3.1. Introduction

The Gurudwaras have a central position in the religious, social and political life of the Sikhs and are an integral part of the Sikh history, heritage and culture. In fact, the Sikh history revolves around them. Most of these Gurudwaras are by and large commemorative buildings. The important Gurudwaras are built at sites associated with the important incidents in the lives of the Gurus, at places which are important milestones in Sikh history. They have also been erected in memory of the martyrs who gave up their lives in defence of their faith, during the long period of persecution to which the Sikhs were subjected (Kapur and Misra, 2003). The Sikh Prayer also daily recounts the most inspiring events of Sikh history and reference is made to the brave heroes who suffered martyrdom for the sake of the Gurudwaras. For example, Gurudwara Sisganj at Delhi is related with Guru Tegh Bahadur, Gurudwara Saheedian Sahib at Amritsar is related with Baba Deep Singh and Gurudwara Alamgir Sahib near Ludhiana is related with Guru Gobind Singh.

Most of the historical Gurudwaras were built during the second half of the eighteenth century and in the early 19th century when the Sikhs had gained political power in the Punjab (K. Singh, 2004b). Gurudwaras sprang up in most of the areas of Sikh habitations and on sites connected with the Gurus and with important events in Sikh history. Most of the historical Gurudwaras were gifted with liberal grants of land by the ruling chiefs and nobility. The period of Sikh rule led to the construction of some impressive religious structures.

The Harmandar Sahib (The Golden Temple) at Amritsar has been the centre of Sikhism during the entire span of eventful history of Sikhs. It became the source of Sikh inspiration and carried the message of Sikhism afar. During the days of their persecution, a visit to Harmandar Sahib exercised an inspirational influence. The Sarbat Khalsa or the Sikh community used to meet at Harmandar Sahib, Amritsar on the occasion of Diwali and Baisakhi. All matters of community’s interest were determined by the gurmattas (resolutions) in such assemblies. The gurmattas when passed were supposed to have received Guru’s sanction. Even ordinary breaches of the rules of conduct were punished in such community meetings and no person, however highly placed, was above the jurisdiction of Sarbat Khalsa (Kapur and Misra, 2003).

Realising the significance of the Harmandar Sahib as the heart and soul of the Sikh faith, various invaders made it the target of their attacks in order to finish the Sikhs.
The Harmandar Sahib was thrice destroyed and rebuilt with devotion and zeal in the 18th century. It stands as a symbol of the brave spirit of the Khalsa. Throughout the history, Sikhism has shown exceptional strength and will to tackle with all crises, without compromising the basic values of its faith. It is through tremendous sacrifices and sufferings that the Sikhs have maintained their identity, principles, philosophy and carried out the mission entrusted to them by their Gurus (G. Dhillon, 1989). The Gurudwaras became the focal points of the Sikhism. They became the centres for mobilising the Sikhs for any cause, social or political and this holds good even today.

In recent years, most of the Gurudwaras were built with an extensive use of marble for the purpose of beautification and durability. Generally, most of the Gurudwaras have an entrance from all sides signifying that they are open to all without any distinction whatsoever, and that God is omnipresent. Apart from Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar and a few other shrines, there is no architectural record of the earlier shrines. No art or architecture from the period before that has survived. It may not have survived, perhaps because it was made with ephemeral materials such as wood and sun-dried brick or may have been damaged by the invaders.

A large number of Sikh Gurudwaras were constructed throughout the Punjab and in the areas of Sikh habitation with distinction in scale. It is not easy to trace the roots of architectural development of these Gurudwara due to limited information that is available or has survived about the Sikh Gurudwara and their builders. The information which is available explains that the construction work of large historical Gurudwara buildings was carried out as a result of royal patronage. Building of a Gurudwara expresses the physical power and economic resources of the ruler. Other than royal patrons, Sikh aristocracy, wealthy merchants and other groups played an important role in the construction of Gurudwaras. However, apart from the royal patrons and the merchants, every individual donated and contributed to the construction of Gurudwaras (“Gurudwara”, 2009).

3.2. Social Relevance of a Gurudwara

The presence of a Gurudwara in the neighbourhood of Sikhs is indispensable. It is a place for congregational worship of God and is the centre of religious and social life of the Sikhs since the time of Guru Nanak and has bounded the Sikh community together by their faith in the teachings of the Gurus (T. Singh, 1922). Congregational worship in the Gurudwaras has a social significance of its own. It serves to integrate the Sikhs and
take them emotionally away from heterogeneous castes within the *sangat*, as loyalty to higher values helps men rise above their narrow loyalties. All social functioning which serves in any way to integrate the group may be regarded as expressions of loyalty to higher values and thus take on a semi-religious meaning ("Gurudwara", 2009).

Gurudwaras enjoy a pivotal position in the life of Sikhs, for them it is not only a place for worship, but the source of their life and inspiration. All important occasions of a Sikh’s life, the birth, the marriage and the death are interlinked with it. People from all religious backgrounds without distinction of caste, status or sex are welcomed into a Gurudwara. Gurudwaras have also played a vital role in shaping the course of events of the Sikh history and in the development of the Sikh religious tradition. Apart from morning and evening services, the Gurudwaras hold special congregations to mark anniversaries of the Sikh Gurus and other important events in Sikh History. They become scenes of festivity when celebrations in honour of the birth anniversaries of the Gurus and of the Khalsa take place (H. Dhillion, 2009).

It is through the Gurudwaras that the Sikhs have been able to effectively give shape to the teachings of their Gurus and to carry forward the mission of the Sikh Gurus. As the Guru is manifested in the *Sangat*, a Sikh is supposed to participate in the congregational worship held in a Gurudwara (G. Dhillon, 2000). Since the Sikhs have migrated to almost every part of the world, so we can easily find a Gurudwaras everywhere in the world. Five Gurudwaras, namely, the Akal Takht, Anandpur Sahib, Patna Sahib, Hazoor Sahib and Damdama Sahib are looked as the ‘Five Thrones’ of authority, from which *Hukamnamas* (divine commands) for the guidance of the community are issued time to time. Among these, the authority of the Akal Takht at Amritsar is regarded as supreme, and all orders issued from there are considered as binding upon the whole Sikh community.

### 3.3. Meaning and Importance of a Gurudwara

A Gurudwara, meaning “the doorway to the Guru”, is the Sikh place of worship for the Sikhs. According to Bhai Kahn Singh, the author of *Mahankosh* (The encyclopaedia of Sikh literature), Gurudwara is more than a place of worship (Nabha, 1930). It is a place of learning for a student, the Guru for a spiritual person, a hospital for sick and a rest house for a pilgrim.

The word ‘Gurudwara’ is compounded of *guru* (spiritual master) and *dwara* (gateway or seat) and, therefore, has an architectural implication. The Sikh Shrines are by and
large commemorative buildings connected with the lives of the ten Sikh Gurus, or associated with certain places and events of historical significance for the Sikhs. The main requirement of a Gurudwara is a room in which Sri Guru Granth Sahib can be placed and people can be seated as a congregation to listen to the readings from the Guru Granth Sahib and to sing and recite its verses. Some Gurudwaras also have resting room for Guru Granth Sahib, Langar building, kitchen, lodging facilities for pilgrims and accommodation of granthis (priests) and sewadars.

As places of worship, Gurudwaras are the source of community-building, acting as guardians of core values of Sikhism and providing an opportunity for collective worship by the sangat (congregation). Gurudwaras are highly respected by the Sikhs because within Sikhism, the spiritual and the temporal are inseparable (G. Singh, 2006).

3.4. Historical Evolution of Gurudwaras

Gurudwaras were established by the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, as centres of religious and social activity and for providing food and shelter to the poor and the needy. The history of origin and development of Gurudwaras is as old as that of the Sikh religion itself (T. Singh, 1922).

Guru Nanak was a great traveller. He travelled in all the directions. According to the Janam Sakhis, Guru Nanak, wherever he went during the course of his extensive travels, organised a congregation and left behind a sangat or assembly of his followers. He called upon his followers to establish dharamsals (places of worship) for the purpose of meeting and singing hymns together. The first Sikh shrine was probably established by Guru Nanak at Kartarpur on the bank of the River Ravi where he settled down after his return from his travels. It was then a simple dharamsal, where his disciples gathered to listen to his discourses and to sing hymns (K. Singh, 2004b). Gradually, a network of dharamsals sprang up all over the country (G. Dhillon, 2000). These dharamsals were spread throughout the length and breadth of South-East Asia. Bhai Gurdas has mentioned about the existence of these congregations locating them from Kabul in Afghanistan to Decca in Bengal (modern Bangladesh) (K. Singh, 2002).

