi painting, which is reminiscent of the narrative painting produced in Rajput courts (for example, the Ramayana, the Gita Govinda and the Bhagavata Purana). Although he is rendered exclusively as a Muslim saint in Janam-sakhi painting, Guru Nanak is represented as either a Hindu ascetic or a Muslim saint (*Sufi*) in portraiture. On the basis of formal and stylistic analysis, it is argued that only Hindu painters at the Mankot court, a Rajput native state in the Pahari hills, depicted Guru Nanak as the representative of their faith (**Figure 2**). Other Hindu and Muslim painters were likely to depict him as a Muslim saint (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 1:** *Guru Nanak Seated in Meditation*. Opaque watercolour on paper. Pahari, possibly from a Mankot workshop. Second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. 18×11,2cm. Acc.no. 248. Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.

Some paintings show Guru Nanak as a Hindu ascetic or siddha (**Figure 1**). The first painting portrays Guru Nanak, inscribed on verso in Devanagari, in frontal view. He is sitting cross-legged and putting his left hand on the left knee. His right hand is used for holding a manuscript that says ‘with the Grace of the True Guru’ in Takri. He has a white beard and mustache. His red cap is wound up with a white bandana. His body is thin and bare except the transparent white shawl that winds around, and a short orange lower garment. Both hands are equipped with a bracelet, but a rosary is rendered only in his right hand. Two necklaces in white and black drop from his neck. The ring on the left ear proves his holy status, according to Goswamy. The vessel is depicted on the pink carpet. The background is painted flat in grass colour, which is typical of Pahari painting. Goswamy attributes this painting to a Mankot workshop in the second quarter of the eighteenth century and indicates the proximity to the representation of Kabir.



**Figure 2: *Guru Nanak Reading from a Text*. Folio, possibly from a series of portraits of religious men. Late Mughal. Last quarter of the 18th century. Opaque watercolor on paper. 16.7×15.5 cm.**

**Collection of Satinder and Narinder Kapany. Copied from Goswamy 2006, plate 3.7.**

One of the best examples that shows Guru Nanak as a Muslim Sufi is the following painting (**Figure 2**). This painting portrays Guru Nanak, inscribed above in Persian, alone in a vertical format. He faces right in three quarter view and has a white beard. He is wearing a red skull cap tied with a white bandana. He holds a red book in his left hand and bookmarks in right hand. He is leaning on a pink cushion and wearing a white garment with black dots. A long white stole from his neck to the floor is impressive. He seems to reside on the terrace where he sits. The background shows a landscape which has depth. Beyond the lake in the middle view, the lands are shown in the distance. The blue borders is well decorated with golden flowers. Goswamy points out that this painting is one of a series of religious figures. Nanak's realistic face is unusual in the history of his representation. Perhaps, the artist was trained at the Mughal atelier, but it is possible that he learned from preexisting images, such as Figure 1, which is evident from the presence of a red book in Nanak's left hand.

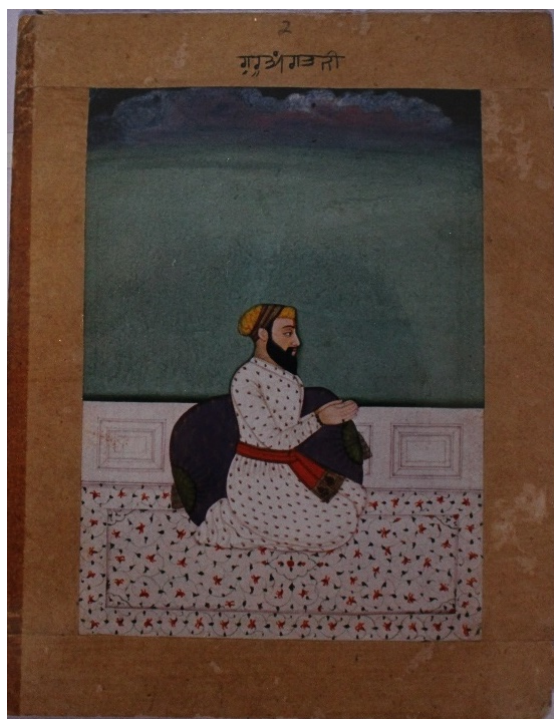


**Figure 3: *Guru Nanak*. By Artist Jodh Singh. 1848. Shreesh pigment on canvas. Sonia Dhami's Collection. Courtesy of the owner.**

