The study of various aspects of *Sikh Calendar art* proved to be an overwhelmingly enlightening and a revealing experience and it turned out to be an extremely enriching phenomenon encompassing all shades and hues of Sikh religion, history, philosophy, culture, traditions, social ethics- psychological and political dimensions in an array of multifarious perspectives. Though initially it may overtly appear to be a visual presentation of imagery employed by some promising Sikh artists to record and document the various episodes from Sikh history, mainly comprising of glorious pages from the lives of Sikh Gurus but it is a heartening revelation that the study of this most popular genre of *Sikh Calendar art* forcefully brought to the surface a plethora of vistas which go beyond the mere visual depictions and eventually relate to the very soul of the religious, philosophical, psychological and ethical essence of the Sikh religion- nurtured by unmatched divine cultivation of thought processes built on supreme sacrifices and exemplary humble, noble and pious lifestyles of *Sikh Gurus*. The process of propagation of the divine message of Sikhism had to encounter monstrous resistance from evil and tyrant rulers who abode the very idea of awakening of the masses as a crime fit for severe punishment. While repeeling the veneer of visual stylization of these Sikh calendars, there appears underneath a reservoir of unfathomed dedication, artistic synergy and personal moral convictions of the stalwarts of *Sikh Calendar art* who reinforced the foundations of these wonderfully painted enchanting works of *Sikh Popular art* after deep contemplation and reinvention of their true selves. Each artist who devoted his lifetime to this genre has infact tried to live the spiritual euphoria. The muse, inspiration and motivation behind their creations stemmed from divinity though the vehicles of imagery displays their own unmistakable personal styles and visual idioms dwelling on the moral values and spiritual ethics carefully cultivated by the Sikh Gurus. The rich and robust cultural traditions and atmosphere contributed to their enthusiasm, excitement and of course the
necessity to pursue a career which catered to their mental satisfaction by bringing an aura of spiritual achievement.

The discerning exercise to scratch below the surface and go beyond the apparent offers an unlimited scope of study of psycho-analysis of a creative person and unearthing the source of inspiration and motivation leads the researcher to discover the potent aspirational elements which form the bulk of the visual vocabulary developed over the years. In short it lays bare the structure of his style and content. The popular preferences do play a part in shaping the thematic evolvement as it shares oneness with the popular taste and the cultural milieu in which the artist lives, dreams and paints. In case of calendars of Sikh art which occupies a revered place in popular Sikh psyche, the reason why this genre is appreciated immensely is that it embodies the glowing spiritual manifestations cherished by the great Sikh Gurus. The main contribution of these artists lies in the development of a widely accepted iconography which is being faithfully followed and adored by the followers of Sikh faith. This arduous journey went through various stages of soul searching revelations and meditative stances during the creation of these mesmerizing works of Sikh Calendar art. Keen scrutiny justifies the proof that the stalwarts of Sikh Calendar art took it as a sacred mission to paint and record truthfully and with great sensitivity the currents and undercurrents of the thematic contents depicted in these appealing works, their personal idioms and degrees of artistic evolvements have also played a great part in achieving the conceptual consolidation of the fleeting movements of glorious events in Sikh history. The mere pursuance of this genre of art as a gainful profession for earning money and eking out a lavish livelihood out of this profession was not on the consciousness of these great artists. Though it may have provided them enough economic substance to sustain a life full of harmony and creative
exploration. As a matter of fact their sacred endeavours were instrumental in satisfying the creative as well as spiritual goals in a befitting way.

Digging deep into the consciousness of these artists by way of posing penetrative queries to find the answers in their interactive expressions and explanations, reading and meeting people who shared close bonds with these artists provided valuable convictions which triggered artistic impulses in their hearts and minds. The pearls of wisdom revealed in their pursuits and their behavioral leanings present the defined psyche responsible for invigorating layers of consciousness to reach pinnacles of professionalism in their works besides achieving ethereal presence that radiates a glow of spiritualism. Due emphasis was also placed in knowing the background and lifestyles of these artists as it is of immense importance to throw a glance on the day-to-day work routines to ascertain the quantum of energy and devotion they had attributed to their works during their lives.

Artist Sobha Singh, the most prominent painter of Sikh Calendar art was a strict disciplinarian. He had a fixed daily routine. He used to get up at 4 a.m. After a cup of coffee, he would start reading his favourite authors like Emerson, Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Ruskin, Krishnamurthi and Khalil Gibran. Then he would stroll and sit in his garden to welcome the dawn. After bowing to the sun, he would go to his easel and start painting. He used to complete the major part of his painting before the visitors started coming. After 10 a.m., he would be in a mood to relax and welcome all and sundry. Sobha Singh derived his philosophy of art from Emerson- the great American author. He believed that, “Art is a branch of ethics and is an outcome of social-historical reality and it only serves its purpose if it pays due attention to the most potent influence of the world comprising of practical and moral values.”

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1 Kaur, Madanjit; Ed. 1987, Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.5-6
of art in secular world is to invoke a sense of spiritual awareness and to provide inspiration. He further elaborating that, “Art should exhilarate and throws down the walls of circumstances on every side, awakening in the beholder the same sense of universal relationship and the power which the work evinces in the artist, and its highest effect is to make new artists.”

The prime reason why Sobha Singh devoted his lifetime in painting the iconographic images of Sikh Gurus especially those of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh after absorbing the philosophical and moral messages advocated during their lives go well with his own thought processes, he adored serenity, spiritualism and self-discipline in his life and creations.

In matters of art, Sobha Singh preferred Italy to France because in his opinion, “Italian art is devotional while Paris highlights only emotion.” He fully acknowledged the importance of deep study of the subject and devoted long hours to study the subject in totality analyzing all philosophical, social and psychological aspects besides giving due diligence to the historical perspective. He was a mystic and a conformist in religion in true spirit of the word. Apart from Bani (devotional poetry) of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (the religious scripture of the Sikhs), he evinced a special interest in Zen thought, Buddhism and writings of Chinese sage- Lao Tse. ‘Solitude is the school of genius’, says Gibbon. One can unfathom the depths of creativity by spending a considerable amount of time in solitude and hear the echoes of silence reverberating in a divine harmony. Sobha Singh achieved the desired creative pinnacle by enjoying isolation and discipline. The elements of nature which are vocal in the surroundings of Dhauladhaars- the majestic mountain range of the Himalayas, offered him its cozy lap and cradled the lonely child in Sobha Singh’s heart and

2 Atkinson, Brooks; Ed. 1940, The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Modern Library, New York, p.312
3 Kaur, Madanjit; Ed. 1987, Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.6
like an ascetic nurtured his philosophies and fulfilled his search for true wisdom. He moulded himself in the image of Dhauladhaars and stood like a rishi with chiseled features crowned by free flowing cluster of silver grey beard and hair. Perhaps this is the reason why he never indulged in painting war scenes and depicting mindless violence. He revealed to Dr. M.S. Randhawa- the ardent admirer and connoisseur of his art that, “Paintings which depict war scenes would never allow men to forget tyranny and hatred, and blood cannot be cleaned with blood. The paintings of wars and religious intolerance widen the gulf among men. But the paintings of the martyrs of peace cover up the cleavages among human beings. Such a painting is comparable to a lighted candle which sends its glow to a limited area, but its reality becomes very significant.”