It was in these congregations in the dharamsals that the followers learned the principles of Sikhism and freed themselves from the prejudice of caste system. Mohsin Fani now Maubid or Zulifkar Ardistani, the author of the Dabistan-i-Mazahab, had witnessed practices of the Sikh religion at Kiratpur under the direct guidance of the sixth Guru
Hargobind and the seventh Guru Har Rai, in the fourth decade of the seventeenth century. According to him, the Sikhs ignored the monopoly of the Brahmins in social and religious matters and men from all castes could freely enter the Sikh dharamsals and partake of the sacred prasad and free meals served in the Guru-ka-langar (J. Singh, 1999).

In order to give realistic shape to his teachings and ideas of unity, equality and fraternity and to do away with the prevailing distinctions of castes and classes, Guru Nanak started the twin institutions of Sangat and Pangat by virtue of which high and low, rich and poor, men and women could sit, pray and dine together in Sangat (G. Dhillon, 2000). Sangat referred to as local religious congregation composed of Sikhs who were drawn to the Guru's ideals and mission, and included people from all castes. This concept of sangat became very popular and acquired great importance and sanctity. dharamsals were the centres where the sangat met regularly for the purpose of congregational worship. The organisation of sangat, dharamsals and congregational worship were important steps for building the Sikh Panth. The dharamsal soon became a community centre where, apart from worship and religious ceremonies connected with births, baptisms, marriages, and obsequies were also held. There was a free community kitchen (guru-ka-langar), and a school where children learnt the Gurmukhi, their daily prayers, Sikh music and scriptures (K. Singh, 2004b). Gradually, they developed into centres of education and higher learning, shelters for the poor, the needy and the orphans and as resting places for travellers. In fact, a Dharamsal was a guidance centre wherein the persons attending the sangat were taught the teachings of Sikh Gurus and the Sikh way of life. A Dharamsal served to be the most continuous and reliable centre of education for the students of Sikhism (H. Dhillion, 2009).

Historically, Gurudwara succeeded dharamsal. Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh Guru, compiled pothi or granth (later Guru Granth Sahib) of holy hymns in 1604. In addition to his own work, he included the compositions of his four spiritual predecessors and of some of the Indian saints and sufis. He installed the first copy of the Granth in the Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar. Copies of the Granth began to be devotedly transcribed and the devotees carried them for installation in their respective Dharamsals. Respectfully, the Granth was called the Granth Sahib and was treated as a sacred personification of the Gurus’ preaching (H. Dhillion, 2009). By the time of Guru
Hargobind (1595-1644) the number of Sikhs had increased considerably, and some of them had also got copies of the pothi (the Adi Granth) compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, which were kept in their respective Dharamsals. The Dharamsals where then pothi was placed, therefore, began to be considered and called the Guru’s dwelling, Gurudwara. The designation became universal after the Gurship was passed to the holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 (B. Dhillon, 2002).

3.4.1. Administrative Setup of Gurudwaras

Historically construction, maintenance and administration of the dharamsal complex had always been the obligation of the Sikh sangat. Their maintenance and administration was the obligation of the local Sikh community (B. Dhillon, 2002). The Sikh Gurus directed their Sikhs to earn their livelihood honestly and share it with others. Charity in the form of voluntary contribution by the Sikh sangat was the major financial source of a Dharamsal (J. Singh, 1999).

Gurudwaras are in existence for more than five centuries, and have gone through various stages in their evolution and development. The community or local Dharamsals were known by the name of place to which they belonged. Some of them gained prominence after the name of a leading Sikh responsible for looking after their day to day functioning. Financially, these dharamsals were self-dependent. With the introduction of manji system and later the masand system (explained in the following paragraphs), the management of these dharamsals came under the purview of manjidars and masands (leaders of a group). However, some of the dharamsals remained in charge of trusted Sikhs who were well-known for their knowledge of Gurbani, personal piety, honesty and dedication to the Guru.

The twin institutions of sangat and pangat were continued by the successors of Guru Nanak. The third Guru Amar Das felt that he alone could not minister to the needs of the thousands of Sikhs who wanted his guidance. For further extending the work of spreading the teachings of Guru Nanak he established twenty two Manjis (seats) or districts. The mission work became more regular (K. Singh, 2004b). Each sangat was placed under the charge of a respected leader, appointed either by Guru Nanak himself or nominated by the sangat. The Guru appointed his representatives as a leader of each sangat. Bhai Lallo was deputed for preaching in the North and Sheikh Sajjan in the South-west of the Punjab. Gopal Das was in Benares, Jhanda Badi in Bushair, Budhan Shah in Kiratpur, Mahi in Mahisar, Devlut in Lushai (Tibet), Salis Bai in Patna and
Behar, Baja Shivnabh in Ceylon, and a host of other workers were scattered over the areas visited by Guru Nanak (T. Singh, 1922). Various representatives appointed by Guru along with the *sangat* of their area used to visit the Guru regularly. The position of this leader was called *manji*. *Manji* literally means a couch. It was customary for the Gurus to receive visitors while sitting on their *manji* and Gurus representatives did likewise preaching to the people while sitting on a *manji* or cot (K. Singh, 2004b).

During the Guru period, the most important *dharamsal* was that of the Guru, while the others were looked after by the local Sikhs. The Guru besides leading the Sikhs in the daily morning and evening prayers, used to oversee all religious services like *kirtan* and recitation of Gurbani. As the langar was an essential part of the *dharamsal*, preparation of food and other arrangements was an important duty which was always assigned to a most respectful and resourceful Sikh. Towards the end of 17th century, the traditional Sikh sources refer to the office of Diwan at main *dharamsal*, who perhaps assisted the Guru to manage the finances (B. Dhillon, 2002).

In view of the increasing need for money to carry out the work on the holy tanks and the development of the new town of Amritsar, the fourth Guru, Ram Das, established new order of Sikh preachers called *masands* (M. Singh, 2008). In the pre-Khalsa period, the most important person to administer the *dharamsals* at regional level was the *masand*. They were the appointees and representatives of the Guru, and carried on missionary work on behalf of the Guru at distant places.

These *masands* were fully conversant with the doctrines of the faith. They were full-time religious preachers who, in addition to the propagation of Sikhism and to organise worship, were also required to collect the voluntarily contributions offered by the devotees and to pass them on to the Guru’s headquarters. At the end of a year, on the Baisakhi day, *masands* used to come to the Guru along with the *sangat* of their respective area to render account of the offerings received and to report on the progress of the propagation work. The money they brought yearly to the Guru was voluntary offering of the Sikhs according to their means (T. Singh, 1922).

The fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, further elaborated and reorganized this new order of *masands*. He also ordered that in future every Sikh was to set aside *dasvandh* (one-tenth) of his income for the Guru’s fund and to forward it through recognised *masand*. These measures, apart from ensuring a regular flow of offerings for the construction of the city and the temple at Amritsar, also resulted in the emergence of a large number of
new followers in the country (T. Singh, 1922).
These *Masands* along with the *sangat*, were the pivot of the Sikh organisation and served the Sikh cause commendably. They were chosen for their faithfulness and integrity. But during the days of the seventh Guru, Har Rai, the absence of the Guru from the main centres of Sikh activity (Amritsar, Goindwal, Kartarpur, Khadoor Sahib, and Kiratpur), the opposition of the other claimants to Guruship, and the collapse of the *masand* system seriously affected the advancement of the community. Guru Har Rai tried to compensate for this by undertaking a tour of the various Sikh centres and by reorganising the missions. During his tenure as Guru some notable conversions were made among the landed families of the Punjab (K. Singh, 2004a).

During the brief period of the Guru Harkishan, the *masands* came out in open support of Ram Rai and other claimants to the *Gurugaddi*. By the time, Guru Tegh Bahadur took over as the ninth Guru, the *masands* had become so daring that they denied the Guru’s entry into the Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar (M. Singh, 2008). The *masands* started exploiting the Sikhs by looting the poor and threatened persons opposing their conduct with the Guru’s curse. They became arrogant and defiant. Thus, when the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, found that the *masands* were misusing the offerings and instead of propagating the Sikh faith they were promoting their self interest, he abolished their Order. The Guru even commanded his followers not to have any kind of association with the *Masands* and ordered “henceforth the Sikhs should themselves present their offerings to the Guru, and that the employment of the *masands* for the purpose shall cease” (M. Singh, 2008).