Near the end of the early nineteenth century, the image of Guru Nanak likely gained its characteristic iconography as the Sikh Guru, which shows his frontal view, which is easier to be use for the purpose of worship (Pinney 2004). In this painting (**Figure 3**), Guru Nanak faces front and has a white beard and moustache. He is staring straightforwardly at the viewers, with heavy eyes, sitting cross-legged and alone. His head is encircled by a golden halo. He is wearing a yellow turban and robe beneath a navy shawl, which includes shaded draping. He is also wearing a beaded necklace and is holding a rosary in his right hand. He is putting his left hand to the ground. A tree, the trunk of which is brown and includes highlighting, is rendered on the right side; its leaves drop towards Nanak's head. Green mountains are seen in the distance, across a blue river. A bit of sky appears at the top left edge. The textures are unusual, and the brush is likely different from a traditional one. The model for this portrait is unknown; however, it could have been a Sikh teacher.

### **Portraiture of the Later Gurus**

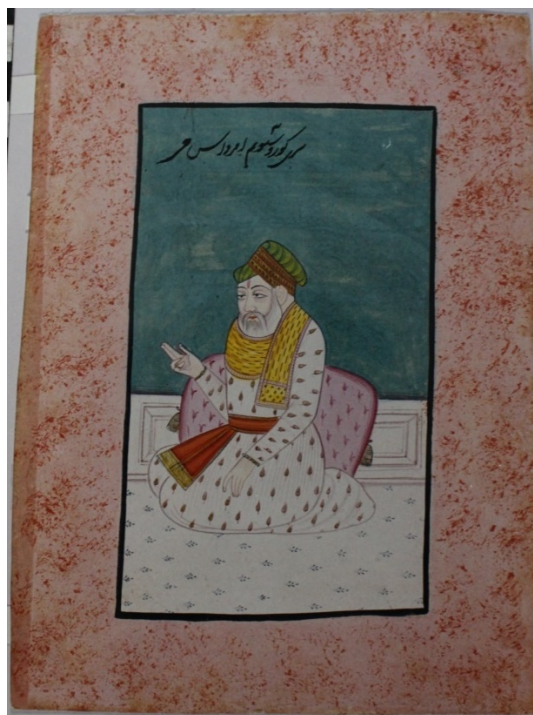
In comparison with Mughal and Rajput portraiture, portraiture of the Sikh Gurus has a religious connotation. This is because the term 'Mughal' or 'Rajput' depends on the painter and patron of artworks. In contrast, the term 'Sikh', or more clearly 'the Sikh Gurus', indicates the subject of artworks. This allowed the painters to depict the Sikh Gurus on the basis of their imagination. It is important to note that all portraits (with perhaps one or two exceptions) of the Sikh Gurus are not from life but painted in later times.



**Figure 4: Guru Angad. Gouache on paper. 19.6×15.2 cm. Acc.no.1844, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.**

Guru Angad (1504–1552), the second guru, is also an important Sikh Guru because only he saw Guru Nanak in person during his lifetime and succeeded to the guruship directly from the first Guru. He is also the only Guru, other than Nanak, who is described in the Janam-sakhis, hagiographic accounts of Guru Nanak. Therefore, his images are included in some of their illustrations. The next painting shows Angad, inscribed in the top border, in the form of devotion, although Nanak is not rendered (**Figure 4**). He has a black beard and faces right in profile is sitting with his legs folded on the floral-patterned carpet in the terrace. He is holding his hands together. He is wearing a yellow turban tied with a brown bandana and a white robe tied with a red band around the waist. He is leaning a blue cushion which edges are painted in green. The background beyond the terrace is coloured in green. A black sky and white clouds are rendered on the top.