The psyche behind Sobha Singh’s art is beautifully narrated in a spell of conversation with his friend Balwant Gargi- a celebrated author and playwright. The artist avers that, “I am not an artist. It is better to be a good man and shed light of humanity. Art is a powerful tool. It depends how it is used and who uses it. A gun is also a power. But who holds that gun? And who holds the brush? If you give a gun in the hands of a child he may shoot himself or he may shoot you down. If it is in the hands of a bandit, he will rob you. If it is in the hands of a saint he will protect you. It’s no fault of the gun. Depends on who uses it. The artist’s function is to beautify the world, to make it more livable, more healthy, more elevated in spirit. As a painter I know that if three men paint the same object, they will paint it in different perspectives, different lights, shades and colours and moods because all of them have individual philosophies, backgrounds and convictions.”

‘Grow More Good’ is the main motto painted on the front gate of his house set in the idyllic surroundings of a lovely village.

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4 Randhawa, Dr. M.S.; Nov.24, 1985, Sobha Singh: Artist of Unity, The Tribune Sunday Reading.
called Andretta in the Kangra valley. This sum up his message that life should be beautiful and we artists should make it more beautiful, more purposeful, more honest, pure and lovely.⁶ He states that, “That more is my purpose. I don’t pride myself as an artist. I want to prove nothing. I want to cut out ego from my being. When one wipes the ego then art is more honest. There is more flow and spontaneity in it.”⁷ He loved simple village folks, labourers, shepherds and farmers and always made it a point to visit their homes in the event of any merriment and adversity. He enjoyed their company as their innocent utterings solidified his convictions that God dwells in simple things and acts.

Sobha Singh once in the grip of inspiration, the world around him would fade into nothingness, his own physical needs of rest and sleep and food were reduced to the barest minimum, for then he would be a denizen of the land of colour and light, with incantation of his brush beckoning the spirit of beauty to this world of symbols and forms. For some of his paintings, he had worked for more than thirty-six hours at a stretch, without even resting on his seat, only a cup of milk and a toast at intervals was enough to relieve his exhaustion, and then at the end the job, with the strain too great even for an iron frame, he would fall into a fit of unconsciousness for hours together as a consequence of defying laws of physical nature.⁸ Sobha Singh believed in the often repeated dictum that “Life is everlasting and art is its compensation.” He believed that the purpose of art is to arouse people to a higher awareness.⁹ Sobha Singh had painted history indeed of the evolution of man’s soul and not only of prophets, saints and great men.

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⁹ Kaur, Madanjit; Ed. 1987, Painter of the Divine- Sobha Singh, Guru Nanak Dev University Press, Amritsar, p.8
To a very interesting question posed by well known author and journalist-Sushil Kumar Phul to Sobha Singh- the doyen of Sikh Calendar art that why the artist has traveled from painting romance to painting religion. And what is the cause of this evolution. He bared his soul and described in depth that how an artist at various stages of consciousness shifts from one step to another with growing self-realization and by achieving a grasp on maturity and reality. He further averred, “In the first phase of my artistic career, I thought only saints and sages are good. I was haunted by Trans-mundane love i.e. Ishk Hakiki. So I painted Sheikh Farid, Surdas and others of the clan. Gradually a realization dawned upon me. The sadhus and saints did not appear perfect anymore. They renounce the world for an ideal to meditate. I thought this was no lie. How can everyone renounce the world in a pursuit of an ideal. In the second phase of my growth, I felt that the lovers were the best people. They are true to each other. They had no ambiguity in their devotion. What is love? We love that which we cannot possess. I painted Sohni Mahiwal, Heer Ranjha and others. Lately it dawned upon me that has Sohni Mahiwal been bound down in wedlock, they might have desired separation in the end. Unfulfilled love only is charming. I forsook romance as an ideal. The women haunted me in the third phase of my evolution because of her devotion to her husband, children and other members of the family. She is transplanted from one family to the other, and sacrifices her everything for others. She is great, I thought the ‘Mother is always great’. To satisfy my desires for mother, I painted a few women like Punjabi Bride, Kangra Bride, Gaddan and others. I shifted to religion ultimately. Religion is nothing but faith. Masses cannot be educated through materialistic philosophy. They can receive wisdom through religion. It inspires them. I have painted Sikh Gurus to inspire people. Painting the Sikh Gurus is nearest to ultimate in evolution of my
real self. This I say because evolution has no end.” An in a parental advice to his daughter Bibi Gurcharan Kaur and her son Hridaypaul Singh, the artist often underlined the need that the reproductions of his thought-provoking masterpieces whenever undertaken should be of superior quality and the sale outlets should be of high professional standard so that his paintings are not reduced to cheap quality products being sold on the pavements of bazaars as he had painted these works after great contemplation and meditation.