Coincidently, he appointed Bhai Mani Singh as the Head *Granthi* in June 1699 thereby restoring the *maryada* at the Harmandar. He served there until 1717. This ended six decades of control by *masands*, who by then had completely identified themselves with Hinduism. Bhai Mani Singh provided wise spiritual leadership to the Sikhs. He encouraged Sikhs to ingrain the two fundamental doctrines into their daily lives that the tenth Guru gave the Sikhs for leading a life - the concept of the *Granth* and the *Panth*. Bhai Mani Singh was successful in inculcating, in the consciousness of the community, the recognition of Amritsar as the politico-religious headquarters of Sikhism. He also helped to perfect the concept of *Sarbat Khalsa* and *Gurmata* as organisational tools for managing religious affairs and institutions (M. Singh, 2001).
The struggle and persecution of the Sikhs was severest during the early and mid 18th century (M. Singh, 2008). During the days of persecution when the Sikhs along with their preachers were forced into exile outside the Punjab, the Sikh shrines passed into the control of the udasis. These udasis professed Sikhism and were familiar with Sikh scriptures and devoted themselves chiefly to reciting and illustrating the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. They did not strictly conform to its outward symbols of Sikhism and could thus escape persecution. The udasis rendered an important service to the Sikh religion by keeping the Gurudwaras going during this period. They were highly respected as men of high moral character and integrity. Most of the udasis who worked as priest in different Gurudwaras were not attached to any particular shrine or to its wealth and property but moved from place to place. There were, however, some who established institutions, admitted chelas (or followers) and became heads of their deras, akharas, and Gurudwaras and they came to be known as mahants. In the earlier stages, these mahants enjoyed the confidence and respect of the sangat of their areas (M. Singh, 2008).

In accordance with the Sikh tradition, in the earlier days the priests or in charge of dharamsals were trusted Sikhs, who were well-known for their knowledge of Gurbani, devoutness, honesty and dedication to the Guru. They did not look upon the offerings as their personal property and offerings were utilised by them for the purpose of running free kitchens and other similar works for the welfare of the community. The income of the shrines was very limited and hardly sufficient to maintain the sangat. There was no temptation for them. There are many examples of Sikh preachers who refused to accept jagirs. For example, Bhai Lakha Singh refused to accept the jagir of the area of Sujanpur granted to him by Sardar Amar Singh Bapa in 1764. Bhai Bhagat Singh refused to accept the grant of seven villages made by Sardar Sada Singh Bahrwalia (T. Singh, 1922).

The rise of the powerful Sikh misalsdars in the later eighteenth century and the subsequent coming into political power of Ranjit Singh in 1799 led to the institutionalization of the Sikh religion (M. Singh, 2008). Ranjit Singh captured Lahore in 1799 and proclaimed himself Maharaja of the Punjab on 12th April, 1801. Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s forty years (1799-1839) remain the golden age of Sikh political achievement (K. Singh, 2004b). During the second half of the eighteenth century and after, as the Sikhs acquired political power, Gurudwaras sprang
up in the areas of Sikh habitations and on the sites connected with the lives of the Gurus and the events in the Sikh history.

With the establishment of the Sikh Raj, the security and splendour of the Gurudwaras was ensured. Sikh royalty and courtiers began the practice of giving large endowments. Ranjit Singh appointed Giani Surat Singh as the hereditary manager of Harmandar (M. Singh, 2001). These developments saw the introduction of complicated rites and ceremonies in Sikh religious practices and the emergence of rich and powerful mahants. These mahants nominated their successors to the gaddis. Their nominees were accepted by the sangats as both the mahants and their chelas enjoyed popular esteem and confidence. But this tradition of purity seems to have deteriorated as a result of increase in their income, derived from revenue-free jagirs (M. Singh, 2008).

Most of the historical Gurudwaras were gifted with liberal grants of revenue free land by the ruling chiefs and nobility. However, this well-intentioned charity, however, in many cases led to the rise of hereditary priesthood which led to corruption. With the sudden increase in the income of the mahants of some of the important Gurudwaras, there came a change in the style of living of some of them. When the income of Gurudwaras from the various sources was small, the mahants used to consult the Sikh sangats of the area on various matters regarding the management of the shrines. But with the opening of a network of canals in the Punjab during the second half of the nineteenth century, there was an enormous increase in the income from revenue free lands attached to Gurudwaras. As a result, the mahants and their chelas began to convert the property of the Gurudwaras into their personal possessions. This was in obvious disregard to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh scriptures. Many superstitions and corrupt practices began to prevail, initially unobserved and then in defiance of the Sikh sentiment. Idols were set up and openly worshipped in the many Gurudwara complexes (T. Singh, 1922).

Gradually, bad characters started gathering around them as chelas to lead easy and immoral lives. Many mahants and their chelas converted sacred places like Gurudwaras to brothels and dens of gamblers and drunkards and bad characters began to haunt these places with impunity. Mahants kept mistresses and had children from prostitutes whom they provided with millions worth of properties out of Gurudwara funds (K. Singh, 2004a).
Sangat Singh has stated that Ranjit Singh caused irreparable damage to Sikhism by his dismantling of the traditional management of the shrines. Taking over of the management of the shrines by the state authorities was destructive of the Sikh values and later paved the way for the British takeover and management of the shrines (S. Singh, 1995).

Mahants had custody of Gurudwaras when the British assumed power in Punjab. mahants were Bedis or Sodhis, direct descendants of the Sikh Gurus. Many Sikhs showed reverence toward these mahants due to their lineage. Some of these mahants lived a life of immorality. They had, contrary to Sikh maryada, introduced the Hindu custom of Puja of gods and goddesses in some Gurudwaras in addition to other Brahmin practices (M. Singh, 2001).

3.4.2. Religious and Social Awakening of the Sikhs

After the decline of Sikh power and annexation of the Punjab to the British Empire in 1849, most of the Sikh shrines passed into the control of the hereditary mahants and the Government-nominated managers and custodians (T. Singh, 1922). One of the first things the British did after annexing Punjab was to assume authority over Sikh Gurudwaras similar to what Ranjit Singh did earlier. The British exercised overall control of the Gurudwaras, details of worship remained with the mahants, thus ensuring their allegiance. The British gave legal recognition to mahants’ ownership of Gurudwaras and the attached lands. This further cemented their alliance. The British had known for some time that Gurudwaras in general, and Harmandar in particular, were the nerve centres of the Sikh community. They also knew that the one who controlled these institutions would control the community. For geo-political reasons the British had concluded that they must keep the Sikh community under check for prosperity of their rule (M. Singh, 2001).

The English right from the annexation of Punjab regarded the Sikh shrines as fulcrums of power and authority. They used Gurudwaras apart from Sikh aristocracy as channels of communication and individual control of the Sikhs. They continued their dharmarths (revenue free grants) and in some cases virtually controlled their administration. This legitimised the position of managers, leading families and other groups or organisations. The British followed the precedent of Ranjit Singh in appointing a manager for the Harmandar Sahib, Amritsar, to justify their appointing a manager of the shrine (S. Singh, 1995).
The British modified the arrangement in 1859 by drawing up a *dastur-ul-amal* (regulations of administration) which provided them a more informal and covert connection with the Harmandar Sahib administration. It provided for appointment of a *Sarbrah* or manager who was to be assisted by an advisory committee of nine baptised Sikhs (S. Singh, 1995). Many *mahants* were practicing rituals and ceremonies which were totally against the ideals and the teachings of Sikhism, like not letting people of “lower caste” into Gurudwaras, publicly smoking, Idol worshipping of various Gods and Goddesses and holding other rituals not followed by the Sikh Gurus. There had also been complaints of immorality against them.

In reaction to these corrupt and wayward practices and beliefs that had gradually crept in the Sikh community and to reform the Gurudwaras that had gone into the hands of corrupt *mahants* and vested interests, the year 1873 saw the birth of the Singh Sabha. Singh Sabha Movement succeeded in renewing a sense of self-awareness among the Sikhs, it marked a turning-point in Sikh history (M. Singh, 2008). The onset of the Singh Sabha Movement in the 1870’s was the catalyst that made Sikhs realise that their right to control their Gurudwaras was nonexistent. Control and reform of the Gurudwaras became the most burning issue for the Sikhs at the turn of the 20th century. The entire Sikh community put up an epic struggle to free Gurudwaras (M. Singh, 2001).

The Singh Sabha movement and its activities had a much wider appeal to the Sikh masses. As in the mind of the Sikhs, the question of purification and freedom of the Gurudwaras has always been associated with their dignity, and no sacrifices have been considered too great for bringing them back under the control of the devout Sikhs. The movement gained quick support from the Sikh masses and elite, prominent Sikh scholars of the time as Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Kahan Singh, Bhai Ditt Singh and Professor Gurmukh Singh joined the ranks of the Singh Sabha (M. Singh, 2008). This socio-religious movement among the Sikhs exposed the evils which had slowly crept into the Sikh social and religious life and indirectly inculcated in them a desire for reform. It influenced the entire Sikh Community and reoriented its outlook towards social and religious beliefs.

The reason behind the success of the Singh Sabha was the motivation to search for Sikh identity and self-assertion. It touched Sikhism to its very roots. Everything that was against Guru’s teaching was rejected. Rites and customs considered consistent with
Sikh doctrine and tradition were established. The growing political unrest and general awakening among the Sikhs masses in the early twentieth century prepared the ground for the coming Akali struggle directed against the mahants and other vested interests in Sikh shrines on the one hand and against the British imperialism in Punjab on the other (G. Dhillon, 1989).