**Figure 5: *Guru Amar Das*. Artist Unknown. Pahari. Acc.no.1845b. Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.**

Guru Amar Das (1479–1574) is the third Guru and was inaugurated in 1552 at the age of 73. He is normally depicted as old as Guru Nanak. This portrait is a single portrait of Amar Das whose name is written on the top (**Figure 5**). He has a white beard and faces left in three quarter view is sitting with his legs folded. He is wearing a green turban tied with a red cloth and a white dotted dress with a red waistcloth including golden edges. He is lying on a pink pillow with the same dotted patterns while offering his right hand ahead. A white carpet is decorated with grey flowers and a background is painted in dark blue. The three-quarter view reminds us of Guru Nanak's image that is usually represented in the mode of three quarter face



**Figure 6: *Guru Ram Das*. Attributed to the second generation after Nainsukh. Guler, Punjab Hills. Ca. 1825-30. 26×30cm. Opaque watercolour and gold on paper. Photographed at the Braharad Babbar in 2017.**

Guru Ram Das (1534–1581) is the fourth Guru of Sikhism. He is famous for founding Amritsar, formerly known as Ramdasapur, the Sikh holy city. He is usually painted as a holy man, like Guru Nanak, and is relatively identifiable from the other Gurus. In this painting (**Figure 6**), Guru Ram Das who has a black beard and faces left in three quarter view is sitting with one leg stood on the white carpet decorated finely with floral patterns. He is wearing a grey turban tied with a yellow bandana as well as a green dress under a purple shawl. He is leaning against a yellow cushion decorated with lattice-like patterns including red crosses. On the right-hand side, an attendant, who has no beard and faces left in three quarter view is sitting cross-legged next to Ram Das. He is wearing a red skull cap and an orange dress with yellow dots under a golden yellow coat. On the left-hand side, there are three musicians in the lower level. A musician who has a black beard and faces up in three quarter view is sitting cross-legged while playing a string instrument painted in light yellow and red.

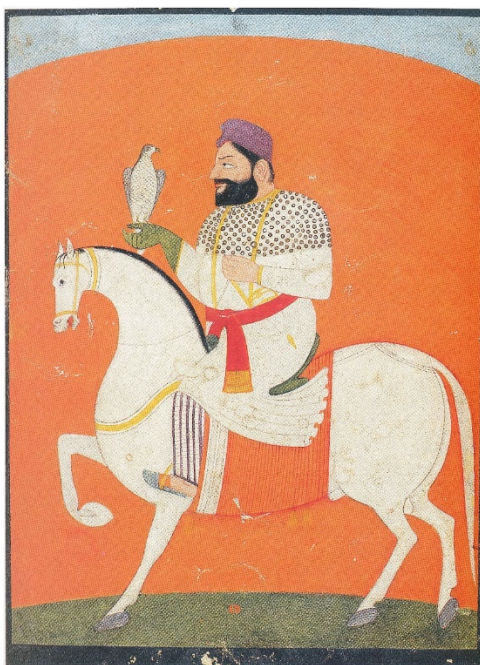


He is wearing a light blue turban tied with a golden yellow bandana as well as a blue dress with yellow dots. Another musician who has a thin moustache and faces right in profile is sitting cross-legged while playing a string instrument painted in light yellow and red. He is wearing a white turban and a golden yellow dress with golden dots. The last musician who has a black beard and faces right in three quarter view is sitting cross-legged while playing a percussion instrument that is decorated colorfully. At the bottom right corner, three ascetics are depicted. One who has a black beard and faces left in profile is sitting while holding a long dark brown scripture in his right hand. He is wearing a brown cap, but nothing in the body. A white cloth is hung from his left shoulder. His forehead is tinted with ashes. Another ascetic who shows only the back of his head is wearing a brown cap and a pink waistcloth just like other two. His body is fully covered with grey ashes. The last ascetic who has a white beard and faces left in profile is leaning against the white latticework at the terrace. He is wearing a brown cap and holding a white scripture in his left hand.



Figure 7: *Guru Arjan*. Artist unknown. Punjab. ca. 1800. Acc. no. 1846, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.