It is often stated by the noble wise men that God created man in his own image and more aptly it is true in the case of art that artists generally paint the paintings in their own images with qualities inherent in their beings. The great masterpiece ‘Eko Simro Nanaka’ depicts Guru Nanak as an apostle of peace who after having attained enlightenment is emerging from the river Kali Bein at Talwandi Sabo. This painting if critically analyzed will stand the testimony that in the real sense this work of art acted like Sobha Singh’s own resurrection and after having struggled for long, he had been successful in capturing a subject which was metaphysical and beyond the touch of physical description. Such enlightening works emerge from the brush of an artist who is predominantly a saint and lives like a Karam Yogi. Sobha Singh believed that escapism from life, family and society is no permanent solution to the ever-emerging questions of one’s existence. Answers have to be found living in the thick of life and life cannot be avoided for any personal enlightenment or awakening. Spirituality is subtle which resides in the simple surroundings around us. One has to develop the sight and see this everlasting beauty. When asked how he could visualize Guru Nanak’s face, his reply was: “I will not caption it as

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‘Guru Nanak’; this is a manifestation of my meditation of the Guru.” It is artist’s sheer humility but it is a fact that no artist has been more successful in capturing the spiritual essence of the Guru as this saint artist- Sobha Singh has done.12

The artist was so devoted to the painting of Sikh Gurus, he would often admit that his soul aim of life was to paint the images of the Gurus. In his own words, he expressed that, “Painting is my life- Gurus are my life-blood. Guru Nanak is a manifestation of my meditation. Guru Gobind Singh is inspiration incarnate.”13 As the Sikh Gurus greatly influenced his very persona, he took upon himself to paint them in repeated versions and to convey to the people the lofty, humanistic and divine values which flowed from the lives of Sikh Gurus. The artist devoted his entire artistic potential in carrying forward the flame of piousness and illuminated and elevated harmony so that the coming generation may get inspiration and awakening from the wisdom of the Gurus. Absence of spiritual awakening and darkness of ignorance leads people to the barbaric and brutal ways. As a heart without kindness is virtually rendered cruel and can only perpetuate barbaric pursuits both physical and mental. In a very simplistic example, the artist has elaborated on this thought and narrates that, “When a child cannot build his sand-house, he demolishes those of others. Mere glorification of one’s physical is mortal while if you have found the essence of your life then you are immortal.”14 His life is a glowing tribute to this conviction that his inner strength, self-realization and self-improvement will certainly give him a cause to live a happy and fruitful life, while using his brush to paint the mundane objects around him he endeavoured to place them on the celestial pedestal. An artist who has attained the caliber, to transform the daily fleeting

14 Khokhar, Dr. Kulwant Singh; 2002, Soul and Principles, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Exports, Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar, p.4
moments of life into highly cherished lofty and idealistic expressions, is indeed a saint and of course a crusader. Indulgence in spiritual pursuits has infact polished the very essence of his art which radiates in divine eternity. The persona of Gurus is so soothingly portrayed that it applies balm to the tortured and parched souls of the beholders. His work develops an instant bond with the viewer and stirs the innermost chords of his minds and soul implanting the message of humanistic values in free-flowing impact of artistic undercurrents. The viewer is charged with an enigmatic energy which mesmerizes his soul and leaves an indelible mark on his innermost psyche. The lines which emanate from Sobha Singh’s heart describe his art and mission in spellbinding truthfulness. The artist sums up his art in his own words as “My art is my religion and my aim in it is to give a form to the formless. In my effort, I paint the Gurus, the avatars and the prophets. Sometimes, a painting of mine, keeps on growing with my growth and I keep on trying to make it more and still more perfect with new touches of my brush and by making changes in it. This way, I see integrated growth of my painting, exactly as I find my past in my present. The art may be of any type, but if it does not touch the inner self of the man and help in is evolution, then it is useless.”

Many upcoming artists used to visit his studios at Andretta to have a first hand knowledge of his working style and his general approach to art as they were spellbound by his technical skills and superior craftsmanship in his each work. They observed him closely and occasionally. Sobha Singh used to give the much sought after advice urgently needed by this new generation of artists. It was his firm belief that in the real sense of the word, the artists cannot be made and they are born as artists. However circumstances, surroundings, sound guidance can

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equip them with greater competence and can even improve their painting styles and infuse a new lease of life into their stagnating creative impulses. Literature and interaction also propels renewed impetus in an artist’s mind and can open new doors to let in the fresh air of ideas and concepts. Similarly some artists he believed are inspired by music. While others are tuned to philosophical discourses and deep discussions. In his words of wisdom, he has explained that, “I believe that an artist is born as such and that none can be taught to become one. The rose is a rose right from its beginning. The genes of an artist present from birth, keep on developing by sincere hardwork. The circumstances and the environment do play their part. In the domain of art, the inspiration is needed by the novices or by the ignorants at the initial stage. All that matters here is the single-mindedness of the purpose. Then the inspiration arises from within. The truth needs no inspirational consolidation. The seed of art in someone keeps on sprouting with right effort. I adopted no teacher to learn painting and I could not afford to join any such institution. I inherited painting from my father and aesthetic sense from my mother. I could draw and paint right from my childhood. I picked up the scale drawing from my brother-in-law, Sardar Mangal Singh. When at Basra, I had an occasion to observe Lt. Col. Glover and Lt. Rigden and a few more Europeans, who painted as a hobby. I kept an eye and mind open and my art kept on evolving. I have my own techniques of colour mixing, balancing, harmonising and of retaining the sensitivity of my paintings.”

Another aspect admitted by the artist is the importance of extensive study of available literature on the subject and he used to deeply contemplate in it. For this purpose, he had created a small cottage away from his abode deep in the forest at Andretta, where silence and solitude reigned and he used to be engaged in contemplation to arrive at the final imagery of a specific work so that all

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aspect and elements of the creation are well thought after and a precise crystal like composition emerges on the canvas of his mind. Such meditative sessions put him in spiritual trance and he came out from the depths of the eternal oceans of his imagination with pearls of wisdom and ethereal comprehension of an artistic sojourn. It is not surprising that due to deep indulgence, each work of Sobha Singh resonates with subtle divinity and his superb technical skills adds a charismatic ambience to his works. Colours, tones and hues danced at his synchronized ecstasy. The greatest compliment he ever got from a rustic native of Andretta was that, “Sardar Sobha Singh takes out his own soul and puts that into the paintings. He possesses some magical powers and his paintings come alive at the touch of his brush.” And yet another viewer was so mesmerized and enthralled on seeing him engrossed in painting of Guru Gobind Singh remarked that, “Guru Gobind Singh himself comes and directs his hand to paint his pictures.” In the nutshell, he used to express that his prime artistic endeavour was to paint the qualities of a particular great man- a saint or a Guru and on this basis an image of that person emerged out of his canvas.