### 3.4.3. Struggle for Reforms in the Sikh Shrines

With the general awakening among the Sikhs masses in the early twentieth century, they began to disapprove the widespread mismanagement and rampant corruption in most of the Sikh shrines under mahants. The Gurudwara Reform Movement started because of the desire to revive the Sikh values and traditions once again. It responded more specifically to the authority and misdeeds of the mahants, who were believed to have been stealing the offerings and other income of the Gurudwaras for their personal uses. Sikh leaders realised that purification and improvement of shrines was not possible till the Gurudwaras were freed from mahants and official control (G. Dhillon, 1989). Sikh leaders and pro-Sikh newspapers like the Khalsa Akhbar, Khalsa Sewak (Punjabi) of Lahore and the Khalsa Advocate (English) played important role in creating awareness among the masses about malpractices and misdeeds of mahants. Sikh press, the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the Singh Sabhas in different areas and the Sikh upper class and other titleholders, also made some attempts to seek help from the British Government in the purification and taking back the control of the Sikh shrines. Various resolutions were passed by the Singh Sabhas condemning the actions of the mahants and urging them to improve their ways. But neither the mahants nor the Government officials in the Punjab paid any attention to these resolutions (M. Singh, 2008).

It had its impact on the Chief Khalsa Diwan which, under pressure from Singh Sabha, adopted a resolution in 1906 seeking transfer of the management of the Harmandar Sahib to representatives of the community. This was a direct challenge to the administrative control of the government formalised in 1859. The government chose to ignore the resolution. In May 1907, the Sikhs urged formation of a ‘Gurudwara Sambhaal Committee’ (a committee for the control of Gurudwaras) having wider implications (S. Singh, 1995).

The Sikhs by now opened up and went in for Dharam Prachar (propagation of faith), through updeshaks, pracharaks, and kirtni jathas in a big way within the Punjab and especially in Sind where they met a great success. This marked the period of self-
assertion by the Sikh community. Sikh preachers like Sant Attar Singh of Mastuana, Sant Sangat Singh of Kamalia and Bhai Hira Singh Ragi did great service and they went in for prachar (disseminating of Gurus teachings by discourses) and kirtan (devotional singing of Guru’s hymns). Singh Sabhas cropped up in various parts of the Punjab, establishing new Gurudwaras and laying emphasis on the spread of education. Sunder Singh Majithia and Harbans Singh Attari started leading preaching jathas to Sind where they established a number of Singh Sabhas and spread the message of the Gurus (S. Singh, 1995).

Realising that simply passing of resolutions will not help the community; Sikh leaders advocated the adoption of other methods like boycotting of the temples, exerting greater public pressure on the mahants and even litigation. All these methods were tried but nothing positive came out of it. Boycotting did not prove effective as mahants of most of the historic shrines, in which reforms were sought, received huge income from the tax-free jagirs attached to the shrines and therefore were able to withstand the reduction in income from stoppage of the offerings of devotees in case of boycott. Public pressure on the mahants also failed to produce any results, they used to eagerly promise to improve their functioning when confronted by the sangat, but reverted back to their old ways as soon as the pressure of public criticism subsided (M. Singh, 2008).

The reformers then thought of bringing improvements in the Gurudwara management through litigation and writ partitions were filed in courts. In the Charitable and Religious Endowments Act, 1920, some rights were given to the beneficiaries in the control and management of temples. Therefore, the Sikh reformers, in the beginning, went to the courts of Law in the hope of obtaining control of their sacred places. Here too they didn’t get relief and disappointment was in store for them (M. Singh, 2008).

The widespread mismanagement and rampant corruption in most of the Sikh shrines under mahants, enjoying the patronage of the British Government, attracted a mass agitation of Sikhs which lasted for 5 years from 1920 to 1925. After being convinced that because of the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the legal system for reform they will not get justice from court of law, the reformers now organised themselves in the form of local Akali jathas. Peaceful agitation was adopted as a weapon to fight the mahants controlling the Sikh shrines on the one hand and the British bureaucratic machinery in the Punjab on the other. This new weapon, proved very effective and the Akali reformers were able to dislodge the mahants and other vested interests in the Sikh
shrines from their hereditary positions and the Government from its unreasonable stand in the course of their five-year (1920-1925) struggle in the province.

To begin with, the agitation for reform was initiated by the local Akali jathas in their respective areas but shortly thereafter two representative bodies of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) and the Shiromani Akali Dal, came into existence. In the course of their struggle these two bodies were not only able to obtain control over all the important Sikh shrines through peaceful agitation and passive sufferings, but also to strengthen the forces of nationalism in the Punjab by ejecting the mahants, the Government-appointed managers and other vested interests in the Sikh community. Over three hundred large and small Gurudwaras were liberated by the Akalis.

The British government ultimately gave in under public pressure and passed, in the first instance, Sikh Gurudwaras and Shrines Act, 1922, in which a committee was nominated by the government to take over control of the Gurudwaras. This, however, was not accepted by the Akali leadership, the morcha (agitation) continued which forced the government to work out another draft. Akali leadership was consulted this time and their principal demand about the shrines being handed over or management to a representative body of the Sikhs was conceded. The Bill was moved in the Punjab Legislative Council by Sardar Tara Singh of Moga on 7 May 1925 and endorsed by another Sikh member, Bhai Jodh Singh. The Bill became operational on 1st November, 1925, known as ‘The Sikh Gurudwaras Act’. The mahants and their rituals and ceremonies were removed from all the Gurudwaras and Sikh rituals were restored (M. Singh, 2008).

Once the important Sikh shrines came under Akali control, the mahants incharge of smaller Gurudwaras either voluntarily submitted to the authority of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee or were made to surrender their shrines and the jagirs attached to them under the provisions of the ‘Sikh Gurudwaras and Shrines Bill’.

This period of the Akali movement is the glorious period of Sikh history of the twentieth century. The Government had to yield and the control of all historic Gurudwaras in the then Punjab state was transferred to a representative body of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee, under the Gurudwaras Act, 1925 (M. Singh, 2008).
3.4.4. The concept of Kar Sewa

The word *Kar* simply means act, action, work, labour, service, etc. In Sanskrit as well as in Persian, *Sewa* means selfless service. So, *Kar-Sewa* means any selflessly performed physical work, labour or service. It is a voluntary contribution of physical labour for construction, repair or renovation of structures, cleaning operations of sacred tanks of Gurudwaras undertaken by the community and it holds a special significance in the Sikh tradition. Sikh Religion is full with the sense of selfless-service, whether it in the sphere of Social works, humanity or construction of Gurudwaras. Every Sikh considers it a privilege to participate in *kar-sewa*, as *sewa* was preached by the Gurus. The inauguration of the *kar-sewa* is marked by a ceremony of *Ardas* for successful completion of the task in the presence of gathered volunteers under the leadership of *Panj Piare* (the Five Elect).

The construction of historical and other Sikh shrines has been done through voluntary contributions of money, material and physical labour. It is the result of the selfless devotion and dedication of the devotees; unmindful of their status, caste or creed. This voluntary labour or *kar-sewa* by devotees has played a major role in construction of Sikh shrines right from the early stages of Sikhism. The concept of *kar-sewa* dates back to the times of the Sikh Gurus who took keen interest in founding and developing new towns, and construction activities. The first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev, founded Kartarpur town now in Pakistan, near Dera Baba Nanak. Subsequently, the various towns were got constructed and developed by Sikh Gurus like Khadoor Sahib by Guru Angad Dev, Goindwal by Guru Amar Dass, Amritsar by Guru Ram Dass, Tarn Taran by Guru Arjan Dev, Kiratpur Sahib by Guru Hargobind Sahib and Anandpur Sahib by Guru Teg Bahadur.

This tradition of building activities was carried forward by the Sikh saints. In the 20th century, the modern era of *kar-sewa* was revived by Sikh saints, like Baba Gurmukh Singh, Baba Jeewan Singh, Baba Harbans Singh, Baba Jhanda Singh, Baba Dalip Singh, Baba Uttam Singh, Baba Kharak Singh, Baba Jagtar Singh and Baba Sadhu Singh. The main idea behind the *kar-sewa* was to maintain and preserve the built heritage of the community without any vested interest. The concept of *kar-sewa* is unique in Sikh religion. In the past leaders of *kar-sewa* groups led very simple and truly religious life and had no personal ambitions. They were fully devoted to Sikhism and *kar-sewa* and dedicated their lives to this cause.
3.5. Architectural Evolution of the Gurudwaras

An ideal Gurudwara is the one where everyone is welcome, and one gets peace of mind and spiritual uplift. It should have the facilities to make it a place where everyone can go with freedom, like an honoured guest. A visitor is provided shelter, food and bedding free of cost (Khokhar, 2003). Entering a Gurudwara is a metaphor for entering into a spiritual process. The form of sacred architecture follows largely from this conception of spiritual process.

