To unravel the artistic expression underneath the apparent visual veneer and to touch the soul and essence of symbolism stylised in features of a specific work of art- requires rational, truthful and concentrated investigation in an effort to demystify the undercurrents involved in shaping the final object d’art bringing forth the historic perspectives, social aspects and aesthetic modulations, employed in solidifying and substantiating the creative enigma. Further emphasis is required in gauging the artistic mastery, skilful comprehension and poetic imagery born out of unbiased historic perceptions laced with thoughtful narration in lucid and vivid dissemination. The features, details and mannerism need a sincere attention as they are as relevant as the content itself of a creative product, defining their role and purpose in particular situation visa-a-vis chronological and religious manifestation. These features may lead the investigator to understand the very elements of matter and mind, that is matter and metaphysics which makes a work of art reverberate with aesthetic and creative energies, thereby ascertaining the standard of artistic excellence achieved by a particular artist. In a way, the features are precisely an indicator of the visual vocabulary used by an artist sculpted by his skilful visualisation in executing a masterpiece which abounds in artistic rudiments, improvisation in compositions rich in personal expressions.

The main features in Sikh Calendar art have a special meaning, importance and purpose. To convey and decode a particular painting in context of its historical facet and religious stance moulded in textual visualisation stipulated a powerful revolutionary approach to bring forth the reformatory perceptions of Sikh religion and its propagation thus felicitating the spread of fundamentals of humanistic aspirations in Sikhism.

From the initial period pertaining to the prevalence of illustrated Janam Sakhis some typical features and elements have graced our intellectual poise to look beyond these simplistic yet appealing illustrations for their subterranean
meanings. Here, the key objective of the artist in principle was to set in chronological order the events in religious context which bore an enormous impact on the growing number of followers. A discerning analysis of these illustrated works would reveal that the basic features and their main artistic thrust was bordering on the simple line rendered in bright colours and the figures were generally stiff looking devoid of realistic mannerism. They were stylised in such a way that the final product was decorative yet not very aesthetically charged. The text and its narration remains the prime interest in these works.

To go a step further to understand the main features in these earlier works of Sikh art wherein the subject was mostly events from the life of Guru Nanak Dev, his early childhood and the Udasis (Missionary Travels) undertaken by him. The persona of Guru Nanak Dev painted in these works had certain specific features, which were later on elaborated upon and accessorised. Here, Guru Nanak Dev is presented in many variations and the basic features associated with him were Saili (Plate-172), Topi (Plate-173), Rosary, long Jama (shirt) (Plate-174), Tilaka (Plate-175), Nimbus (Plate-176), Simarini, (Plate-177) a benign smile and the face turned slightly to right or to left. From his Topi seems to radiate a circle of light, something like a divine aura symbolising his enlightened state. In Janam Sakhi illustrations, a cap worn by Guru Nanak is an essentiality painted vividly, as conical, close fitting and sometimes his best-known Qalandari. (Plate-178) A shawl or Chaddar (Plate-179) on his shoulder was depicted to enhance dignity of his bearing. It is sometimes replaced by a Gudari (Plate-180) symbolical of Kabir’s all assimilating bearing, humility, all embracing, all pervading expanses of his life and mission.¹

It will be convenient to study the development of features in Sikh painting pertaining to the first Sikh Guru- Guru Nanak Dev in periodical development.

¹ Daljeet, Dr; 2004, The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.119
The first phase was more or less dominated by the *Pahari* tradition. At the end of this phase, European influences began to make their presence felt and this factor ushered in a period of transition in which the older tradition gradually yielded the pride of place to the new so called modern tradition. The third phase witnessed a dominance of the western techniques and a nationalistic reaction against its too mundane an approach towards its adoption in *Sikh* art. The response communicates itself in revising the idealism of the previous tradition as a counter-poise to the realism of the western tradition popular during the nineteenth century and before.²

The artists depicted Guru Nanak Dev as a man of great dynamism, always engaged in some activity or other in the first phase. This is because of the fact that their paintings were concerned primarily with illustrations of important events of Nanak’s life. He was portrayed as a sturdy looking man having a dynamic personality clad in a loose mantle (*Jama*) reaching down to the ankles, lending the air of grandeur to his persona, with a cloth-band tied around the waist to underline the attributes of vitality of a person on the move. The dignified character of the Guru’s position was projected by implementing various procedures such as rarely depicted frontal or three-quarter view style whereas the practice prevalent was to depict the other figures facing either right or left. To enhance his coveted position, he was often shown sitting on a piece of carpet, or on a piece of furniture or a sheet of cloth spread out on a bedecked floor. Generally, his seat was located under the umbrella of a tree and often an attendant was made to stand just behind with a fly-whisk (*Chaurī*) held aloft over the Guru’s head; and on certain other occasions a kind of halo was drawn around his head. A rosary, a black string of some length called *Saili* usually worn by *Sadhus* or *Sants*, hung around his neck and on the front side reached down to the

navel, or in the diagonal manner passed over the right shoulder and under the left arm-pit or the vice versa. His forehead bore a broad tilak mark and one of his hands held a string of beads, Mala (Simarini) and was busy counting the beads (an Indian mode of worship). A Bairagan (Plate-181) (saint’s stick) yet another symbol of distinction was also displayed.3

Specific articles of dress too distinguished Guru Nanak Dev from the rest of the people shown in the paintings mainly his cap was perceived as a symbol of his divinity. Though in his childhood, he was often shown wearing the turban and the cap was worn only occasionally. But from the time he proclaimed his mission, his head-gear, almost invariably, was a cap of a distinctive type. This cap appeared to be like a crown in shape (more or less a Mukat usually worn by Hindu deities) made of a single piece with a type of a little dome in the centre. The cap comprised of a compact pattern with some visibly marked divisions in front, projecting upward giving the cap a greater resemblance of the Hindu Mukat. Some of the paintings depict the Guru in a few other designs of caps, such as a close-fitting cap or a conical cap but such designs are exceptions rather than the rule. The use of a Chaddar (shawl) thrown over the back and the shoulders is occasionally considered to with a view to reinforcing to the dignified bearing of the Guru. Birds and animals have been depicted in the foreground with a view to specify the Guru’s divine spell on them in a few paintings.4

The prominent phases of Guru Nanak’s life from his early childhood years as an infant and a toddler to adolescent days, youth and middle age then as an old man have been featured with changes in physical appearance, his beard by its form, size and colour helps us to assess the gradual growth of his age. Notable changes are apparent in the case of headgears and costumes worn by him.

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3 Singh, Dr. Fauja; March 1969, A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.136
4 Ibid, p.137
With the establishment of the Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh helped in further enhancing and enriching the earlier tradition of painting, pertaining to the Gurus and Guler-Kangra style with ample aesthetic substance added multi-dimensional charm to these works without interfering with the content matter owing to the sensitive issue of religious perceptions. Masterly use of the symbols and features, which were already popular and revered in the *Janam Sakhi* illustrations, received a touch of appealing artistic augmentation. There are fine specimens of portraits of Guru Nanak showing him sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of one or two people. The paintings of the Khalsa period were of a finer execution than those of the preceding period. They have tastefully decorated margins (*Hashias*) and fascinating stylisation. During this period, elements such as a wooden *Takht* with a *Takia* (Plate-182) (big cylindrical pillow) on one side supporting the back painted with decorative and floral patterns was introduced to project the much exalted and revered position of Guru Nanak Dev.⁵

During the closing years of nineteenth century, a marked departure at this stage shows an absolute change in narration and depiction adopted by some artists especially Lahora Singh, whose portraits and paintings of Guru Nanak illustrate the more memorable events of Guru Nanak’s life in typical Punjabi atmosphere and flavour and do not reveal any distinct legacy of the earlier tradition. The main feature of these paintings is the acquisition of some technical skills in rendering which abounds in a certain proficiency in portraying in realistic and three-dimensional effects complete with shadows, linear and colour perspectives with ascent on draping the characters in proper Punjabi dresses such as the female characters in their Punjabi *Ghagaras* (long skirts) with short shirts (*Plate-183*), *Salwar* (female trousers), *Kameez* (*Kurtis*) and *Dupattas* (female