Andretta, the laid back sleepy village where he established his abode and studio, is surrounded by towering snow-clad Dhauladhaar mountains, murmuring brooks and a rich variety of flora and fauna, inhabited by simple and innocent Pahari folks, lies in Kangra valley, where other prominent figures from theatre and literary world like Mother of Punjabi Theatre- Lady Norah Richards and Father of Blue pottery- Sardar Gurcharan Singh, also established their homes and studios and they used to have frequent visitors like Balraj Sahni, Prithvi Raj Kapoor, Dr. M.S. Randhawa, Dr. Karan Singh, Amrita Pritam, Nanak Singh, Gurbaksh Singh Preetlari and Pandit Mangat Ram amongst them. This place has

the magical beauty and charm of its own and these people found true solace in the lap of nature. Andretta certainly has played a great part in shaping the destiny of this ascetic artist who was in constant pursuit of real divine bliss so that the turmoils of life may cease to exist. He had tasted the noisy and crafty life in many cities where one-upmanship and selfishness ruled the roost. He did not have fancy for over clever money-minded self-proclaimed leaders of art and literature who hankered after laurels and honours only. Being a misfit in such circumstances he always yearned to live at a place where he could understand his real self so that whatever he painted came straight from his heart and is devoid of economic constraints. Living here in Andretta amongst the hard working folks, took away the unnecessary burden of professional competition and lightened his soul which ultimately wiped the dust off his innermost psyche and he could see the things in right perspective. This indeed was a boon for his career and artistic journey. Here he enjoyed whatever he did in his own inimitable manner.

Occasionally, Sobha Singh used to describe the sad trends in promotion of art and culture prevalent in modern times, he did not mince words to express his anguish at the sad and unreasonable happenings pertaining to the art world. He aired his views with sarcasm that, “Mostly wrong people and third-rate artists are patronized by the government. Good artists are admired only after they die because they provide an occasion for a politician to make a good speech. He further mentions that Good artists are born when the artists go through suffering and starvation, while the government pampers some artists without going into their creative merit. This may be due to political considerations. To provide true patronage to art and culture, government should formulate a transparent and democratic policy where the only consideration for honouring an artist should be his dedication and creative merit. This way hordes of so called artists and poets who use their talents of sycophancy and glib talking will disappear into thin air. Politicizing the creative arts by the patrons is of immense destructive value and
in the long run genuine artists who wholeheartedly devote their lives towards the propagation of art stand to loose a great deal.” In a lighter vein, he once remarked in response to the question of this nature that, “Ninety per cent artists and poets are not genuine and to get rid of them they should be sent to jails. Thus the society would be cleared of manipulators and pseudo-artists.”

Sobha Singh often quoted relevant couplets from Gurbani beneath his paintings in an effort to reach out to the masses, so that these revered couplets by the Gurus, may instill a feeling of divinity and kindle a flame in their hearts for humanistic values as these values have the power to bring harmony and mutual respect for all mankind to usher in an era of peaceful co-existence in this world.

An artist is always in search of food for thought so that with his creative efforts the darkness of ignorance which is the root cause of hatred amongst the human beings is dispelled. Infact Sobha Singh’s life is a shinning example of a visionary who took it as a sacred mission to spread harmony in society through his art. Basically he was a true messenger who portrayed the divine messages of the Gurus.

Running after awards and honours for self-glorification was not in Sobha Singh’s temperament and infact he found it quiet difficult to part with his paintings for the consideration of money. Thus he had devised a way to earn his livelihood through the sale of the reproductions of these great works. The best reward for him was people’s love and respect for his art which he got in abundance during his lifetime and even after death from art connoisseurs as well as common viewers. He did not like the idea that some people worship his paintings and burn incense-sticks and offer flowers before them. He considered it as a ritualistic act. He described that it would give him much more happiness and

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satisfaction if people improved their lives by getting inspired from his works. This will aid their mental upliftment and growth as human beings.²²

The fertile soil of village Verka in Amritsar district of Punjab though generally associated with the production of milk, butter and ghee has also produced an artist who came to be known as ‘John Constable of India’²³ due to his immense love for nature. This was artist S.G. Thakur Singh who created some records of sorts which remain unbroken till today. He was primarily the first artist who was awarded a handsome cash award and a medal in the British Empire Exhibition in London in 1924.²⁴ He was a frontrunner in following the painting techniques brought to India by the British artists. He added a Midas touch to every artistic creation and his canvases were so versatile and vibrant that these touched vast realms of subjects from nature to life, to cultural manifestations stretching beyond the boundaries of Punjab in his magnificent works. He received lavish praise and laurels from all over India and abroad. Though he had very humble beginnings and could not afford the systematic institutional academic study in art yet his determination and dedication enabled him to stand amongst the most creative and aesthetically sound artists of his day as one of the tallest stalwart of his times. Even as a child, he was always engrossed in observing the bounties of sunrise and sunsets and stood in the fields all alone marveling at the beauty of nature. Trees, plants, animals and birds became his chum-friends and he enjoyed being in their company and started sketching them often on the mud walls of Katcha houses of his village as he could barely afford a sketchbook due to dire poverty and deprivation. He had such a powerful imagination and skill that he could draw from memory the faces

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of the people and lazily grazing cattles in the fields and each tree offered him a mode of fascination and provided him blissful ecstasy in painting it in charcoal made out of burnt wood. These moments laid a solid artistic foundation in his heart and his sensitive portrayal of the surroundings strengthened his grasp on nature painting. Each passing day added to his caliber as an artist and Nature became his school of art and his teacher. The love of nature never betrayed him till the end of his life; he loved it, touched it, felt it and painted it in its enigmatic divinity. Infact he lavishly captured the very essence of nature and experienced the subtle presence of God in his nature study, as he had the good opportunity to travel far and wide on the soil of this great country. He expressed his enchantment of his country in the following words: “This ancient land of India, so vast in her extent, so varied in her loveliness, has lured from time immemorial the footsteps of the greedy conqueror as well as the inquisitive visitor from lands far remote. But face to face with her irresistible magnificence the conqueror found him disarmed, and instead of ransacking her fair bosom, was forced to lay at her lotus feet the best gift of his own exotic culture and civilization. The dazed visitor went back with his incredible tales of wonder and romance and was instrumental in manipulating a fresh wave of invasion with results not a whit different from those in the past. This endless process of time has thus made India the treasure-house not only of natural beauty but also of works of supreme artistic excellence. Even her minutest particle of dust instinct with some mystical, mythical or historical tradition or association. In the busy life of today, it is given only to a very few lovers of nature and art to have the luxury of visiting all such places and having a first hand impression of their fadeless splendour.”