The character of a Sikh Gurudwara reflects local architectural style and the material and skills to which they relate. The main form and style of the Sikh Gurudwara was established during 1587-1601 after the construction of the Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar. The architecture of Gurudwaras across India may vary in form and scale. However, the basic elements of the Gurudwaras are the same. The following section describes the evolution of the Gurudwara and the development of their architectural styles along with their materials of construction. The design of a Gurudwara comprises of a simple rectangular or a square hall. The hall invariably is covered with ribbed doom and is accessible from all the sites. The Guru Granth Sahib (the holy book) is placed in this hall. The orientation of the building is not standardised. There may be one or more entrances to the complex. But in most of the cases, there is a main entrance portal, the darshani Deodi, followed by an uncovered passage leading to the Gurudwara. If the size and scale of the site permits a large tank with a pillared cloister becomes an integral part of the complex. The Pilaster is an important element in Sikh architecture (Bhui, 1999).

3.5.1. Elements of a Gurudwara

Gurudwara buildings have historically evolved to cater to the needs of the Sikh sangat. These include the main hall for prakash of Guru Granth Sahib and the attending sangat, resting room for Guru Granth Sahib, Langar building, kitchen, office complex, Sarai (lodging facilities for pilgrims) and accommodation of granthis (priests) and sewadars (volunteers). A library and a museum etc. are other buildings that can be added to the main shrine depending upon historical importance of the Gurudwara or on the number of visitors to a particular shrine (G. Singh, 1998).

It was the latter half of the 18th century that the Gurudwara structures began to acquire a definite form. Similar to the terminology used to distinguish the basic components of a Gothic Church (for example nave, aisles, chancel, spire, etc), the common elements of a Sikh Gurudwara are as follows:
Sanctum Santorum (Darbar Sahib): A hall called Darbar Sahib, houses the holy book “the Guru Granth Sahib” resting on a raised platform, on top of which a canopy is hung. Devotees leave their offerings in a box called golak in front of the Guru Granth Sahib. Here people assemble as devotees and can sit as a congregation to listen to the readings from the Guru Granth Sahib, meditate and to sing and recite its verses. This hall in most modern Gurudwaras is large and can accommodate many hundreds of devotees.

Sukhashan Room (Rest Room for the Guru Granth Sahib): After completion of the daily rituals in a Gurudwara, Guru Granth Sahib is placed for resting in a separate room overnight; this room is also called as Sach Khand or Sukhashan Room. This room is provided in all Gurudwaras whether large or small.

The Nishan Sahib (Sikh flag): The Nishan sahib is an integral part of a Gurudwara unless, Nishan Sahib - the Sikh Flag, flutters on or at the place, it is not considered a Gurudwara; it is fixed within the Gurudwara complex. The tradition of fixing a nishan sahib is said to have started by the sixth Guru, Hargobind, he installed two Nishan Sahibs in front of Akal Takht at Amritsar depicting temporal and spiritual power. It is a steel pole draped in yellow or blue covering called chola. The flag which is triangular bears the Sikh emblem and one can spot a Sikh Gurudwara from a distance because of this (Kalsi, 1997).

Sarovar (Holy Pond): Sarovar or the holy ponds are found in most of the Gurudwaras. The Harmandar Sahib is situated amidst the holy sarovar. Devotees take a holy dip in the waters of this sarovar. Not only Sikhism, but almost all the religions have attached high importance to water. In one way or the other, the holy water is used in the respective religions to perform various ceremonies (H. Singh, 2008).

Langar: The institution of Guru Ka Langar is closely associated with a Gurudwara and is as old as Sikhism itself. It was started by Guru Nanak and carried forward by his successors (H. Dhillion, 2009). It served the dual purpose of feeding the poor and eliminating the caste and status prejudices and distinctions. Guru Nanak took practical steps to break the vicious hold of caste system by starting free community kitchens or Guru Ka Langar in all centres and persuading his followers, irrespective of their castes, to sit and dine together (K. Singh, 2004a).

According to Bhai Kahan Singh the word langar is derived from a Sanskrit word analgrah, meaning ‘the cooking place’ (Nabha, 1930). Langar, in short, helps in
teaching service, spreading equality, removing untouchability and other such evils and prejudices that spring from social and racial distinctions.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh made grants of *jagirs* to Gurudwaras for the maintenance of *langars*. Similar endowments were created by other Sikh rulers as well. Today, practically every Gurudwara has a *langar* supported by the community in general. Establishment of *langars* became a continuing tradition of the Sikh society (J. Singh, 1999).

*Parikarma* (Circumambulatory): The *parikrama* meaning the ambulatory passageway for circumambulation is a passage which leads to the main Shrine. While walking the *parikrama* one is supposed to be binding and uniting with the almighty. It consists of enclosed corridor or open passage around the outside of *Sanctum Santorum*. *Parikrama* is provided in most of the Gurudwaras.

*Deodi*: Many Gurudwaras have a *Deodi*, an entrance or a gateway, through which one has to pass before reaching the shrine. A *Deodi* is often an impressive structure with an impressive gateway. The visitors get the first glimpse of the *Sanctum Sanctorum* from the *Deodi*.

*Karah Prasad Area*: *Karah Prasad* means a religious offering’ it is sweet flour based recipe that is offered to all visitors to the Sikh Shrines. This is regarded as food blessed by the Guru.

*Joda Ghar*: It’s a place to keep footwear before entering the Gurudwara premises. Here pilgrims take off their shoes and hand them over to the persons performing service (*sewa*) in the Joda Ghar. The shoes are collected by the volunteers to keep in the racks and a token is issued for retrieval.

*Gathri Ghar* (Cloak Room): The visitors are required to deposit items, which are either not allowed or they themselves do not wish to carry at the luggage store called *Gathri Ghar*.

3.5.2. The Evolution

Every Architectural style undoubtedly reflects distinctive design elements and construction principles that represent a particular culture and era. In this context, a Gurudwara is not only the abode of God and place of worship, but is also the cradle of knowledge, art, architecture and culture. Gurudwaras have greatly influenced the socio-cultural life of the Sikhs and gave continuity to traditional Sikh values. The evolution of
Gurudwara architecture is marked by adherence to the religious considerations that had continued over last few centuries.

There are many questions that are related to the idea of what constitutes ‘Sikh Architecture’. The most prevailing view seems to be that Sikh architecture possesses a set of architectural vocabulary that is indisputable. The most consistent perception of the Sikh architectural vocabulary is represented by the many historical Gurudwaras such as the Harmandar Sahib complex in Amritsar, Takht Keshgarh Sahib at Anandpur Sahib, Darbar Sahib at Dera Baba Nanak, Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran, and in numerous other such Gurudwaras. This study is important to pave the way for a more enlightened intellectual discourse towards a theoretical construction of the idea of ‘Sikh Architecture’.

The Sikh religion and its philosophy have greatly influenced Gurudwara architecture in its evolutionary process. Therefore this dissertation through documentary research and other archival, literary and theoretical investigation of research works on the Sikh architecture brings out the concepts that have been adopted since Guru Period for the design of the Gurudwaras, the methods involved in the construction of the Gurudwara structures along with the skill and effort it took to build such edifices. Together these aspects bring out the style and design philosophy behind the construction of the Sikh Gurudwaras which is as relevant today as it used to be in the times of the Sikh Gurus.

The span of over five centuries of Sikh history, beginning with Babar’s invasion, this land has known no leisure or peace to direct its energy into creative channels. Punjab saw a close knit chain of foreign invasions which brought in plunder and pillage, unrest, instability, human loss and destruction. The rise of the powerful Sikh Misldars (chieftains) in the later eighteenth century and the subsequent coming into political power of Ranjit Singh in 1799 and his rule for the next forty years (1799-1839) remains the golden age of Sikh political achievement. With the establishment of the Sikh Raj, the security and splendour of the Gurudwaras was ensured. Sikh royalty and courtiers began the practice of giving large endowments. As a result, Gurudwara sprang up in the areas of Sikh habitations and on the sites connected with the lives of the Gurus and with events in Sikh history. We can find Gurudwaras all over the world where Sikhs are settled and especially in Punjab the Gurudwaras can be found everywhere varying from small villages to the large cities. The Sikh faith, worships a creator God who is infinite, yet as close as our own heart. The Gurudwaras express this sense
of divine presence. These are designed to connect and carry devotees towards the God (K. Brown, 1999).

3.5.2.1. Early Sikh Shrines

It was during early times that the Gurudwaras (Dharmsals) were simple and humble in architectural expression. They were utilised within the traditions set by the Guru. The architectural style adopted by the Sikhs was direct reflection of their religious beliefs. Gurudwaras were constructed with the resources the community had at that time. This kind of architecture had matured while facing certain factors such as the climate, the availability of materials, political adversaries, the religious purposes and the dominant cultures of that time, these factors played decisive role in the architectural development of Gurudwaras.