Guru Arjan (1563-1606) is the fifth Guru of Sikhism and renowned as the commissioner of the *Adi Granth*, the basis of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. His iconography is one of the least characteristic and hardest to distinguish from other Gurus, for Guru Arjan is normally depicted as a nobleman. In this painting (**Figure 7**), Guru Arjan who has a black beard and faces right in profile is sitting cross-legged on the white carpet decorated with floral calligraphy. He is wearing a pink turban tied with a yellow bandana and a red dress tied with a yellow waistcloth decorated with floral patterns. He is leaning against a turquoise pillow, the edges of which are painted in red. Beyond the white terrace, the background is painted boldly in grey.



**Figure 8:** *Guru Hargobind out riding*. Leaf from a series of portraits of the Gurus. Artist unknown. Kashmir/Punjab; first quarter of the 19th century. 35(28.7)×27.5(22.5)cm.

Shri Harish Chander, Chamba. Copied from Goswamy 2000, figure 26.

Guru Hargobind (1595–1644), the sixth Guru of Sikhism, is usually represented in a manner similar to Guru Gobind Singh. He is frequently holding a hawk and mounted on a horse. Sometimes he is armed with a sword and a shield, because he fought with Mughal emperors such as Jahangir and Shah Jahan over his lifetime. In this portrait (**Figure 8**), Guru Hargobind, who has a

black beard and faces left in profile, is mounted on a white horse. He is wearing a purple turban and a white garment tied with a red cloth including yellow edges, although many black dots are displayed around the shoulders. He wears white trousers with black stripes and a pair of grey shoes. He is holding a falcon in his right hand that sits on a green glove. A yellow string is hung from the neck. The horse holds his right leg up and carries an orange cloth as a saddle. Above a green field at the bottom, an orange background is painted under a light blue sky. Those borders are slightly curved to the edges.



**Figure 9:** *Guru Har Rai*, the seventh Guru. Leaf from a series of portraits of the Gurus. Attributed to the Seu-Nainsukh workshop. Pahari. first quarter of the 19th century. 22×16.2cm. Acc. no. F-45, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.

Guru Har Rai (1630–1661) is the seventh Guru of Sikhism and was crowned at the age of 14. The most notable episode in his life is that he allowed Dara Shikoh, brother and enemy of Aurangzeb, to pass through his territories, which left Aurangzeb outraged. Har Rai is usually painted as a youth with a black beard. In this painting (**Figure 9**), Guru Har Rai who has a black beard

and faces left in profile is standing on the green grass while holding a stick in his right hand. His head is encircled with a red halo in which the center is transparent. He is wearing a white turban and a white dress over a red trouser with green dots. A necklace is hung from his neck. On the right-hand side, an attendant who has a black beard and faces left in profile is standing on the grass while holding a parasol over Guru Har Rai in both hands. He is wearing a pink turban and an orange dress tied with a blue waistcloth. A white cloth is hung from his left shoulder. On the left-hand side, there are tall white blossoms and a white dog whose hands, feet, tail and ears are painted in orange. It is turning back its head to face Guru Har Rai. The sun is painted in the light blue sky over white clouds.



**Figure 10: *Guru Har Krishan*. Punjab. First half of the 18th century. Acc.no.74.289, Himachal State Museum, Shimla.**

Guru Har Krishan (1656–1664), the eighth Guru, died at the age of seven. As he was a child, his is one of the most identifiable images among the ten