In recording the bewitching scenes, landscapes, seascapes, historical monuments, places of pilgrimage and a vast variety of ethnic inhabitants, the subjects which

Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.17.

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were close to his heart- he had in fact left behind an artistic legacy for those not fortunate enough to have the luxury to travel to these incredible places to have a first hand artistic interaction. He narrates that, “I have been motivated by a desire to be of service to the less fortunate among the art lovers who neither time nor convenience permits any chance to embark upon a holy pilgrimage to the eternal shrines of beauty.”

S.G. Thakur Singh not only documented the myriad glimpses of landscapes of this country in an aesthetic manner, he also endeavoured to publish a few multicoloured publications of his works with suitable descriptions so that the coming generations may have a chance to have the glimpses of India which had been capturing the imagination of kings, emperors, travelers and settlers. The remarkable work compiled in these albums have immense educational value and art lovers and upcoming artists can fire their imagination to create wonderful works. This great artist had a photographic eye and memory and well versed in architectural aspects like perspective and foreshortening. Another highlight of his work is that he infused his soul into the subjects he painted and his works do not look like mere imitations of the original spots but there reigns an aura of divinity in these outstanding works and they are bathed in a light that transmits awakening and spiritualism in one’s mind. An ardent admirer of ‘William Wordsworth’- the renowned Nature poet, he sought to express visually what Wordsworth described in his lucid literary style and we can admiringly characterise him as a William Wordsworth who wrote his poems in colour and brush. The love of nature is treasured in the hearts of a few people whose roots are well-grounded in the soil and whose heads are above the clouds. Analyzing his psyche and philosophy,

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27 Rani, Dr. Saroj; 2001, The Realistic Artists from Punjab, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.45
behind the arresting of the fleeting moments of nature lies a proof of ample glow of spirituality and his love for the divinity. Infact people like him are philosophers in their own rite. In a very commendable remark written by the Great Russian painter- Nicholas Roerich in which Roerich has praised the works of S.G. Thakur Singh and he says: “S.G. Thakur Singh loves his great motherland. He travels and depicts various aspects of Indian life. From realistic studies he turns to landscapes full of harmony in colours. We should be grateful to the artist who gives us the beauty of India.”

The humble boy from Verka received appreciation and accolade for his enchanting works from people as great as the Nobel Laureate- Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore praises his unparalleled efforts in capturing the beauty of his Motherland in the words: “The representations of the Landscapes, temple scenes and some striking aspects of Indian Cities done by Mr. S.G. Thakur Singh have given me pleasure and I can recommend them to all lovers of beauty in nature and human works of art.”

James H. Cousins- the vice-president of the Kalakshetra, Adyar, Madras has scholarly disseminated the innermost psyche of this artist and has analyzed his work in a critical manner which has brought out the essence and the essential sensitivity of this artist in a vivid fashion. He writes: “To those who have seen something of the spectacle of India, this admirably reproduced selection from the paintings of Sardar S.G. Thakur Singh will be a happy perpetual reminder of past pleasure. The reproductions will also enable one to realize features, delineated by the patient artist that had been over-looked or only glanced at among the moving distractions of actual life. To those who have not actually visited the country, the reproductions will reveal something of the beauty and distinctiveness of the Indian scene, architecturally, naturally and humanly. This

double service comes out of the artist’s extraordinary fidelity to what the eye sees. There is no technical freakishness in his art; no interposing of what is called self-expression between the subject matter and the beholder. To Hamlet ‘the play is the thing’; to Thakur Singh ‘the picture is the thing.’ This is not putting his work in the category of colour photography. The latter is usually hard, needs to be excessively lighted and is not absolutely true. But Thakur Singh has a gift of selection, arrangement and reserve in colouring that bears its testimony to his own vital and individual sensitiveness and delicacy of response to the visible world and his joy in the unsophisticated depiction of beauty.”

There is a glint of romanticism in S.G. Thakur Singh’s works as whatever he painted had a certain degree of rhythmic expression and movement with pleasing soft tones and hues, he understands the sensitivity of the subject like a mother naturally understands her child. There appears an added dimension to his work which has the palpitation of a living heartbeat. The subjects are life-like in depiction and they transcend a visual magic which moves the heart of the beholder, gently touching the innermost chords. The authenticity of the composition and the technical overbearing does not overpower the lyricism lit large on his canvases. Infact, this mysterious lyricism lifts his works to the domain of visual ecstasy and fills them with ethereal charm. He had a good command over the medium of oil colours, water-colours, drawing and sketching, the basic fundamentals of western style painting appear to be adopted by him in abundance. The clarity and realism are certainly akin to the western painting style yet if closely monitored it will reveal that the fineness of execution makes it cousin-brother to the Rajput and Mughal era of Indian painting. The element of movement goes hand in hand with the stationary elements of his compositions.

31 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.19
The artist has a remarkable control over the movement and the same becomes an integral part of the painting. Figures are made to operate in the composition as they would be actually moving in the actual natural scene with no undue concentration or accentuation. This is a result of his keen observance and quick visualization. His works are an epitome of blissful flavour which cast the aromas of a poetic justification as sensitivity is a grand tool in this artist’s hand and the brushwork has magical touch soothing, enthralling and captivating in the same breath. The broken line of sunset gold in a sea-piece is painted with such industrious trust that the eye moves from wavelet to wavelet so quickly as to induce the delightful feeling of rhythmical light.  

For S.G. Thakur Singh, the nature was an eternal beloved whose moods and tantrums sent surges of untamed energy in his veins and he poured his heart at every whim and fancy of this beloved. In pursuit of his muse, he wandered from valleys to the mountains, crossed brooks and rivers, gazed at the surfs of the dancing waves in the ocean and filled his heart with magical moments and transferred them onto his ever enchanting canvases. S.G. Thakur Singh is fully himself when he arrests with his powerful brush the fleeting colours that play upon the sublime face of nature. To him she is endowed with a personality which is swayed by different moods at different times. Sometimes it is gay, at other times melancholy; sometimes it is turbulent, at other times tranquil. But he loves to paint her more generally in her grave and somber moods. In the manner of William Wordsworth, he takes scenes from real life, but without impairing their individuality and local colouring, he transforms them with the aid of his romantic imagination into a visionary world of wonder and enchantment.  