Sikhs started with very simple abode may be huts or other such types of dwelling units, which have no particular architectural merit. As the earlier structures were simple, small and constructed from less durable materials such as timber, brick and plaster the early examples of Sikh architecture and art have mostly disappeared. There is not much authentic reference material as well as documentary proof of their shape, size and style. But beyond this primitive starting point, it is found that Sikh religious architecture develops along paths of their religious beliefs (K. Brown, 1999).

A Gurudwara usually has a very simple entrance. One can walk right in from any of the entrances provided on all sides. The mass of the walls is always played down. The Nanakshahi bricks used in the earlier construction are concealed behind a layer of smooth plaster which gives it sense of lightness. This effect is increased by the delicate pilasters and blind archways that decorate its surfaces. Most of the early historical Gurudwaras are nearly always square plan, though some are rectangular and octagonal plans also. They are invariably a single storey

![Figure 3.1: Possible Sketches of early Dharmsal(derived from Janam Sakhis)](image)
structure and easily approachable. And in most of the cases, Gurudwaras have doors on all four sides so that they can be entered from any side. The focus is, therefore, on the centre, where the sacred book, the Guru Granth Sahib, is placed. True worship lies in acknowledging it as the centre of life, and in a Gurudwara there is always a path which one can walk around as he contemplates the Supreme Being represented by the Guru Granth Sahib in the centre (K. Brown, 1999).

Old photographs of some of the Gurudwaras are available which were constructed during the time of the misls around mid eighteen century. They are Holgarh Sahib (Figure: 3.2) and Guru Ka Lahore (Figure: 3.3), both of these Gurudwara are in Anandpur Sahib (District Ropar). Both of these shrines were nothing more than a simple square room. Both these original structures were demolished and new Gurudwaras were constructed at the respective sites. Gurudwara Holgarh Sahib was a square structure. On one side, there was central doorway flanked by two blind recessed arches on each side. On the remaining three sides there was one recessed arch with opening (Arshi, 1986). In the old building of the Gurudwara Guru Ka Lahore, the outer circumambulation path surrounds it. It had a flat roof.
with projected eave at parapet level. On one side, there was central doorway flanked by two blind recessed arches on each side. On the remaining three sides there was one recessed arch with opening (Arshi, 1986).

A third example of such early Gurudwaras is the Hari Mandir Sahib in Kiratpur (Figure 3.4); it also has the same design, a square room with the façade on all four sides had a central doorway flanked by two blind recessed cusped arches with niches, opening on all sides and recessed blind arches on the walls. The major difference from previous examples is the addition of a kiosk at the roof level and doorway on all four sides.

Figure 3.4: Gurudwara Hari Mandir Sahib, Kiratpur, Source Arshi

Another such example of Gurudwara constructed during initial phase of evolution is Gurudwara Taru Singh Shaheed, at Lahore (figure: 3.5). The devotees built Gurudwara Shahidganj in memory of Sikh martyrs of the eighteenth century. The Gurudwara is located in the Naulakha Bazaar, Lahore. This was the place where thousands of Sikhs, including the celebrated Bhai Taru Singh, and about 3,000 captives of the Chhota Ghallughara campaign (1746) were executed or tortured to death. The local Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, Lahore, got possession of the Shahidganj in March 1935 and decided to replace the old mosque like building with a new one (“Shahidganj”, n.d.). It is also a small square structure with similar facade treatment to Gurudwara Harimandir Sahib at Kiratpur, but it has more elaborate detailing. It has a dome and curved cusp eave on top of the structure with a cupola on each of the four corners. It has projected
eave in the form of cusped arch at ceiling level with small cupolas on top of it and domical roof had been provided with *kalasa* on top. The decoration of Gurudwaras is already apparent in these examples where as in the initial examples it was very simplistic.

The Tibbi Sahib Gurudwara, Jaito Mandi (Distt. Firozepur) was constructed on high sand dune at Jaitu Mandi in Faridkot district. This place was visited by Guru Gobind Singh in 1704 and the Gurudwara was constructed to commemorate this important event. The date of construction of the Gurudwara is not known, but it is believed that it was constructed by Maharaja Hira Singh (1871-1911) of Nabha in late 19th century. A small shrine constructed on a square plan it has only one entrance on the east side and has domical Bengali roof on top (see figure 3.6). On the top of the roof, there is an inverted lotus-like member holding the *Kalasa*. Some structural additions, like portico, have been made recently (Arshi, 1986).

![Figure 3.6: Gurudwara Tibbi sahib, Jaito Mandi, Dist Faridkot, Source: Arshi](image)

Gurudwara Loh Garh, is located about one mile towards south of Anandpur Sahib. It was one of the fortresses constructed by Guru Gobind Singh for the protection of Anandpur city. But the fort was demolished by the Mughals after the Guru left Anandpur. Later, Sikh Sardars, during Misl period, constructed an octagonal Gurudwara in its place, which was replaced by a new building on an octagonal plan under the supervision of Sant Sewa Singh of Anandgarh (figure 3.7). The original building consisted of an octagonal chamber enclosed with another octagonal Structure, thus a circumambulatory path was formed between the two outer chambers had four gates, one in each side and the other sides of the building had windows in each direction. The roof was provided with the projected eave. The inner chamber had only four gates, one in each side. Its roof was slightly higher than the outer structure. The dome and kiosks were conspicuous by their absence (Arshi, 1986).
Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib (the birth place of the Khalsa) is one of the five Temporal Authorities of Sikhism. Kesgarh Sahib is where the first Khalsa were initiated by Guru Gobind Singh on Baisakhi day March 30, 1699. It is one of the five most sacred places in Sikhism.

The Guru spent 25 years at Anandpur Sahib. This Gurudwara was constructed at the site of one of the five forts constructed by Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib for the defence of the Sikhs. All the forts were joined together with earthworks and underground tunnels. The construction began in 1689 and took over ten years to complete. This Gurudwara was simple square structure with arched doorway on all four sides (figure: 3.8). It had a flat roof on top, at present there stands an impressive Gurudwara on this site (Arshi, 1986).

Gurudwara Gobind Gath was constructed to commemorate the visit of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, by Maharaja Karam Singh of Patiala. After the
victory against the imperial forces at Muktsar, the Guru reached the Bathinda fort and stayed there for some days. The building of the Gurudwara is also a square room with opening on all four sides enclosed further in another square having openings on three sides. At first floor level, the central part is raised. On top of it, there is a dome with a cupola on each of the four corners (Figure: 3.9).

Gurudwara Shahid Ganj Sahib also called Angitha Sahib commemorates the place where the last rites of the Forty Muktas (the Liberated ones), were performed. Guru Gobind Singh himself performed the last rites of the forty Sikhs who laid down their lives in the battle at Muktsar and named the place as Shahid Ganj. A Gurudwara was later constructed here and named Gurudwara Shahid Ganj Sahib (Arshi, 1986).

It has a square room with octagonal space enclosed by thick piers where Guru Granth Sahib is installed (figure: 3.10). On one side, there is a verandah with four arched openings and three blind recessed arches. On other three sides, there are three arched openings in the central part and one blind recessed arch on each side. There is small straight flight staircase leading to the terrace. At terrace level raised drum is provided over which a fluted dome has been provided. The dome crowning the Gurudwara is a simple version of the magnificent lotus-domes.

After the conquest of Sirhind by Sikhs under the leadership of Banda Singh Bahadur in 1710 and later by the Dal Khalsa in 1764, a memorial was raised at the place. When Maharaja Karam Singh of Patiala got
Gurudwara Fatehgarh Sahib rebuilt, he had to search for and determine the exact spot of cremation of Sahibzadas (the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh). The urn containing the ashes was at last discovered and he got a Gurudwara built over it in 1843 and named it Gurudwara Joti Sarup. A century later, in 1944, Maharaja Yadavinder Singh set up a committee for the improvement of Gurudwaras Fatehgarh Sahib (figure 3.11) and Joti Sarup. Consequently two upper storeys and a dome were added to the building in 1955-56. Since then, except for a portion of the original Fort wall, the place has been changed into an entirely new building. The Guru Granth Sahib is placed in the room on the ground floor. A narrow winding staircase leads up to the first floor, a bare room with a low platform in the centre and a lotus dome above (G. Singh, 1995).

The two storeyed edifice was constructed on a raised platform, divan hall on the ground floor, with basement below and a central pavilion on top. The basement called Bhora contains the old brick enclosure believed to be the exact site of the execution of Sahibzadas. At present the inverted lotus at the apex of the dome at the pinnacle is covered on the exterior with gold-plated sheets. The dome is topped by an umbrella shaped gold finial as are the domes of the four kiosks located at each corner of the roof. The three storeyed gateway is topped by decorative kiosks and a clock tower.