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head-cover) (Plate-184) and the male characters in their long shirts (Jama), tight
fitting Pyjamas (Plate-185), scarfs (cloth bands tied around the waists and the outer
wrappings), Chaddars (shawls) combined with the landscape emphasizing the
Punjabi character of the life during this period. Inspite of all these changes, Guru
Nanak’s Mukat on the head still remained a permanent feature. Rendering skills
acquired from Europeans enabled Punjabi artists to have a remarkable control
over painting details of drapery as per the body contours in light and shade and
use of tonal values and creation of depth added realistic excellence. Here
capturing of moods, gestures and postures of different characters made moving
and expressive visual narration of a story. A keen eye for detail and
understanding of body proportions and highlighting of the central character
displayed loads of artistic acumen achieved by the artists. Thus the paintings of
Lahora Singh represent a marked stage in the emergence of the modern tradition
in the art of the Punjab.⁶

Amongst the symbols which were replaced or discarded in paintings
related to Guru Nanak Dev gradually we see a vanishing of Tilak from his
forehead and the cap being replaced by a Pugree (Plate-186) (Turban) during his
adulthood. The absence of the Tilak mark is an indicator of a new trend in the
thinking of the late nineteenth century Sikhs. A similar mingling of different
influences may be noticed in the aspects of architecture and costumes. Besides
the old Mughal architecture and costumes several elements suggesting the
presence of Punjabi and Sikh influence were given credence. A noticeable
feature in Sikh art is the continuation of style of Mughal turbans in Sikh masses
and the same are visible in most of the paintings during this period.⁷

Following this period, there was a smouldering urge in the minds of the
leading lights of Sikh faith engaged in propagation of their religion to revive,

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⁶ Singh, Dr. Fauja; March 1969, A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak, Punjab History
Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.140
⁷ Ibid, p.142
reform and energise the early Sikh powerful ascent in religious thought and ethos carrying along the new impressions and visions provided by western influences of science and rationalism. As a result of the new ferment a new outlook on life emerged which had the tendency of rejecting the mythical and the supernatural in the creed.

The artists of the third or modern phase were the product of the new outlook thus created. The western impact gave them realism, and the Indian heritage idealism, so that their works of art represent a balanced combination of both the elements. The western influence explains the absence of supernaturalism and mythology, and the stress on expressionism in their works, whereas the presence of religious idealism in them is explained by the continuity of the indigenous tradition. The old picture of Guru Nanak Dev with his favourite companions, Bala and Mardana is now removed from its Janam Sakhi moorings and is separately stressing the idea of communal harmony so dear to the Guru’s heart.8

Another broad change which appeared in Sikh painting was the portrayal of individual portraits of Guru Nanak and in this context excellent works were produced by legendary painters of Sikh art as Sobha Singh, Kirpal Singh, Jaswant Singh, G.S.Sohan Singh and Mohinder Singh marking the direct emergence of Sikh Calendar art wherein the typical features which travelled with the time, were more poignantly painted and preserved. Guru Nanak’s portraits especially by Sobha Singh have no reference to any historical situation and are prominently concerned with bringing out such spiritual qualities of the Master as the poise of self-realisation, ecstasy of meditation, glow of contemplation and intensity of divine love. Kirpal Singh’s portraits on the other hand are usually related to some historical situation or another. They depict Guru Nanak as a tireless world teacher, overtowering in stature with well-defined limbs having the

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play of a spiritual radiance, missionary zeal and mental poise on his face. Jaswant Singh’s work is an attempt to portray the sub-conscious and thus bears the mark of surrealism. Detail, natural backgrounds, landscape and perspective with ascent on decorative element set G.S.Sohan Singh apart as an artist of distinguished standing.

Passing through the process of reformatory filtration freezing new perceptions and religious manifestations the Sikh Calendar art chose to portray Guru Nanak Dev in a style which was far from the earlier mythical version depicted in the Janam Sakhi illustrations and the features which were admired and adopted in this genre were complete replacement of the Guru’s cap by a straight turban showing no angle in front; disappearance of Tilak mark and Bairagan; full view face in most of the cases; continued presence of the Halo, Saili and the Mala (Plate-187) and longer and constantly white beard depicting old age as a sign of spiritual wisdom bringing Guru Nanak into closer accord with the Khalsa ideal of uncut hair while the whiteness strengthens the image of a venerable sage.9

Close on heels a major feature attained is the remarkable proficiency in painting techniques achieved by the artists where elements of art and aesthetics are abundantly visible and there is a sea change in the colour palette which emphasized a soothing and subtle impact on the audience of Sikh Calendar art raising these paintings to the ethereal level with profound presence of spirituality, calm and poise.

The common use of the Abhaya mudra (Plate-188) (do not fear gesture), symbol widely used in Popular art throughout India further strengthened the newly acquired projected image of Guru Nanak in these works and a flowing white beard and hand raised in blessing propagated a general expression of

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9 Singh, Dr. Fauja; March 1969, A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.144
benevolence presenting a distinct impression of the first Guru. Here he emerges as Baba Nanak the Teacher, the Guru; who supremely bestows peace of mind and spiritual enlightenment. Another change serves to enhance Guru Nanak’s spirituality is that all the earlier tradition could supply is retained in the Saili and ubiquitous Mala. Rarely does the Guru’s raised hand lack his rosary and consistently there is at least one shown encircling his turban. The complement is provided by drawing the Guru’s eyes in a particular way. The half-closed eyes, is a presumption to represent spiritual ecstasy and the divine intoxication of mystical meditation. Nanak the Teacher of spiritual wisdom has also become Nanak the Mystic.\textsuperscript{10}

A significant change is heralded by the veining away of symbols associated with asceticism, specifically those that indicate a Nath Yogi connection. It is a reflection in a way to describe the diminishing of the Nath Tradition in modern times and its subsequent withdrawal from popular awareness. Though the Nath Yogis (or Siddhs as they are called in the Janam Sakhis) wielded a substantial influence during Nanak’s own life-time, an influence which is evidently visible in his own works and some later versions were influenced by their perceptions too.\textsuperscript{11} This influence, though declining, was still prevalent in the late nineteenth century; its presence can still be easily observed in the prints and lithographed Janam Sakhis of that period depicting Baba Nanak still holding discourses with Siddhs and using artefacts, which entail a Nath identity.\textsuperscript{12} But from now on however, the absence of a caged parrot (Plate-189) and Yogis crutch is a marked departure and no illustrator seemed to be interested in the describing how Baba Nanak humbled the greatest Siddhs in discourse and in miracle-matches. The Lota (Plate-190), a utensil related to Yogis has changed its shape and appears only sporadically. Now the patched cloak

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p.56
of the Yogi has become a colourful shawl and even the clog sandals (Padukas) (Plate-191) show signs of giving way to ordinary Punjabi Juti. (Plate-192) Nanak is no longer the Great Yogi. The role has ceased to be meaningful in the late twentieth century and has accordingly been discarded. The change in Guru Nanak’s head-gear in the form of turban became more prominent with the Yogi image on the wane. This shift in head-gear was already in transition mode in the late twentieth century thereafter the cap and Mukat tradition was completely forsaken. But the turban which was shown in these Sikh calendars did not resemble with the standard turban styles of twentieth century, which has an inverted ‘V’ across the forehead. Nanak’s turban tied straight across his forehead was considered sign of simplicity and spiritual veneration.\(^{13}\) Though Nanak’s clothing is the same as shown in nineteenth century works. He continues to wear a long shirt (Jama) with a sash (Kamarband) (Plate-193) tied around his waist and sometimes extended over his left shoulder. The display of expensive looking shawl on his shoulders is widespread now in latest Sikh calendars, he is shown wearing a tight fitting Pyjamas underneath the Jama.