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Commenting on the thought-process and laying his inner psyche thread-bare, renowned author and admirer of S.G. Thakur Singh’s work- Principal Shamsher Singh has thrown light on the essence and sensibilities of this great artist’s work in a very truthful and precise manner and he avers that, “In landscape painting, he is essentially a lyricist. Some of his scenes without exaggeration, be styled as symphonies in colours like the Greek sculptor, who could carve in stone the movement of the wind and the breeze.” Such magnetism emanates from the works of a man who swims in ecstasy of philosophical vision and who is relentlessly engaged in pursuit of something as spiritual and divine as the presence of a celestial splendour called the Milky Way.

Celebrated art historian Krishna Chaitanya had disseminated the works of S.G. Thakur Singh in an alluring description: “In an age when so much humbug can intimidate so many people into shaking their heads with admiration at bizarre forms on canvas, on the significance of which the men who painted them preserve a discreet silence, it is good to come across an artist like Thakur Singh, whose art communicates itself to us with the same simplicity with which the hour of dawn or twilight can communicate its mood.” The critic correlates the works of Thakur Singh to the Dutch painters of still life and he expresses that the mention of Vermeer brings to mind Thakur Singh’s affinity with them. He further explains: “The art of seventeenth century Netherlands and Flanders renovated the vision of civilized men by awakening the mind to the consciousness of the beauty of every day surroundings. The modern age, it would seem, is not eager to recover this frame of mind. The immense difference between a portrait by El Greco and a portrait by Chardin distinguishes a still life by Braque from


one by a Dutch painter like Van Der Meer. But while we have gained in psychological depth, we have lost in familiar charm and a catholic taste should not reject either of these values. Thakur Singh recovers the simpler frame of mind. Pomegranates, green and ripe, provide contrast of colour, the perfect round of a Thali insinuates itself gracefully into the compositional scheme and a brass Lota catches all the light in one of his pictures, a rare instance of a still life painting which has managed to be genuinely Indian in spirit."

Dr. B.N. Goswamy, a renowned art historian and art critic, fondly remembers that during his youth, when he was a student in Amritsar, he used to pass by ‘S.G. Thakur Singh Academy of Art’ on his bicycle and had an irresistible desire to go inside this academy and see what was displayed there. He paid repeated visits to this place and was astonished to find some paintings of unparalleled artistic charm. But more than that, he came to know that, these remarkable works were done by a rustic lad from the village of Verka in Amritsar district. He was fascinated by the struggle and the spirit of enterprise that ran like a thread through the lives of this artist and his mentor- Mohammad Alam. Both of these men of untiring spirit were possessed with a will to create a niche in the Indian art world wherein those days Bengal school and Bengalis had captured the coveted place of art promotion in India and it was next to impossible to invade their bastion. Dr. B.N. Goswamy came across an old sepia-coloured photograph of Thakur Singh, in his mid-thirties perhaps, posing, seated on a European style sofa, dressed in a three-piece suit with an ivory-handled walking stick positioned close to his legs and the walls behind him covered with paintings- his own work, apparently- some in gilt frames, others half-finished: an actress dressed up as a character from a Parsi play, some smaller portraits, a young woman holding on to a branch, a view of possibly of the Golden Temple,

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and what looks from a distance as a framed testimonial. This was an astonishing transformation for an artist who till a few decades back was toiling in the fields of his village. This represents the determination and a will to succeed in his profession without being bogged down by adversities and economic support. He had a rare gift of enterprise and a sense of urgency in his character which stood him a good stead throughout his brilliant career. He not only made a name for himself but had dreams about providing an institution where the young generation of artists could come and study art without hardships through which he had to go during his early years. This dream was realized because of his unstinted hardwork and vision.

It seems that G.S. Sohan Singh had licked colours in a silver spoon instead of honey by his illustrious father Sardar Gian Singh Naqqash- a well known fresco painter of Golden Temple at Amritsar. Art runs in his veins. He spent his early childhood, looking at his father engaged in producing marvelous scenes from Sikh history for the murals and thus he used to be engaged in doodling and sketching even as a he was a toddler. Sardar Gian Singh saw a spark in his son’s creative engagements and encouraged him to follow his foot-steps after only studying up to middle class. This young lad took up assignments in sign painting, illustrations, calligraphy, book illustrations and designing of book jackets. Later on, he came to be called as an all-rounder in each department of art and emerged as a pioneer in not only painting elaborate scenes from Sikh history but producing calendar art works and its reproductions in his own studio, which he established, after learning all technical aspects of litho- print making, letter-press publishing and efficiently managed an art studio, which even had a section for framing and promotion of sales for advertisements. He even made illustrations for newspapers and magazines as he had a

37 Goswamy, B.N.; December 12, 2010, Risen from the soil, The Tribune.
38 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.63
considerable amount of efficiency in illustration work and had obtained the much needed caliber to visually interpret the Sikh history in its right perspective.\textsuperscript{39} He soon developed a pleasing style of his own which was both decorative and rich in detail. His paintings have the hallmark of decorative elements, beautiful floral margins and frames which he learnt from his father who was considered to be a master of this art. His paintings have a distinct flavour oozing with glowing vibrant colours and have a mass appeal- prerequisite element for a piece of good Calendar art. He based his paintings on glorious events of Sikh history with suitable titles and couplets from Gurbani.

Coveted credit for reproducing Sikh Calendar art goes to G.S. Sohan Singh, an enterprising artist who produced fabulous calendars on not so common themes of Sikh history and these printed calendars were made available in the market at very nominal prices. Thus he became a household name in this field and soon people started displaying his works reproduced in calendars, in their homes, shops and other institutional buildings. Infact, he was able to reach out to the masses through these Sikh calendars. These captivating calendars were in great demand as they caught the imagination of Sikh masses due to their religious content and skillful painting techniques endowed with elements of floral design and ornamental stylization.\textsuperscript{40}

After retirement from the Golden Temple as a Naqqash, Gian Singh joined his equally creative son and their business flourished by leaps and bounds. They had also started the business of framing, designing of labels, pamphlets, brochures and booklets for various trading companies and business houses. G.S. Sohan Singh’s first Sikh Calendar on the unusual theme of Banda Bahadur was well received as a calendar. This encouraged him to go deep into the minute

\textsuperscript{39} Rani, Dr. Saroj; 2001, \textit{The Realistic Artists from Punjab}, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.98-99

\textsuperscript{40} Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, \textit{Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)}, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.64
details of Sikh history and dig out some rare episodes. He then used to select three themes in a year for his calendars and reproduced them after getting the printing plates from Lahore.\footnote{Walia, Varinder: December 1, 2005, \textit{The rich life of an artist who was a pauper}, The Tribune.} This artist will be remembered as the first \textit{Sikh Popular art} artist who tasted true professional success in producing hundreds of reproductions of his work for consumption in the market. This indeed is a remarkable initiative which strongly established him as the full-fledged front-running painter of \textit{Sikh Calendar art}.