The general impression of earlier Sikh shrines is of simple and small structures with little decoration rather than of an impressive structural element having intricate detailing. Even in these simple early Gurudwaras, one can see how aesthetic value is achieved, especially in the Gurudwara at Kiratpur, Gurudwara Taru Sahib at Lahore, Gurudwara Fatehgarh Sahib at Fatehgarh Sahib, and Gurudwara Shahidganj Sahib at Muktsar. In most of these examples, the roof is separated from the lower of the building by wide but very thin eaves. One gets the impression that it is a light weight structure. This effect is further enhanced when the Gurudwara is topped by a dome. Architectural style developed by the Sikhs was deeply rooted in the fundamental beliefs of their people. The Punjab of the 18th century was the period of the Sikh misls (the Sikh confederacies). It was only by breaking their power that Ranjit Singh could unite the entire Punjab and make himself the first Maharaja of the Sikh empire. He was a pious man and built and renovated many Gurudwaras throughout his land. His masterpiece was the Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar, which was renovated by him. Most of the decorative and gold plating of Gurudwara was done during his time (K. Brown,
3.5.2.2. Later Sikh Shrines

From the previous section one can make out what early Sikh shrines looked like. As time went on, Sikhs wanted to place their Gurudwaras in an elaborate setting, to make their Gurudwaras part of a large impressive sanctuary. In most of the large Gurudwara complexes, one can find that the builders had to integrate four elements which had become the fundaments of Gurudwara architecture: the enclosure, its gateway (Deodi), the Gurudwara itself and the pool. An early and attractive example, which probably dates from the time of the mls, is the Gurudwara Ramsar at Amritsar (Figure 3.12). It is situated at about two hundred yards from the Harmandar Sahib, near Chatiwind gate in Amritsar. At this place, Guru Arjan Dev got compiled the Adi-Granth by Bhai Gurdas. The Guru started the excavation of the sacred tank of Ramsar in 1543 and a Gurudwara building was constructed in 1602-03. The date of the construction of the old building of the Gurudwara could not be ascertained. It seems to have been constructed quite late perhaps not before the 18th century (Arshi, 1986). Even this building has been completely demolished and replaced with a new building in 1992.

The old Gurudwara building had a sacred tank in the north, within an enclosure formed by rows of rooms on three sides and an archway in the east. Thus the enclosure formed an open circumambulatory path. The Gurudwara was two storey high. Although it was a relatively simple building, it had some of the features of the shrines built or renovated by Ranjit Singh. The shrine was a square structure with a ribbed dome at the top. The
dome crowning the Gurudwara was a simple version of the magnificent lotus-domes that have been extensively used by the Sikhs in the shrines constructed by them. At the ground floor, it had one doorway on each of its four sides. The area over each doorway was disposed into an arched motif with several cusps on both inside as well as outside. On either side of the gateway, there were some arched niches. The upper parts of these walls were decorated with relief motif of cusped arches resting on fluted pilasters. Lower part of all the four walls of ground floor was cladded with marble slabs and the area above lintel level was gilded both from inside and outside. The external corners were provided with octagonal pilasters. A projected eave ran around the top on all sides of the ground floor and separates the ground floor from the first (K. Brown, 1999).

The enclosure around the Gurudwara had rooms on three of its inner sides facing the courtyard. On the fourth side the entrance to the shrine was gained through an archway (Deodi) on the eastern side. The gateway, a single unit, consists of a rectangular structure with an arched opening, the upper part of which was cusped. Outside the enclosure to the south was the pool which was linked by a doorway through the rooms on that side. The pool was surrounded by a decorated gateway (Figure 3.13 A). Overall appearance of the shrine was quite pleasing. The enclosure surrounded the Gurudwara alone, cutting the pool off from the rest of the complex. In the Gurudwaras, constructed later, these elements were integrated in a better way.

The Gurudwara Damdama Sahib is situated on the right bank of the river Beas, on the Amritsar-Sri Hargobindpur road about two miles from the Sri Hargobindpur. It was constructed to commemorate the visit of the sixth Guru, Hargobind, to this place. It is a double storeyed octagonal structure with the lower part of the exterior having a rectangular doorway on four of its alternate sides. The remaining four sides have curved niches with cusped arched formation (Figure 3.13). The upper part of the exterior has,
on each of its side, a projected balconied window with arched opening. The external corners are furnished with pilasters on all the edges. A projected eave in the shape of arch over the doors and flat at the corner runs around the top on all sides of the first floor and separates the first floor from the ribbed dome on top.

The Gurudwara which attracted the attention of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is the Darbar Sahib at Dera Baba Nanak (Figure 3.14). The general layout is more or less the same as at the Gurudwara Ramsar at Amritsar, but the roof and dome of this Gurudwara are quite different from the other Sikh shrines. The Dome is actually taller than the building itself. It is raised on first floor having floral patterns on the lower part of the octagonal drum above that are two rows of lotus leaf patterns. Maharaja Ranjit Singh expressed his admiration for it by gilding the dome. The elaborate detailing of the dome is in striking contrast with the simplicity of the building. The dome with two rows of lotus leaves with small cupola on top separated from the roof by eave. An arched eave is provided in the central part of each of the side and a flat eave running around the corners with a cupola on top of the each of the four corners. The row of the onion shaped domes between the rows of miniature lotus leaves is dizzying as it run round the bottom of the dome (K. Brown, 1999).

Maharaja Ranjit Singh showed his respect for this shrine by gilding it. He honoured it even more by copying its design exactly when he himself got built the Gurudwara Angitha Sahib at Khadoor Sahib (Figure 3.15). The splendid archway, added later, unfortunately detracts from the impact of the Gurudwara which originally was identical to the one at Dera Baba Nanak. The Gurudwara is surrounded by an enclosure with rooms on all sides, but the most striking feature of the entire complex is the

Figure 3.14: Gurudwara Darbar Sahib, Dera Baba Nanak

Figure 3.15: Khadoor Sahib, Source Mahnkosh
gateway that leads into the complex (Figure 3.15). This beautiful structure with its cusped archway and balconied windows looks forward to the gateways and Gurudwaras of Tarn Taran and the Harmandar Sahib itself (K. Brown, 1999).

The Gurudwara Chobara Sahib is situated at Goindwal in the district of Amritsar, about fifteen miles away from Tarn Taran, on the northern bank of the river Beas. It was the ancestral home of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, which was later on converted into a Gurudwara with minor renovations and repairs. It is enclosed by a wall on the eastern side and rooms on the other three sides; the shrine is situated in the south-western corner of the enclosure (Figure 3.16). The entrance to the shrine was through the south-eastern corner of the enclosure but it has now been closed and rooms have been erected in this corner. A new double storeyed gateway was constructed by the Maharaja of Kapurthala in the north-eastern side. This gateway has an archway with double recesses. The side has been divided by pairs of round pilasters with usual round bases. The compartments created possess recessed cusped arches having rectangular windows, topped by projected eave. Some of which are surmounted by rectangular perforated ventilators. A projected eave divides the first and the second storeys. The side rooms of the archway are decorated with a frieze with floral pattern.

The culmination of the architectural experiments towards forming a perfect union of the elements in a Sikh shrine can be seen in the Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran (K. Brown, 1999). It is hard to imagine that this was once no more than a hut beside a pool, until the present Gurudwara was built in 1775 and later renovated by Ranjit Singh. Here the Gurudwara and pool form an integrated unit (Figure 3.17), and the entire complex (rather than just the Gurudwara itself) is enclosed by the sanctuary wall. In its design, the Gurudwara is remarkably similar to the Harmandar Sahib.
The walls are cased in marble slabs with the light designs in panels that are typical of Sikh architecture.

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, laid the foundation of the city and the Darbar sahib in 1590. In 1775, Sardar Budh Singh Faizalpuria, Sardar Khushal Singh and Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia constructed the present structure of Gurudwara and the tank. The remaining work, including the beautification of the Shrine, was done by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1830. At one corner of the tank, (north-east) there stands a tall magnificent masonry tower got constructed by Kunwar Nau Nihal Singh. Darbar Sahib is constructed on the pedestal (raised platform) The Darbar sahib is a three storeyed building constructed on a square plan in the eastern end of the tank. It has a low ribbed dome at the top. It consists of an outer structure, which goes up to the second storey, enclosing another square structure formed by pillars and semicircular stunted arches. Its lower parts are of white marble but the upper parts are covered with plates of gilded copper. In the interior, on the ground, is the Guru Granth Sahib, placed under a gorgeous canopy, studded with jewels. The interior is a structure formed by four square pillars joined by semicircular stunted arches at the top. A circumambulatory path is formed between these piers and the outer walls on the three sides. The fourth corner, i.e. the north–eastern, contains a small chamber in the form of a room called toshakhanna (temple treasury).