In a partial downturn Guru Nanak’s two companions Bala and Mardana which were always present in earlier works, there is a trend now to either give these figures a miss altogether or sometimes a few subordinate figures or artefacts are clubbed in the composition without giving much importance on these characters. Thus in a way these Sikh Calendar art prints are meant to be categorised as solo portraits of Guru Nanak with a full or half figure presentation. Bala and Mardana with their assigned artefacts as Bala with peacock-feather Chauri (Plate-194) and Mardana with his Rabab (Plate-195) are only depicted when the calendars are referring to Janam Sakhi type narrations. The subject matter which depicts three of them in popular Sikh calendars however was very much appreciated as this scene signified the communal brotherhood being the main

\(^{13}\) McLeod, W.H; 1991, Popular Sikh Art, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.42
plank of Sikhism where the presence of Mardana-the Muslim and Bala-the Hindu while Guru Nanak personified both.\textsuperscript{14} It was not an intentional or well thought of preposition to depict the threesome together to showcase the thought behind promotion of communal accord but it is a wise classification by the modern eyes to think of this composition as of harmonious substance.

In a typical new feature in modern day \textit{Sikh Calendar art} prints is the absence of Bala and Mardana when a specific calendar is so designed to carry the Ten Sikh Gurus conclave. Their complete banishment is framed either to declutter the composition or concentrate on the essential legendary presence of other Sikh Gurus or they are removed from the integrated group as each Guru has been set in his own frame laying stress on their divine authority and lineage. Another feature indicates that this was done keeping in mind the impossibility of their being present together during the lives of all the Sikh Gurus. A striking feature which is of utmost significance in Ten Sikh Gurus group portrait presents them with same faces though the beards and garments have some variations underlining the fundamental Sikh doctrine that same divine spirit (Guru) successively inhabited ten separate bodies. The same facial identity expresses this spirit.\textsuperscript{15} Though some people may think artists were not well versed in painting individual portraits of Sikh Gurus but this was not the fact and the artists sure had some fundamental aspects pertaining to iconographic features in mind while painting the Gurus with same features.

Yet a feature which was associated in all Sikh calendars is the benign presence of the sacred scripture Sri Guru Granth Sahib which was to be regarded as the eternal Sikh Guru after passing away of the tenth Sikh Guru- Guru Gobind Singh. As the tenth Guru had impelled the gathered community- the Guru Panth that no living person would act as a Sikh Guru except this Holy Scripture for all

\textsuperscript{14} McLeod, W.H; 1980, \textit{Early Sikh Traditions: A Study of the janam-sakhis}, Oxford, p.172-73
\textsuperscript{15} McLeod, W.H; 1968, \textit{Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion}, Oxford, p.196-199
purposes of spiritual and religious guidance.\textsuperscript{16} Though the Sikh calendars depicting Ten Sikh Gurus presented a difficult task to artists to juxtapose all Sikh Gurus with elaborately designed frames, geometric compositions and floral patterns. The artist due to the reverence to the last Guru enshrined in the scripture- Sri Guru Granth Sahib without fear of compositional congestion and overcrowding accommodated Sri Guru Granth Sahib at the appropriate place. The inscription of “Ik-Onkar Satnam” is also adjusted suitably giving credence to its meaning.

A notable feature in group portraits of Ten Sikh Gurus is the change in attire as the first five Sikh Gurus all replicate the style associated with Guru Nanak, the only difference being a slight modernizing of the shape of the turban right from the second Guru onwards. In other respects they follow the first Master’s example, each wearing a rosary in his turban and a prayerful Seili around his neck. All of them wear simple robes with scarves (Parna)\textsuperscript{(Plate-196)} surmounted on their shoulders as humble servants.\textsuperscript{17}

The sixth Guru’s attire is however different from the first five Sikh Gurus. As in earlier calendars, Guru Hargobind’s decision to take up arms are easily represented by the addition of bow and arrows, uniform and plume due to Panth’s experience of persecution and victimization. The same militant resistance was further enhanced in the portraits of Guru Gobind Singh by adding at least one steel quoit (Chakkar)\textsuperscript{(Plate-197)} to his turban. Sometimes the falcon is missing in the bust type (head and shoulders format) oval portraits of the sixth and the tenth Sikh Guru due to the reason that it was difficult to adjust it on the wrist in such compositions, which could interfere with the main focus on the face. Both the Gurus stand out clearly as military leaders, faithfully reflecting the traditional interpretation of their respective roles.

\textsuperscript{16} McLeod, W.H; 1984, \textit{Textual Source for the Study of Sikhism}, Manchester, p.37-38
\textsuperscript{17} McLeod, W.H; 1991, \textit{Popular Sikh Art}, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.44
The remaining three Sikh Gurus are ambivalent. Some artists align them all with the militant style of the sixth and the tenth Guru. Others revert to the ‘spiritual’ mode of the first five Gurus while yet others project an uneasy combination of these two roles.

The change which is thus portrayed in apparel and accessories represents more than a move from the exclusively spiritual to the manifestly militant. In popular tradition the Gurus come to be known as ‘kings’ (*Patasah* or *Padsah*) and this conferring of royal authority also finds expression in the portraits of the later Gurus. Their dresses are shown ornately embroidered, the plumes surmount diadems as strings of pearls appear around their necks. However some calendars also depicted fourth Guru Ram Das manifestly royal with gorgeous robes, a splendid throne, embroidered *Takia* and explicit *Chhatri* (Plate-198) or regal umbrella.

In general terms all Ten Sikh Gurus are addressed as ‘*Padsah*’ by the Sikh devotees. But the corresponding iconography towards this direction is believed to have started with fourth or sixth Sikh Guru to tenth Sikh Guru.

Yet in the real sense of the word the term ‘*Padsah*’ is suitably attributed to Guru Gobind Singh due to the reason that he emerged as a most valiant warrior and heroic leader who inspired and changed the course of Sikh history forever and his accomplishments as a statesman, poet, writer, soldier and majestic all inspiring spiritual and temporal revolutionary had no match. Portraying Guru Gobind Singh as a royal king is perhaps too far fetched a thought harboured by his followers in order to show the most coveted place he is placed at due to his heroic as well as qualities of head and heart as he forbade such references in his discourses for himself. But at the heart of the matter Guru Gobind Singh is worshipped as a mighty warrior and Lord of the Khalsa akin to the majestic

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status of a king and he is portrayed in all royal finery projecting sword, dagger, bow and arrow (Plate-199), spear, Katar (Plate-200) (scissor dagger), steel quoit and round shield (Plate-201) as such objects only belong to a protector, a ruler and a warlord and hence the idea of addressing him as true ‘Padsah’ is justified. The other features associated with this parlance is that the falcon is shown perched on his wrist, the Guru himself is commonly mounted on a horse and in some Sikh calendars has been depicted standing by a cannon and there is an image of fort in the background. There is a presence of pennants, battlements and troops behind and around Guru Gobind Singh’s full-length portraits. He is also referred as ‘Kalgidhar Padsah’ literally meaning He is the king with the plume (Kalgi) (Plate-202) bedecked in his turban decorated with bands of pearls and precious stones.

The image of Guru Gobind Singh which at present is profusely painted in the Sikh calendars may have its source in traditions but the modern day projection is distinctive in the lushness and luxuriance of visual presentation of portraying him as royal and majestic personality coupled with an aura of spiritual strength on his face to prescribe to his much loved images as ‘Saint Soldier’. A deeper inspection would reveal that sword and daggers are not mere pieces of steel but they are intricately carved and decorated with finely embossed hilts and richly embroidered scabbards. The hilts had symbolic images of lions and tigers sculpted in jade and precious metals signifying the fact that these were the ornaments of a royal king and a mighty warrior.