G.S. Sohan Singh spent considerable amount of time studying the reproductions of Renaissance art, Persian and Mughal paintings, thus he acquired a clear impression of floral patterns and his indulgence for depicting details in costumes, jewellery, accessories, weapons, flora and fauna was noticeable. He organized the compositions in such an immaculate manner that they were devoid of chaotic presentation inspite of his preference for introducing scores of figures in a scene. The overpowering aspect of his deft handling infused a tender and pleasing appeal to the eye. He had developed a penchant for drawing accurate features, movements and gestures in superb understanding of perspectives and proportions. The skies and clouds with paleish hue and swirling effect resemble to Claude Lorrain and Poussin’s work.\footnote{Rani, Dr. Saroj: 2001, \textit{The Realistic Artists from Punjab}, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.27} In the forefront, he loved to add rich floral patterns as these were rich specimens of botanical element which he had mastered drawing scientific charts for his clients during the early days of his career as a master illustrator.

Sardar Sobha Singh in his frank opinion about the work of this artist describes him as a gem of a person, who had the disciplined training and the required devotion and dedication towards painting scenes portraying Sikh ethics and the wisdom of the Gurus in his typical gentle and tender style with lyrical bold lines and sweet and soft tones of colour. This amply explains the man that
his life was full of harmony and he was ready to put in long hours of labour into his masterpieces which were appreciated and adored by a large section of society. Sobha Singh further explains that, “I am inclined to believe that Art expression is the crystallization of the Artist’s continued ‘Sadhna’ and ‘Tapasya’ spread over a large number of years. It is heartening to find, in this age of escapist-materialism, that there are among us sincere and selfless devotees of art like G.S. Sohan Singh. The spirit of noble thoughts, cultivated through continued study of human values, is amply evident in and through his paintings. In his own way, he has successfully depicted his visions and feelings through the medium of sweet colours and delicate but bold lines.” 43 This artist breathed the air deeply scented with the fervour of Gurus divine messages which applied soothing balm on the souls of human beings mired in the dust and grime of bewilderment and illusions. He felt that he had a role to play in quenching the thirst of masses through the calendars of Sikh art which are capable of infusing mystic transformation in their minds and souls. Thus he channelised his creative talents towards producing calendars of rare spiritual beauty and divine charm. For the first time a calendar on the theme of ‘Gagan Mayi Thaal Ravi Chand Dipak….’ The Aarti adopted by the Sikhs came to the market and it became so immensely popular that it had to be reprinted in many editions. 44

A renowned artist Ajaib Chitrakar defines G.S. Sohan Singh’s deep sensibilities and intense understanding in portraying a formless subject into a visually powerful presentation, without losing the complex meaning and the essence of the thought. He further explains: “G.S. Sohan Singh was a deeply religious person, gentle in temperament and sensitive at heart. Before starting a new creation, he would sit in silence and contemplate on the subject so that whatever he painted would have the touch of philosophical fervour and deep

43 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995. Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.65
44 Ibid, p.66
inherent meaning in a symbolical form. He stressed upon aesthetic excellence and dwelled upon the significance of intricacies of the creation. Each work carried the aroma of his meditative stance and glowed in the halo of celestial charm. Sacred couplets from Gurbani were his main inspiration and motivation as he had a phenomenal grasp on the Sikh ethos, traditions and culture. His hand on the pulse of common man enabled him to create paintings of everlasting beauty based on day-to-day happenings of Punjabi way of life. He painted colourful fairs, festivals, ceremonies and scenes from daily chores of Punjabi rural life. He had a fascination for painting common folks engaged in different ethnic trades like a Bangle-seller, a juggler, a Banjara, a farmer toiling in his fields, a snake charmer entertaining an amazed crowd- a Punjabi woman churning milk and Women at the spinning wheel (Charkha) spinning snow-white cotton flakes.” All these subjects bring to the fore his love for traditional Punjabi culture where the fragrance of the soil and mud houses can be felt and seen by the viewer.

It would not be an understatement that artist Kirpal Singh wrote the Sikh history with the vibrant and versatile touch of his brush. Truly his brush seemed to carry the dynamic and untamed energy of a lightening blaze which sent waves of powerful and pulsating tremours in portrayal of visually charged glimpses of the bygone era of Sikh history which was written in the blood of the countless martyrs. Though this great artist rose from the humble beginnings, he generated a vision and a resolve to portray each and every episode of the struggle and sacrifice of the Sikhs for whom the protection and propagation of high Sikh values was more important than their own lives. Seeds of this sacred mission were sown in his heart when

45 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 66-68
46 Randhawa, M.S.; 1963, Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab, The Tribune
he was merely a teenager and had a chance to go through an absorbing book titled ‘Sundri’ written by Bhai Vir Singh. This inspiring book stirred a sense of pride in his heart for the Punjabi valour and bravery. The characters and events written in this book had left an indelible impression on his mind. He was so engrossed in these characters that he started visualizing them in his mind’s eye and felt the urgency to bring them out on his canvas. The other great influence on his art was the tales from the lives of Sikh Gurus which were narrated to him in his early childhood days and he remembered each and every moment in such detail that he felt an overbearing task to transfer these glorious episodes in his paintings and sketches in order to make the people aware of such unparalleled sacrifices enshrined in the pages of Sikh history written in the ink of divinity and spirituality. The glorious lives of Sikh Gurus which abounded in high moral values and ideals and above all the significance of martyrdom in Sikhism set him on a sacred mission to perform that is to paint and record the revolutionary influences which were responsible for changing the very course of Sikh history.

Kirpal Singh expressed his views on the authenticity of his paintings and explained that, “Unless an artist devotes his time to study the written historical literature in depth and familiarizes himself with the true causes and motives of a particular happening which leave an overbearing effect on the collective psyche of a nation and develops a capacity in himself to correlate with the manifestations generated by historical, religious and political dimensions; he is unable to bring to life the very soul and essence of the events. The exercise of creating various versions of a subject or composition felicitates an artist’s capacity to narrate a theme by organizing the elements in various juxtapositions

48 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.96
49 Randhawa, M.S.; 1963, Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab, The Tribune
to achieve a final product is of utmost importance. It serves the purpose in finalization and consolidation of a work of real high standard with full justification to its ideology. This task needs concentrated focus and determination coupled with unmatched technical skill and an eye for aesthetics.”