First floor is in the form of a gallery on all the four sides, as the central hall is double height. The gallery is supported by the inner piers and the exterior walls and serves also as the circumambulatory path. There are three cusped openings, formed by square pillars on each of its sides, which open into the central square hall. On second floor, there is a small square chamber constructed on the inner pillars. It has three cusped openings in each side. This small square chamber is topped by an onion shaped gilded dome, which is similar to the dome of the Harmandar Sahib. Even the interior design is
similar with a central hall surrounded by rooms that form galleries, which on the upper floor look down over the double height hall below. The Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran is, however, a great work. The Harmandar Sahib simply brings its features to perfection.

3.5.2.3. The Sikh Architectural Masterpiece

The built architectural form of the Harmandar Sahib, expresses the social and cultural intent of the relation between politics and religion. The plan of the precinct and its construction are based on the state of the art design and construction as it had developed until the early seventeenth century. However, the design of architectural components and their arrangement give expression to the process of social dissent and reconstruction that was ushered by the hymns of the saints and the ten Sikh Gurus. Ranjit Singh’s legacy survives most strikingly in the wonderful Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar. The centre of attraction of the complex is clearly the Harmandar Sahib, and everything else radiates from it. The Gurudwara, the pool and the path for circumambulation are perfectly integrated here through the ingenious device of placing the Gurudwara in the middle of the pool (K. Brown, 1999).

The Harmandar Sahib in Amritsar is the most sacred shrine of the Sikhs. Its foundation stone was laid in 1589 but the present structure and the tank was built in 1765. The Harmandar Sahib is the premier shrine of the Sikh community and a wonderful example of the blending of architectural styles that created a new style the form and style of Gurudwaras (K. Singh, 2004a). In the 19th century, the complex was still open to the outside world, so it must have appeared to blend into it and spread all the way to the horizon. A colonnade has been added in mid twentieth century on all sides, but this does not distract from the impression of a vast open space.

The Golden Temple is approached through archway on the northwest side. According to Madanjit (1992), causeway is 60m long which leads to main shrine. There is a vast

Figure 3.18: photographs of Harmandar Sahib, Amritsar, source: www.goldentempleamritsar.org and the Author
light-reflecting pool. The *Sanctum Sanctorum* rises from the centre of this sacred pool. The sacred tank which holds the temple in its midst like a lotus flower, is 492 feet square and 17 feet deep. Running around the outer edge of the-tank is marble pavement (*parikarma*) 60 feet wide, with marble slabs of various shapes, designs and colours. The hall is 42 feet square (M. Kaur, 1983). According to Bhui, the main complex of the Darbar Sahib is a vast rectangular space approximately 600 feet by 580 feet in scale. Adjacent to this is another small rectangular space which houses the Akal Takht. The entire area on the periphery has been enclosed by a pillared cloister with entrance portals. On the inner side of the pillared cloister runs a wide marble pathway that encloses a tank, 500 feet by 480 feet in size and 17 feet deep. The main building has an irregular half octagon added onto its original square format which was placed on a square platform, approximately 66 feet wide. The marble causeway, 216 feet long and 19 feet 6 inches wide has a parapet made of perforated marble screens interspersed with marble pillared (Bhui, 1999).

The geometric designs on the marble pavement create a quick rhythm which invites the visitor to walk around. The colonnade, the pool and the path all revolve around the Gurudwara. The centrality of the Gurudwara is emphasised by the four doors which open out in all directions. The focal point is of course, the holy book the Guru Granth Sahib, in the central hall. The square building of the Central shrine is a three-storeyed structure over which rises a low-fluted majestic masonry dome covered with gold plated copper sheets. The dome is the crowning feature of the temple. It is designed after the shape of the lotus-symbol. The petals of the dome present a very harmonious setting. A number of varieties of smaller domes, drawn in a line, decorate the parapet. Four *chhatris* (kiosks) with fluted metal cupolas stand at each corner. The floor of the upper storey is paved with *Nanak Shahi* bricks. These red bricks are broad on the top and narrow at the bottom, and stand exquisitely laid in very fine brick-mortar and lime. The provision of windows supported on brackets and the enrichment of arches with numerous foliations on the first floor gives a picturesque appearance. Intricate designs on marble inlaid with stones of different hues on the entrance to the inner sanctuary, provide a great attraction to the passersby. The holy *Guru Granth*, the scriptures of the Sikhs, rests under a gorgeous canopy in the centre of this hall. The door on the southern side of the central hall provides approach to the water in the holy tank. The steps there are called *Har-ki-pauri*. The ceiling of the portico of the *Har-ki-pauri* is decorated with
beautiful Tukri (glass mosaic) work. The staircase adjoining Har ki pauri leads to the first floor of the shrine. There is a small square pavilion on second floor surmounted by a low-fluted golden dome. The interior of the pavilion is set with pieces of mirror of different sizes and colours. That is why it is called the Shish Mahal. It is said that originally the first floor was pavilion where the Sikh Gurus used to sit in meditation. The hall was profusely embellished with floral designs during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The inlay work on the ceiling as well as the walls of the Shish Mahal is reminiscent of the great skill of the artists. Everything about the Harmandar Sahib reveals the presence of a reality that lies beyond mere appearances. It does not seek to impress the senses like the edge of the roof is decorated with no less than fifty-eight little golden onion-shaped domes, which bewilder the senses as they run around the roof. The four domed kiosks at the corners of the roof are matched by the great flat dome that crowns the entire building. This dome is adorned with a gigantic lotus-leaf motif, and the little spheres that run around it are actually lotuses as well. The room just below the dome lies right above the central hall, so the dome makes the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib visible even from the outside (K. Brown, 1999).

The walls of the hall are decorated with floral designs and its arches are ornamented with verses from Guru Granth reproduced in letters of gold. The artists, however, have maintained the excellence of their art and have not allowed Gurbani (Sikh scriptures) to dominate. The walls of the hall stand inlaid with figures and floral designs adorned and studded at places with precious and coloured stones. This techniques used for embellishment of exterior surfaces as well as for interior decoration is called jаратка. It is both an expensive and time consuming technique. The craftsmanship of this jаратка (mosaic) reminds us of the pietra dure tradition. It somewhat resembles the Mughal technique used for the decoration of the Taj Mahal at Agra. But the jаратка of the Harmandar Sahib has an edge over the jаратка of the Taj in that the former has human and animal figures also besides the usual floral designs so characteristic of the Taj. The Sikh artists seem to have taken these motifs from the vedantic concept of life and given a philosophical outlook to art.

The walls of the first floor contain fine art work in plaster of paris too. The ceiling of the central dome is admittedly a work of rare craftsmanship. The decoration on the porch of the first floor displays fine naqqashi executed in gold and various colours and
cut-glasses of different shapes and sizes. The architecture of the Harmandar Sahib testifies to the fact that Sikhs vociferously patronised the architectural embellishments and ornamental accretions to their mansions. They spent lavishly in beautifying their holy Temple.

The embossed metal work of the Harmandar Sahib is a specimen of the excellence attained by the Sikh craftsmanship in the skilful harmony of brass and copper. The same is the case with frescos, naqqashi and applied arts displayed at the Temple. The walls, corridors and panels of the Harmandar Sahib contain a variety of excellent mohtrakashi or fresco-paintings. These frescos are said to be modelled after the wall paintings of its time found in the Kangra Valley. Most of the fresco-paintings of the Harmandar Sahib are representations of Hindu mythological themes. They reflect the original spirit of the Vaishnava cult, but the technique has suitably been modified to suit the needs of the Sikh art. It is to be noted here that the tolerance of the Sikhs towards other religions motivated the Sikh artists to borrow from other cultures. The Harmandar Sahib was designed to produce the experience of contemplation without focusing on any single element. The surfaces of the Gurudwara deliberately distract the senses so as to direct the mind (K. Brown, 1999).

3.6. Summary

Sikhism, in the course of its history and development, has banked on the Gurudwaras as the centres of community’s unity. It is through the Gurudwaras that the Sikhs have been able to effectively give shape to the ideas of human equality and fraternity thought by the Sikh Gurus. Most of the Gurudwaras represent significant events in Sikh history as they are built at sites associated with the Gurus or at places which are important milestones in Sikh history. People of all religious backgrounds without distinction of caste, class, status or sex are welcomed into a Gurudwara.

Architecturally, Gurudwaras have evolved over a period of time. In early times, a Gurudwara was known as a Dharmsal. Gurudwaras were simple and humble in architectural expression. Sikhs started with very simple abode, may be huts or other such types of dwelling units, which have no particular architectural merit. The general impression of earlier Gurudwaras is of simple and small structures with little decoration rather than of an impressive structural element bearing up the heavy weight of the superstructure and roof. As time went on, Sikhs wanted to place their Gurudwaras in an elaborate setting to make their Gurudwaras part of large and impressive complexes.