A thought provoking feature which leads us to Guru Gobind Singh’s colourful attire with ostentatiously magnificent embroidery work seems to be worn only by a royal personality and accessories such as belts (Kamarband), armlets, bracelets and grand pieces of jewellery lay stress on his royal stature. The horse which he rides is usually white or blue and is adorned with a richness matching its Master’s array.
The actual dress which Guru Gobind Singh wears typically comprises a standard range of items. Like Guru Nanak he wears a *Jama* but one of a distinctively different cut. The Guru Gobind Singh’s *Jama* is usually shorter, sometimes more a tunic than a robe. It typically has a high collar and is often fastened at the side in the shape of an ‘*Angrakha*’. The garment is usually decorated with rich embroidery and brocade borders. Various colours are used, with saffron slightly more popular, than red, pink or green. Contrasting colours are used for the sash tied around his waist. Beneath his *Jama* the Guru wears a tight fitting white *Pyjama* and elegantly decorated slippers (*Juti*) with gold and silver thread work. His turban is distinctively conical with a loose end hanging from its peak.\(^{19}\)

In addition to that the other ornamental features present in Sikh calendars related to tenth Sikh Guru are various ornaments such as a buckled belt and an ornate shoulder-strap along with one pearl necklace but commonly several strings are shown. The resplendent plume in the turban is also shown accompanied either by a jewelled aigrette or an ornate version of the Khalsa emblem (the steel quoit surmounted by a two-edged sword and flanked by curved swords). The Guru’s beard is usually shown as slightly forked and the tips of his moustache are invariably turned up.\(^{20}\) He always carries weapons and if the circumstances are appropriate he will also have his falcon. Occasionally a *Chhatri* is provided. A richly embroidered velvet or brocade gown appears in many latest versions of portraits of the Guru.

In contrast to Baba Nanak’s portraits, the portraits of Guru Gobind Singh besides having divinity shown as royal authority, military power and ostentatious affluence and grandeur. The portraits of these two Gurus are distinctively indicative of the concept of ‘Miri and Piri’ established by Guru Hargobind Sahib.

\(^{20}\) Ibid, p.46
In this sense the contemporary iconography matches the traditional interpretation of the Panth’s development from Guru Nanak’s stress on inward meditation to Guru Gobind Singh’s founding of the militant Khalsa. A query which concerns analytical investigation of *Sikh Calendar art* especially in context of Guru Gobind Singh requires to understand the presentation of gorgeous and sumptuous image projected in today’s calendar. It is perhaps due to the technological advancement in printing which has enabled the artists to decorate these portraits elaborately to convert them into fabulously decorative and overwhelmingly appealing appearance seeped in visual richness yet oozing a specific spiritual charm with a mesmerising and spellbinding effect.

The emergence of the feature to explain this status is the regent history of Sikh kings and princes especially from royal house of Patiala who attired themselves in magnificent and fashionable costumes befitting their profound affluence having richly decorated palaces and thrones projected a spell of majestic ambience. These royal figures may have attracted the attention of the artists and eked their imagination to incorporate such royal and regal splendour while painting the costumes of Guru Gobind Singh. The richness of expensive looking clothes and other accessories associated with royalty is the covert manifestation of an image, which is amply appreciated and adored by the masses in the event of depiction of Guru Gobind Singh. This means that the iconography associated with Guru Gobind Singh is in fact the distinctively Sikh expression of a much larger phenomenon portrayed in dazzling grand scale.

In Sikh calendars Guru Gobind Singh has been shown standing or sitting against the backdrop of snow-capped pristine mountains and sometimes a lake or a waterfall is shown cascading through the rich foliage and dense forests added a charm of its own because most of the events related to the tenth Guru happened to have been unfolded in such surroundings. A scene of Kailash Parbat and the

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valley of flowers where Gurudwara Hemkunt Sahib is situated is in fact near a glacier and Guru Sahib is fabled to have worshipped there in his previous life. (Plate-204) Other scenic harmonious backgrounds depict Guru Sahib seated on the banks of river Godavari at Nanded. In yet another calendar Guru Sahib is featured as squatting on the banks of river Yamuna at Paonta Sahib where he established his abode. He is either shown crossing a mighty river with furiously rising waves mounted on a horseback denoting his internal storm and a resolve to stand against the evil and the tyrant. (Plate-205)

From Guru Angad Dev to Guru Arjan Dev who carried forward the saintly task of preaching the doctrines of Guru Nanak Dev basically are dressed as simple pious holy men attired in long shirt (Jama) over a tight fitting Pyjama wearing a straight turban (Pugree) in white or pale tones with a Siropa (Plate-206) type cloth around their neck and sometimes a shawl is shown spread on the back and the shoulders. A circle of divine light is depicted behind their heads. A sash (Kamarband) is tied around their waist and they are holding a Simarini (rosary) in their hands. There is no depiction of weapons such as sword, Katar (dagger) but they were shown reclining against a round cylindrical pillow (Takia). There is spiritual glow on their faces and their eyes lost in deep thought and contemplation.

Due to the brutal atrocities and tortures committed on the disciples following the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, a feature which is witnessed here, is the militarisation of the followers of Sikh faith under Guru Hargobind who felt the need to protect their faith which was only possible with taking of arms in self protection as the oppressors during this period were not only tyrant and intolerant of other faiths but demonstrated their anger in gruesome fashion perpetuating horrible and inhuman acts on unarmed and simple folks. From now we see Guru Hargobind featured as a saint and a valiant warrior fully armed with two swords of ‘Miri and Piri’ kindling the flame of violent resistance and his attires are that
of a smart soldier wearing impressive bright clothes and occasional pieces of ornaments sometimes a plume is also placed on his turban. This is a major departure from the earlier saintly image of the Gurus.

Though the seventh and eighth Sikh Gurus-Guru Har Rai and Guru Harkishan were not completely engaged in fighting their oppressors are shown wearing a plume and necklaces of white pearls. They served the humanity in their own way and were the torchbearers of true Sikh ideals.

The most common symbols and artefacts visible in the modern day Sikh calendars are projection of divine light in a circular form (Plate-207) which is present at the back of the head of all Sikh Gurus as a mark of sanctity and it is also visible in two prominent personalities namely Baba Buddha and Baba Deep Singh to place them in revered positions. The design of the halo is sometimes in misty form in soft light colours but it has been elaborately designed and ornate in many calendars showing sun like rays radiating from the circles. In some calendars this halo symbol has been decorated in sequins, sitare and chamki (glitter).

Nearly all the Sikh calendars carry extensive use of the ‘Ik-Onkar’ (Plate-208) symbol in various artistic forms some in geometrical and stylised calligraphic forms and sometimes it is depicted just as a flame of light in semi-abstract form. This symbol comprises of the first two characters recorded in the Adi Granth, a short-hand version of the term expressing the unity of Akal Purakh underlining the fact that God is one Supreme Being and He is omnipresent. “Mul Mantar” by Guru Nanak Dev, which is the primary or fundamental creed of Sikh faith, begins with this symbol is the cornerstone of the Sikh faith. The Guru Granth Sahib is an exposition of that One Reality, an explanation of how that
One Reality relates to the world and also how each of us personally relate to it.\textsuperscript{22} Thus its significance is measured in both spiritual and universal intellect.

The symbol of ‘Ik-Onkar’ is considered so auspicious that it is used on almost all occasions for initiating or undertaking new works on letters, first page of the books, marriage cards, visiting cards, invitation cards and its metallic versions are used on the turbans and in necklaces. Religious buildings appropriately and respectfully displayed this symbol in concrete and marble structures. Infact ‘Ik-Onkar’ is the most solidified, compact and most visible Sikh symbol with its talismanic qualities it kindles in our hearts the feelings full of good omens and a realisation that we are being surrounded by the power of the almighty.

In \textit{Sikh Calendar art}, ‘Ik-Onkar’ represents the Divine Name, fundamental doctrine of Gurmat.\textsuperscript{23} It is shown as a superscription at the top of a picture, a sun or star in the sky (symbolising a burst of spiritual enlightenment), the source of divine power in the palm of the Guru’s hand, a spiritual breastplate, embroidery on a garment or the cloth wrapping of the Guru Granth Sahib (\textit{Rumala}) (Plate-209), a decorative badge or pendant, smoke from a fire or flame from a lamp, the hilt of a sword and the frame for an inset picture. Some artists have ventured to improvise it in myriad designs giving this symbol a shape of a lamp or a candle stand. Its presence in the necklaces of Gurus on the diamonds and pearls gives it an exalted place of unfathomed respect.