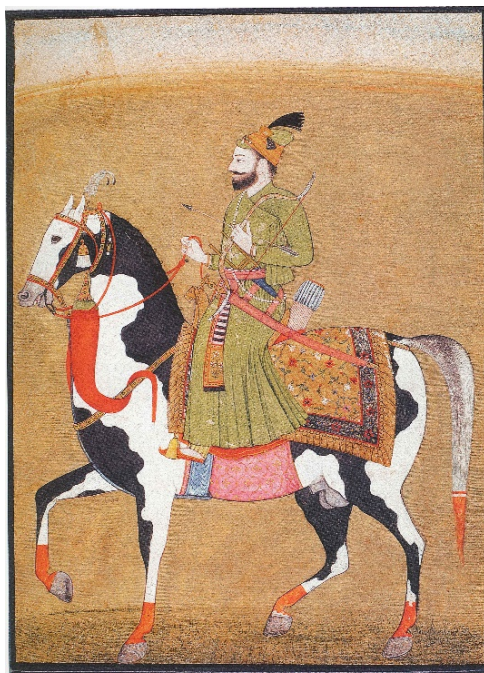
Gurus. This portrait was executed in the early eighteenth century according to the caption provided by the owner (**Figure 10**). On the left-hand side, Har Krishan, who faces left in profile and naturally has no beard, is standing in the terrace. He is wearing a purple turban tied with a gold bandana and equipped with a black feather. He is also wearing an orange garment decorated with golden drops under a golden cloak decorated with floral patterns. A pendant and a white rosary are shown between black collars of the garment. He is holding a flower in his right hand and wearing a trouser with white and pink stripes. On the right-hand side, an attendant who faces left in profile and has a light beard is standing and holding a black peacock feather fan above Har Krishan. He is wearing a white turban tied with a golden bandana and a yellow garment tied with a purple cloth around the waist. A pendant and a white rosary are hung from the neck. He is wearing the same type of trousers, with white and red stripes, as the Guru. A green carpet decorated with yellow drops and arabesque is on the floor, in the top and bottom edges of which fine lattice works are shown. The background is painted boldly in green although there is a big tear on the inscription. Blue waves are depicted in the white zone representing clouds under the blue zone on the top.





**Figure 11:** *Portrait of the ninth Sikh guru, Tegh Bahadur.* Artist unknown. Northern India or Pakistan. approx. 1670 (?). 27.3(22.2)×20.9(16.5)cm. Opaque watercolors on paper. Acc. no. 1998.94. Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–1675) is the ninth Guru of Sikhism and famous for his sacrifice and for the verses he wrote, which were added to what became the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy text. Like Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Hargobind, he is painted as a warrior, frequently holding a falcon and dressed in a sword and armour. In this painting (**Figure 11**), Tegh Bahadur, who has a black beard and faces left in profile, is standing in the center on the grass, while holding a hawk in his right hand. Interestingly, his head is encircled with a golden halo in which the center is transparent. He is wearing an orange turban and an orange dress. The background is painted in green, and purple and orange clouds are floating on the top.



**Figure 12: *Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru.* Leaf from a series of portraits of the Gurus. From the family workshop of Nainsukh of Guler. Pahari. First quarter of the 19th century. 21.4×16.2 cm. Acc.no. F-48, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh.**

Among the Gurus following Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and last human Guru, has been the most popular and the most frequently depicted in paintings. He sometimes appears next to Guru Nanak and sometimes pays homage to the first Guru. However, it is often difficult to identify Guru Gobind Singh accurately, for he is normally represented in the fashions of royalty and nobility. The following painting shows Guru Gobind Singh with that type of iconography (**Figure 12**). The words are inscribed on verso in Devanagari and Persian characters, saying ‘Sri Guru Gobind Singh 10’ and in a later hand ‘10 Guru Gobind Singh.’ (Goswamy 2006, 146) Gobind Singh, who has a black beard and faces left in profile, is riding a horse colored in white and black. His green turban is tied with a yellow bandana and decorated with a black feather. He is wearing a green robe tied with a black-and-white striped cloth with golden edges. He is armed with a sword in the pink sheath and arrows in the pink cylinder. He is holding a bow in his right hand and the

red reins in his left hand. A luxury carpet decorated with floral patterns and grey borders is put on the pink saddle. The background is painted in brown and the horizon is bending along the white sky. A few grasses are rendered at the bottom.

### Conclusion

We can see deification of Guru Nanak in portraiture in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The idea that he is deified in these paintings is based on the theory that a frontal view is used for worshipping the sitter (Pinney 2004). Although Guru Nanak's face was represented in three different modes, namely frontal, profile and three quarter face, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a three-quarter view of the face has been dominant in his images since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when his attire and accessories also changed from those of a Hindu ascetic or a Muslim saint to those of a Sikh Guru, exemplified by a turban. It is also noticeable that the later Gurus were painted primarily in portrait, a fact that may manifest their authoritative genealogy against other contemporary successors (Branfoot 2012).

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