In a visually interesting Sikh calendar, an artist has used this symbol in a very imaginative way showing it as a rudder (\textit{patwaar}) of a ship wherein people irrespective of caste, creed and religious affinities are shown crossing the rough river of life. The rudders in the form of ‘Ik-Onkar’ carry the persona of Ten Sikh Gurus surrounded by intricate floral designs, which present a high voltage of

\textsuperscript{22} Shankar, Vijay.N and Kaur, Harmander; 2005, \textit{Sri Guru Granth Sahib- A Universal Scripture for Mankind}, Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, Haryana, p.113
\textsuperscript{23} McLeod, W.H; 1968, \textit{Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion}, Oxford, p.196
artistic and aesthetic charm.\(^{(Plate-210)}\) This symbol due to its religious significance is inscribed on a *Rakhi* in an emotionally moving Sikh calendar celebrating the pure love of a brother and sister. \(^{(Plate-211)}\) The prominence of this particular symbol in modern *Sikh Calendar art* iconography contrasts with its rarity in nineteenth century prints and murals. Its current popularity is due to a revolution in printing technologies, which prints countless Sikh calendars and souvenirs thus making it an omnipresent object of faith.

Sikhism did not approve of idol worship, but held in deity like reverence objects known to have remained associated with their Gurus or formed part of spiritual sanctity, elevating them to status of timeless, formless entity. These things, by virtue of their association with the Gurus or Panth, moved a Sikh emotionally generating in him a feeling of devotion towards his Gurus and a commitment towards his Panth. The presence of a Khalsa symbol (*Khanda Kirpan*) \(^{(Plate-212)}\) in contemporary Sikh calendars is explicitly used due to its importance as emblem and a mark of Sikh sovereignty and martial prowess (Sikh Panth). This symbol comprises a steel quoit (*Chakkar*) with a vertical two-edged sword (*Khanda*) \(^{(Plate-213)}\) flanked by two small curved swords (*Kirpan*).\(^{24}\) \(^{(Plate-214)}\) ‘*Khanda*’ the two edged weapon symbolised an instrument, which transformed by its touch simple water into nectar and a simple folk into the purest one.\(^{25}\) Its importance gained a new height during Guru Gobind Singh’s time, when at the time of creation of Khalsa it was used to prepare the Amrit, due to which it is called ‘Khande Ki Pahul’ - rites of two edged dagger.\(^{26}\) Since then ‘*Khanda*’ was not a mere weapon but an essential organ of baptizing to Khalsa.\(^{27}\) The two

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26 Singh, Dr. Paramvir; 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.31
27 Daljeet, Dr; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.115
edged ‘Khanda’ also symbolise the twin concepts of ‘Miri’ and ‘Piri’ (Temporal and Spiritual power).28 ‘Khanda’ - a simple weapon was transformed into a spiritual instrument of sectarian baptism and had become the symbol of guided strength and resolute mind. This ‘Khanda’ was later made to crown the Nishan Sahib and with a couple of Kirpans, to serve now for three hundred years as Panth’s emblem.29 The two curved swords incorporated in this Khalsa emblem are symbolic of a weapon, which cuts ignorance from its roots, and one perceives the transcendent knowledge. As God is the one who destroys ignorance, thus ‘Kirpan’ symbolises God himself and addressed as ‘Sri Sahib’. ‘Kirpan’ as a weapon can be used in both offence as well as defence. Apart from this, it reveals the free entity of the Sikhs and signifies that Sikhs cannot become slave of anyone. Its use must be for upholding righteousness and justice. ‘Kirpan’ literally means a weapon used for self-esteem, but in the form of Kirpa or grace, not in the form of tyranny.30 When perched on waist with upward handle it requires mind to hold it and with its downward blade it aims at cleansing and purifying the earth.31 These three elements of the Khalsa emblem are encircled in a ‘Chakkar’ (Plate-215) a steel quoit, which is a metaphor for eternity and symbolises an infinite God.32

This Khalsa emblem appears frequently in Sikh Calendar prints, usually in association with Guru Gobind Singh (founder of the Khalsa). It is worn as a badge on his turban (Plate-216) or belt, emblazoned on the flag of the Khalsa (Nisan) or added to the margin as an appropriate decoration for a calendar depicting the

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28 Singh, Dr. Paramvir; 2008, Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.31
29 Daljeet, Dr; 2004, The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.115
30 Singh, Dr. Paramvir; 2008, Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.16
31 Daljeet, Dr; 2004, The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.115
32 Singh, Dr. Paramvir; 2008, Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.31
Lord of the Khalsa. A galloping horse of Guru Gobind Singh carried this emblem on the decorative chest piece worn around the horse’s neck. (Plate-217) This symbol is also embroidered on an Adi Granth (Rumala). As the component parts so clearly indicate, the symbol expresses militancy. This involves defence of the Panth against oppressors and also in a more general sense, the protection of righteousness from the assaults of the evil. War is not fought for its own sake. It is fought as Dharamyudh, as a battle waged on behalf of truth and justice.

In Sikh calendars, portraits devoted to Guru Gobind Singh and other valiant warriors of the Panth are shown displaying this Khalsa emblem as badges on their turbans, armlets, worn in necklaces, and on chest-plates and found on arrow caskets. It is also inscribed on the Nishan Sahibs being carried by Panj Pyaras during the Gurpurab processions. It is painted on margins and decorative frames of the calendars giving it a metallic tint preferably in golden shades and is surmounted on religious artefacts in ornamental versions giving it richness due to its valued place in Khalsa Panth. Sometimes it is the central piece accompanied by two flags of ‘Miri’ and ‘Piri’ with Khandas placed on top erected near the Gurdwaras giving it sumptuously enhanced exposition. The mere presence of this Khalsa emblem inscribed on Panth’s saffron flags being carried during battles had a very emphatic task of reinforcing the soldier’s resolve to defeat the enemy as a fight under this flag was always a fight for justice and the flags with this insignia presented a regal and powerful assemblage of do or die dedicated soldiers.

A feature most respectfully displayed in Sikh calendars is of course the installation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. (Plate-218) The Guru Granth Sahib is a great and endless sea of devotion to the Divine and in that sea the hymns of the Sikh Gurus and the Bhagats are powerful waves that carry the minds and
souls of devotees.\(^3^3\) Besides being most modern scripture it is endowed with the Bani or hymns of a diverse section of society making it the most secular religious scripture which is revered as a living Guru by the Sikhs true to tenth Guru’s directions “Guru manyo Granth”. The Sri Guru Granth Sahib in Sikh calendars always appears with garlands and embroidered mantle (Rumalas) and usually with the traditional canopy (Chandni).\(^{(Plate-219)}\) Given the veneration traditionally bestowed on the sacred scripture the incidence of the Guru Granth Sahib in modern Sikh Calendar art prints is surprisingly low perhaps due to the fact that some people may not be able to accord the due respect it deserves as the calendars are sometimes carelessly and haphazardly displayed in improper places due to the ignorance and casual attitude.

In Sikh calendars ‘Karah Prasad’\(^{(Plate-220)}\) is usually shown placed near Sri Guru Granth Sahib and has a significant place in Sikh tradition. It is distributed in the Sangat after offering it to the Akal Purakh. There is a tradition of preparing it in the Gurdwaras daily and in the Sikh houses on the days of Gurpurab or some special occasions. The ‘Karah Prasad’ offered before Guru Sahib is considered the blessings of the Guru. For preparing ‘Karah Prasad’, five contents- wheat flour, pure sugar, clarified butter, water and fire is used and the method of preparing it has been described in the ‘Sikh Rehat Maryada’.\(^3^4\) Only the ‘Karah Prasad’, which has been prepared or got prepared according to the prescribed method, is acceptable in the congregation. In addition, the person who doles out the ‘Karah Prasad’ among the congregation should do so without ant discrimination based on personal regard or spite.\(^3^5\) ‘Karah Prasad’ is one of the main regular features of Sikh Calendar art from the late nineteenth century.

\(^{3^3}\) Shankar, Vijay.N and Kaur, Harminder; 2005, Sri Guru Granth Sahib- A Universal Scripture for Mankind, Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, Haryana, p.113


\(^{3^5}\) Singh, Dr. Paramvir; 2008, Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.27
As regarding the depiction of Gurdwaras in Sikh calendars the prime place goes to Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar (Plate-221) being the holiest of the holy shrines of Sikhs. In various compositional variations Sri Harimandir Sahib finds a central and prominent place in calendars. In some instances, one or more Gurdwaras appear as insets. Such Gurdwaras bear an overt relationship to the Guru who dominates the picture or to the incident, which it portrays. For example a Sikh calendar illustrates the birth and childhood of Guru Nanak appropriately includes Gurdwara Janam-Asthan, the temple that marks his actual birth place in Nankana Sahib. Similarly a sequence portraying the devoted service of Guru Amar Das concludes with a picture of Gurdwara Baoli Sahib in Goindwal. In Sikh Calendar art the image of the Golden Temple dominates confirming the supremacy of this particular shrine in the popular imagination.

A few calendars are available which depict the presence of all five Takhts- Sri Akal Takht Sahib, Amritsar; Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib, Patna Sahib; Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib; Takht Sri Hazur Sahib, Nanded; Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Sabo ki Talwandi and Golden Temple together. Though the Takhts hold their own significance as a seat of authority combining both the temporal as well as eternal.36 Another factor why Golden Temple is more popular as compared to other Gurdwaras and its widespread publication in calendars it offers a feast to the eye with its unique gold covered structure and a pool of nectar around it enhances its visual magnificence and radiates a splendour, which evokes unique spiritually elevated emotions amongst the devotees.

The holy inscription “Satnam Waheguru”(Plate-222) finds a respectful presence in nearly all Sikh calendars as this is the central Sikh concept of True Nam (or the Name), which is to be seen on almost every leaf of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Satnam or Name Adoration is a central concept of the religious philosophy of the Gurus and characteristically it is as simple as it is profound

starting with the idea of a monotheistic God or One Reality. It is both the message and the messenger of Truth, the Primal Guru, the Enlightener. The True Nam is a sound; the Name connects at once to that which we want to reach. 

According to scholar G.S.Talib, the Name “ is the only visible form of the creator available to the devotees; Being a sound it is itself abstract, immaterial and formless”. In Sikh Practice, “the supreme Name of the creator is “Ik Onkar”. Parallel to it is Satnam (Eternal, holy presence). 

Alongside Satnam, equally visible word Waheguru denotes as the Gurmantar for a Sikh. It is the invocatory formula received from the Guru. It is that term, significant of the Supreme Being, which the Guru confides to the Sikhs to meditate on. The word Waheguru has been the Gurmantar for the Sikhs from the very beginning. Satnam Waheguru is found in Sikh calendars as a superscription; as embroidery on garments, Sri Guru Granth Sahib mantles (Rumalas), and the sail of a symbolic ship and as engraving on the links in one of the tenth Guru’s necklaces. It is projected in a number of styles in calligraphic forms in ascent on floral as well as geometrical designs to decorate these holy words.

Another important feature is the depiction of ‘Nishan Sahib’ in Sikh calendars which is installed at a high level site in every Gurdwara. As matter of religious injunction, it must be hoisted at every building of the Gurdwara. It is a symbol of sovereignty for the Sikhs. The cloth of the flag is either of saffron or of bluish grey colour. On top of the flag post, there is either a spearhead or a ‘Khanda’. The ‘Nishan Sahib’ is made of cotton or silk cloth and is triangular in shape. This saffron flag was hoisted, for the first time in 1606 A.D at Sri Akal Takht Sahib. A pole of timber or metal supports the ‘Nishan

38 Ibid, p.123
39 Singh, Dr. Paramvir; 2008, Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.18
Sahib’ having ‘Khanda Kirpan’ embroidered or printed on it. This ‘Nishan Sahib’ is referred to in the daily prayer (Ardas) of the Sikhs asking for its eternality.\textsuperscript{40} This feature relating to Panth and Khalsa is drawn in calendars either in front of a Gurdwara or as a design element balance a composition portraying a particular historical place or an event pertaining to Sikh history or Guru’s life.

While talking about the dominance of two main colours in Sikh calendars that is blue and saffron crystallised in earlier iconographic compositions. There is also an abundance of red, maroon, deep green and deep blue shades specially shown in the costumes of important figures and in relatively later calendars there is a touch of natural colours subdued shades of grey, white, pale, blue and light green for attires of common people composed in these compositions. But deep blue, white and saffron are colours related to the Khalsa Panth and Nihangs belonging to various Dals. Blue colour was chosen to express oneness with Akal Purakh and is a sign of infinity. Saffron colour is associated with sacrifice and carries a deep meaning of a resolute soul wholly devoted to the cause of eradication of evil and is considered as a colour of revolution according to Indian ethos and traditions. Yet white colour is an expression of purity, piousness, peace and saintliness having abundance of simplicity and calm.

Light coloured turbans and \textit{Jamas} (long shirts) are worn even today in rustic Punjab as they also act as radiating agents against bright sunlight as clothes of dark colours hamper the mobility of people due to absorption of unbearable excessive heat. In recent Sikh calendars where there is depiction of crowds engaged in specific activities pertaining to a particular scene people are shown mostly in light coloured attires. But the prime figures, saints, warriors, kings or Gurus are shown in appropriate colourful costumes so that they stand out against the crowd lending a focal attention to maximise an artistic charm to the

composition highlighting the required thrust on the central characters. In addition to this, landscapes in natural and realistic manner have been attempted by the artists, to augment the aesthetic appeal and make a picture look like a page from the real history. Trees especially Kikar (Plate-224), Pipal (Plate-225), Banyan (Plate-226) and other native trees have meticulously been painted in their true colours which stand a testimony to the keen observance of the artists while depicting a particular place in a rural setting. There is a remarkable control over the choice of colour palette, which has accorded a mercurial aesthetical character, and a class of its own to these contemporary calendars. The essence of something Sikh and Khalsa is evident due to skilful narrative and proficiency in proper characterisation in compositional arrangements loaded with Sikh paraphernalia.

A relative feature which attracts the eye in these calendars is of the understanding of Sikh architecture or the shape of rural structures, houses made of small bricks or of mud walls with typical wooden doors and street scenes. The facial cuts and features of the Punjabi people and their skin tones have been keenly observed and painted in masterly strokes. This depiction of Punjabi flavour is the result of enormous study and a deep sense of visualisation, which has successfully captured the fleeting time period in these calendars. Houses of rich people and other structures have not been painted in elaborate decorative styles yet they speak volumes of the straightforward approach without ascent on exaggeration and there is no unnecessary urge to depict them in over decorative styles.

It is observed that the artists have invested their considerable amount of time in the study of the attires or costumes worn by the Mughals, which were quite different in shapes, sizes, curves and patterns. Headgears relating to the Mughals and Pathan soldiers engaged in battlefields with Sikhs have been painted in a precise and correct manner. It is not very difficult to spot the difference in the styles of their beards and moustaches of these invaders and
oppressors shown engaged in turbulent and tumultuous war scenes with the Sikhs.

Yet another feature which has been used by some artists while painting scenes of gruesome torture and violence against the innocent Sikh disciples is the dramatization and exaggeration of facial gestures pertaining to project cruelty on the faces of Mughals bordering on crude ugly faces which looked demonic with extraordinary painted huge and red eyes and overtly heavy arms and muscles holding large and heavy weapons like swords, axes, spears, hammers and hot iron spikes.

An overwhelmingly noticeable feature in these calendars is that the artists have painted an aura of calm and peaceful disposition on the faces of Sikh followers being brutally martyred by horrible looking executioners. The peaceful state of mind depicted on these Sikh martyrs clearly demonstrates the height of spiritual strength and an unshakable belief in the almighty aptly justifying the dictum- ‘Tera Bhana Meetha Lage’ meaning ‘Thy Will is sweet’.

Means of transport and agricultural implements are among the other spheres of life frozen in these Sikh calendars. Walking on foot was the commonest mode of travelling in those times. People from different strata of society used horses (Plate-227), bullock-carts (Plate-228), chariots and palanquins (Plate-229) (Dolis) as means of transport according to their need and economic conditions. The carts and chariots were usually drawn by horses and oxen for heavy transport. Horses and palanquins were much in demand for individual travelling. Palanquins were generally meant for ladies and men of very high status. As regards agriculture, these calendars furnish us with a good peep into the mode and implements of cultivation, the working of the Persian wheel, the grazing of cattle by young boys and general life in the countryside. From them we also learn something about the animals such as cows, buffaloes, goats, camels, sheep and even occasional elephants being tamed by the people for
various tasks. There was a tradition of carrying the goods on head from one place to another, which is still visible in rural areas of Punjab connected with the daily chores of agriculture. From these calendars various species of birds, animals, plants and trees peep out in confirmation of their presence in those times in specific regions.\textsuperscript{41}

Women shown in these calendars with their heads covered with heavy Dupattas and Chaddars wearing Kurtis, Ghagras, Salwar Kameez and are generally not wearing any heavy jewellery firstly because they used to lead simple and solemn lives and secondly there was a general fear and anxiety that prevailed due to perpetual invasions by the Mughal, Afghan and Turkish invaders and looters in Punjab being the gateway to India. The ornaments, which were most popular with them, seem to be the earrings.\textsuperscript{42} Saintly people are shown wearing wooden clogs (Padukas) while ordinary people are generally depicted as bare footed. The common footwear was the Desi Juti (Plate-230) (country shoe), though the better off classes made use of costly slippers laced with gold and silver thread embroidery. Ordinary children painted in these calendars had very little clothing on their bodies, but those hailing from good families used to put on long shirts or cloaks with tight Pyjamas underneath and covered their heads either with caps or with turbans. The Brahmins were dressed differently from the other people and could easily be recognised as such from the manner of their dress. They put on a Dhoti and a Pugree and carried a piece of cloth (Parna in popular language) over their shoulders. (Plate-231) Excepting the head, the upper part of their body had nothing or except the sacred thread (Janeu).\textsuperscript{43}

There is also a reference in these calendars to a variety of caps worn by people belonging to various religious sects. The caps were mostly in vogue

\textsuperscript{41} Singh, Dr. Fauja; March 1969, \textit{A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak}, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.151-152
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, p.148-149
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, p.150
among the diverse Hindu religious orders of the Sants, Siddhs, Yogis etc. Among the Muslim religious orders, the ‘Dastar’ (Plate-232) (large sized Pugree) was more in vogue than the cap. This was why the Ulema were called ‘Dastarbandan’ and the Sayads who tied their turbans around ‘Kulas’ (conical caps) were known as ‘Kulas-Daran’. The rulers and the chiefs generally used the Pugree. Among the vast population of people too, the Pugree was worn by those popular persons who were more respected than the others. The cap was usually worn by ordinary folks who were not able to afford expensive turbans. Both the caps and the turbans had several designs as is evident in the Sikh calendars. Babar and members of several Muslim religious orders are shown here in large-sized turbans, some of them tied the turbans around ‘Kulas’ (conical caps). The more common pattern, however was a small-sized turban tied in the Rajput-Mughal style. The chiefs had plumes, usually of Heron’s feathers, tucked in to indicate their special status. The designs of the Pugree changed with the passage of time and we find a wide difference between the earlier Pugrees and those of the twentieth century. The cap offered even a greater variety of designs. There were close-fitting caps of the Yogis. The Siddhs another well-known order of the Hindu Hermits, put on conical caps with high tops generally known as ‘Qalandari’.44

It is very interesting to note that these calendars have set in chorological order Sikh history, cultural traditions and a daily way of life of common people and through this mirror we assimilate a plethora of undercurrents of historical significance and social manifestations. The figures painted are so life-like and moving in these calendars that we come across all emotions such as anger, joy, sorrow, amazement, disbelief, kindness, affection which have been painted in eloquent and lucid manner and one can easily gauge the mood of the moment.

44 Singh, Dr. Fauja; March 1969, A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.149
An appropriate and calculated use of the skies, clouds, storms, and sunshine has lent added aesthetic value and expression to these artistic compositions, which have the quality to attract and enthrall the onlooker.

These Sikh calendars testify that Pandhas or Brahmins were assigned the task of spreading education besides healing the people from ailments both physical and mental with their knowledge of Ayurvedic system of medicine. Similarly Maulvis were not supposed to teach in a school but were also understood to have curing powers through their proficiency in the Unani Hikmat. A glimpse of this tradition is present in some rare calendars.\(^\text{45}\)

The artists have recorded the use of richly embroidered drapery especially in red, green and maroon velvets and the presence of canopy (Chandni) provide a vivid cluster of tinsel, garlands and coloured textiles and in the similar fashion rugs, carpets and other spreads have been painted in the scenes to portray royalty and riches accompanied by intricately carved wooden furniture with inlay work such as Takhts (Plate-233), thrones and foot-rests (Plate-234) covered with a soft pillow which usually had golden or silver tinsels. Interiors of ‘Shamiyanas’ (temporary camping fabric structures) have also been decorated with the display of pieces of weaponry- shields, crossed spears and swords mounted on the walls. In some cases layers of beautiful bead-strings have been used to form temporary curtains. These settings also have occasional metallic, brass or silver Persian style utensils like Surahis and lamps, which presented an atmosphere of enhanced ambience due to their intricate and ornamental designs and shapes. Depiction of iron bowl (Bata) (Plate-235) an article usually carried by Nihangs is a sacred utensil to the Sikh soldiers as Guru Gobind Singh had prepared the first Amrit in such a utensil (Bata Sahib) for baptism of Panj Pyaras on the auspicious day of the birth of Khalsa.

\(^{45}\) Singh, Dr. Fauja; March 1969, A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4th Session, Patiala, p.151
Guru Gobind Singh, at the time of creation of Khalsa with ‘Khande Bate di Pahul’, ordered everybody to wear five Kakars to initiate as Khalsa. These five Kakars, known as symbol of Khalsa, beginning with the alphabet ‘K’, are essential for every baptised Sikh. The set of these five symbols present the distinctive features of the Khalsa, which set them off from the followers of any other religious faith. These attributes had otherwise too a deeper significance and guided a Sikh’s life from his head to toe. These are ‘Kes’ (long uncut hair), ‘Kangha’ (comb), ‘Kara’ (iron bracelet), ‘Kachhahera’ (shorts reaching up to the knees) and ‘Kirpan’ (sword). ‘Kes’ or unshorn hair is the stamp of the Guru. A Sikh believes them to be a treasure blessed upon by the Guru. One having ‘Kes’ has been symbolised as a cosmic being, who has been described as “Sohane nak jin lamre vala” - having beautiful nose and unshorn hair, in Gurbani. Guru Gobind Singh created Khalsa in the image of this cosmic being. The unshorn hair indicates living in Guru’s Will and Sikh has to preserve the form blessed upon him by the Lord. The turban added to head’s physical height, held it high and by its spiral shape led mind to incline upward to ever-greater heights. ‘Kangha’ or comb is to be kept in the hair to keep the hair clean while combing and saving them from matted condition. Matted hair symbolises renunciation of the world, which is contrary to the Sikh tradition. The comb, ‘Kangha’ weeded out evil and undesirable. ‘Kara’, which adorned generally on the right wrist, is made of iron. ‘Kara’ testonies the fact that Sikh do not believe in superstitions or false beliefs and lives in the Guru’s Will. Every Khalsa is enjoined to wear a ‘Kachhahera’, a pair of specially designed shorts, symbolises the high conduct of

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48 Singh, Dr. Paramvir; 2008, Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.18
49 Daljeet, Dr; 2004, The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.115
the individual wearing it. It is of tight fitting and covers the thighs up to the knees. ‘Kachhahera’ stands to negate the concept of nudity prevalent in Indian asceticism. It restricts a Sikh to adhere to the social norms as a balanced social being. In the Sikh religion, ‘Kirpan’ or sword is a weapon which is primarily used for self-protection rather than to attack somebody without reason.\textsuperscript{50} We come across these symbols and features in many calendars being the key elements of Sikh faith understanding their conceptual meaning which helps in defining the Sikh characters (Khalsa) projected in the calendars while narrating a particular episode from Sikh history. Their visual projection also gives a distinctive appearance to the calendars on Sikh themes and their repeated depiction has been instrumental in propagating the Sikh faith, ethos and traditions.

Sikh calendars of war scenes generally show ‘Nagara’\textsuperscript{(Plate-241)} mounted on horsebacks or elephants. ‘Nagara’ is believed to be a thunderous musical instrument of war. It is used in the battlefield to indicate the beginning of the war. Its use could be traced to the celebration of festivals. Guru Gobind Singh prepared a drum, which was called ‘Ranjit Nagara’ or ‘drum of victory’ and had used it at the times of wars. The Nihang Singhs, while moving from one place to another, play a ‘Nagara’ ahead of their caravan to announce to the people of their arrival. ‘Nagara’ is used in Gurdwaras on some special occasions and at the time of Ardas.\textsuperscript{51} Similarly a large brass musical instrument known as ‘Ransingha’\textsuperscript{(Plate-242)} is a ‘S’ shaped, huge windpipe which is blown by the warriors leading the troops to announce the arrival of a procession and also at the same time to boost the courage and moral of the warriors thereby scaring away the enemies with its roaring sounds followed by loud war cries of ‘Bole Sau

\textsuperscript{50} Singh, Dr. Paramvir; 2008, Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.16
\textsuperscript{51} Singha, H.S.; 2000, The encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Hemkunt Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.150
Nihal Sat Sri Akal’. A stringed musical instrument called ‘Rabab’ is also shown in many Sikh calendars specially the ones related to Guru Nanak Dev where his constant companion Mardana is shown playing this musical instrument. (Plate-243) Other musical instruments shown in calendars which were popularised by Guru Gobind Singh for his sightless disciples such as ‘Tabla’ (Plate-244), ‘Saranda’ (Plate-245), and ‘Taus’ (Plate-246) in order to enable them to contribute to the Sikh faith in their own capacity as music is an integral part of Shabad and Bani recitation enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib which has been set on ragas of Indian classical music.  

‘Dhad’ (Plate-247) is an ancient musical instrument in the shape of a tabor (Damru), which is played with the finger’s strokes of the hands. The person playing this instrument is called a Dhadi or a bard. The use of ‘Dhad’ and ‘Sarangi’ (Plate-248) is still popular even today as ‘Dhad Sargis’ or the balladeers narrate the tales from the pages of Sikh history of valour and bravery of Sikh martyrs, warriors and Gurus in their own inimitable and zestful style, which is capable of uplifting the emotions of the masses to a rare plateau of enthusiasm. They are usually seen performing in all large religious congregations, melas and festivals. This is their musical tribute to the inspirational aspect of Sikh religion of which the history is replete with lofty ideals of service and sacrifice. Many contemporary calendars showcase this element in quite appealing form thereby registering their valuable contribution towards the propagation of Sikh history as these Dhadis are capable of establishing a direct contact with the masses while they perform on the stage in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and have a rare capacity to move the gathered devotees. Their long association with the Sikh religion goes back to the times when Guru Hargobind ordained the Dhadis to sing ballads in front of the Akal Takht in order to produce zeal and enthusiasm.

52 Bains, K.S; 1995, Sikh Heritage in Paintings, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.77
for victory in wars in the hearts of the Sikhs. Abdulla and Nattha were the main minstrels of Guru Sahib’s time.53

A feature worth notice in the Sikh calendars is the inscription and description of a particular person or a group of persons, their names and designations/titles and the purpose for their congregation at a particular place either a religious place or a palace are mentioned in Gurmukhi script. This practice was even evident in earliest woodcuts and Sikh calendars. A place of pride is also reserved in the calendars for religious couplets or Bani from the Holy Scripture to impress upon the devout to understand and follow the essence of wisdom enshrined in the couplet. Sometimes these couplets are used as an indication to highlight the sanctity of an event, person or place. The practice of labelling the characters helps in tracing the gist of anecdotes featured in the calendars and to summarise the long episode in few precise stanzas.

In a number of contemporary calendars painted for the propagation of Sikh way of life, artists have attempted to illustrate the most popular Sikh martial art known as ‘Gatka’ (Plate-249), which is a significant sports activity of Khalsa. ‘Gatka’ is practiced amongst the Sikhs especially the Baptised ones as it keeps them physically fit and strong, and provides excellence in the art of warfare. For the purpose of practice by the youngsters a long stick instead of a sword is used and wooden or metal shield is provided to save themselves from the attack later on proper swords, spears and chakkaries are used. Guru Hargobind started competitions of ‘Gatka’ and physical activities in front of the Akal Takht so that the Sikhs may achieve expertise in warfare. The playing of ‘Gatka’ builds a feeling of self-confidence, enthusiasm and alertness among the Sikhs and it is

ceremoniously played in front of the Sikh religious processions. Nihang Singhs as known as ‘Guru ki Fauj’ seriously practice this martial sport along with performing of marvellous and miraculous feats on their horses on the day of *Hola Mohalla* at Anandpur Sahib or wherever their *Deras* are situated. Depiction of martial traits, weapons and unique types of turbans and dresses of Nihangs have attracted the attention of many artists who have ventured to showcase the exotic scenes in Sikh calendars.

Having identified the main features prevalent in *Sikh Calendar art* which remained in constant use during the past century or so as they project the essence of Sikhism, Sikh way of life, their religious practices and objects which are of immense sanctity and sacred value and the ceremonies associated with the Sikhs enable us to have a brief idea of the visual presentation which has been portrayed by the artists in their myriad styles and techniques using their artistic skills and aesthetic faculties to describe prominent episodes from Sikh history. It is essential for an artist of any denomination to achieve an insight into the understanding of these features to depict the moral, social and historical perceptions contained in them while depicting the philosophical and religious background of an event and it is also an absolute requirement for the artist to have a fair knowledge of the features related to Sikhism in order to present in a truthful way the plethora of ideals through their optimum use in an exercise to retain the content and flavour of the related subject. Identification of accurate features related to Sikhism and *Sikh art* is all the more important and pertinent for a person who is not well versed with these objects and practices. Features depicted correctly and appropriately in specific situations and compositions add to the authenticity thus the inner meaning contained in a particular feature should

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54 Singh, Dr. Paramvir; 2008, *Sikh Gurus- Concepts and Culture*, Sikh Foundation, New Delhi, p.30
also be given due thought so that the inner soul of the subject matter comes alive in a realistic and befitting manner which will initiate the audience in mobilising a thought process to understand the ethos involved in evolving a particular feature. The task requires immense patience and dedication both in terms of deep study and understanding of the main features. The textural narrative in these calendars can only be explained and illustrated properly if due consideration is devoted to the symbolic essence and its objective is well defined through deep visualisation and control over the rendering techniques. At no point the basic importance of a feature could be sacrificed otherwise the final product in this case a Sikh calendar will be devoid of the true Sikh flavour and ambience associated with it. Here the main task for an artist engaged in the painting of Sikh calendars is to acquaint himself with the eminence of features in order to retain their form and content to preserve and augment the thought process in the formation of these features in exact visual resemblance and their latent manifestations.

As these features are the culmination of long and deep philosophical and spiritual quest which was undertaken by the Great Sikh Gurus and other Sikh luminaries who are adored as torchbearers of Sikh ethics generated these features after long spells of meditative contemplations and having exemplary personal moral values. Hence it is natural that these symbols are so revered by the Sikhs as they represent the soul of the Khalsa Panth. Most of the features of the Sikh Calendar art are respectfully addressed as ‘Sahibs’ due to their immensely holy character such as Nishan Sahib (Khalsa flag), Sri Sahib (Plate-250) (Sword), Chaur Sahib (Plate-251) (Holy fly-whisk), Khanda Sahib (Two-edged sword), Bata Sahib (Iron Bowl), Manji Sahib (Plate-252) (Charpoy), Takht Sahib (Throne), Pidha Sahib (Pidhi) and Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Adi Granth) etc. as they are considered an embodiment of the true spirit of Khalsa. Knowledge of these features in totality together with their meaning and their outer visual form can enable a person to differentiate between the separate genre of Sikh Calendar art from the
calendars related to other sects and religions both for scholars as well as the laymen engaged in the study of "Sikh Calendar art."