His own persona and body language amply illustrated this factor that he was bestowed with the required determination and energy of highly charged spirit and strength of character. He considered himself to be a crusader in his own right; he shunned many luxuries of a modern day life enjoyed by the contemporary artist. He generally donned a black robe and wore a white turban symbolizing his interest in Sufism which advocated piousness and purity of thought and action. His most discernible strength lies in utmost dedication to hardwork. He enjoyed working till midnight and invested his time and energy in bringing to life an enchanting work of great historical significance in phenomenal expression. He was a man of few words and did not relish ideal gossip. Joining art groups or attending gatherings of poets and painters where ultimately the artistic energies directly or indirectly get hijacked towards petty politics was not his forte. He considered his work as the real award which provided him genuine satisfaction of accomplishing it in creditable creative way.

In Kirpal Singh’s sumptuously illustrated war compositions, the sturdy horse occupies the central feature which lends a kinetic energy and an irresistibly eye-catching presence. A deep study of anatomy of horses is apparently the result of his long association with this subject. He professed his love for horses in a piece of conversation with an art critic: “My village had seen violent clashes

50 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.96
51 Randhawa, M.S.; 1963, Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab, The Tribune
52 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.104
between various factions of people and the mounted police paid regular visits to this village to dispel their angry quarrels and clashes. This provided me a good opportunity to study the horse in all postures and movements as the police horses were usually fabulously well-build, sturdy and very alluring. I enjoyed sketching them in detail.” The second reason he explained: “Near my village lies the Ferozpur Military Cantonment which had cavalries, mounted police and polo players, to watch them in action, gave me a lot of excitement and sketching them in my sketchbook was even greater source of joy and a matter of great artistic satisfaction.” Thus the presence of sturdy horses was etched in his subconscious mind and he comfortably filled large canvases with galloping and jumping horses being ridden by the Sikh warriors. His interest in horses was so overpowering that his father had to purchase a young mare for his son which became a source of joy for him and the mare was proudly trained by his elder brother.53

The glow of pride on the faces of brave and valiant Sikh warriors was passionately depicted by Kirpal Singh in his dynamic style in the paintings literally reverberating with action in the war-fields.54 He successfully captured the roar of a lion in the war cries of Jo Bole Sau Nihaal Sat Sri Akal chanted by majestic Sikh soldiers while challenging the tyrant and shrewd oppressors. These paintings lifted his own spirits and he felt a strange artistic satisfaction and a sense of gratitude to the Sikh Gurus who he felt guided his artistic vision to portray the essence of a sacred struggle against the inhuman and barbaric Mughal rulers. Painting these war scenes, he felt that he was one of those dedicated and devout soldiers of the great Gurus. The scenes brought alive on these canvases, instantly developed a repot with the viewer and the artist successfully transported their attention to the era, when these glorious episodes of unparalleled bravery

and sacrifices happened.\textsuperscript{55} He shared the same zeal with the viewer which he himself found in portraying dynamic compositions of Sikh history. He was a man who had a great respect for the value of time and there was an apparent urgency in his actions as he painted large mural-like paintings in the courtyard of his house which gave the appearance of an army camp.\textsuperscript{56} In the nutshell, he had earned the coveted place in the world of \textit{Sikh Calendar art} by dedicating his entire life in writing the Sikh history with his magical brush. His own persona is indicative of a man possessed with glorious traditions of selfless service and deep reverence to his faith.

\textbf{Sardar Jaswant Singh} though physically a short-statured man was infact a hard core professional artist who believed in the dictum of less talk and more work. He possessed an infinite creative energy which stood him in good stead, when engrossed in his work he could go on painting for long stretches of time and was never let down by his physical strength and fantastic artistic indulgence.\textsuperscript{57} His disciplined approach to his career brought him proficiency and imagination to excel in all departments of commercial art, be it sign board painting, calligraphy in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and English, designing of book jackets, creative illustrations of high aesthetic standard, eye-catching labels, brochures and catalogues. After establishing his studio with a renowned artist friend- Sarfaraz in Lahore, he soon realized that it would be better to have his own individual studio as he was considered one of the top-notch designers and artists during this period.\textsuperscript{58} His creative impulses were not restricted to the purely commercial art projects but his love for literature and


\textsuperscript{56} Randhawa, M.S.; 1963, \textit{Kirpal Singh- The Artist who made alive the history of the Punjab}, The Tribune

\textsuperscript{57} Chittrakar, Ajaib; 1995, \textit{Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)}, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.83

\textsuperscript{58} Singh, Prem; 1992, \textit{Jaswant Singh (1918-1991)-Exhibition of Paintings} (Catalogue), Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Rose Garden Sector-16, Chandigarh, p.3
music immensely influenced his thought processes and he enjoyed producing works of imaginative substance wherein he could satisfy his creative hunger for creating works of exceptional merit in terms of lucid visual narration and bewitching aesthetic charm. The expertise which he had attained in illustration widened his artistic vistas and within a short span of time he started creating excellent specimens of paintings in all mediums such as water-colours, crayons, pen and ink, oil colours etc. In the company of musicians, art lovers and writers, he enriched his vision and developed a keen insight which is visible in most of his masterpieces.\(^{59}\) The brush danced at his will and his realism was laced with superb artistic melody and harmony. The lyrical and poetic stance appeared frequently due to his love for music and divine presence of blissful colours. It is noteworthy that a man of nearly 5 feet height had the strength to paint large mural-like paintings sometimes in the size of 10 feet x 20 feet. This artist with a musical muse strived hard to visualize the temperament of sounds and notes in his mesmerizing works and provided life-like forms to the *Ragas* and *Raginis* in Indian classical musical traditions.\(^{60}\) Though such attempts are only seen in Pahari and Rajput paintings but a close analysis will reveal that his *Raagmala* paintings were attempted in surrealistic and contemporary styles. Each *Raga* he represented in his works had his own individual stylized version. The great art connoisseur and patron of art- Dr. M.S. Randhawa granted him a project on *Raagmala* series as he was fully convinced that, “*Jaswant Singh with his vast knowledge of music will do full justice to this subject as he himself was a musician of no less merit and fully understood the intricacies and fine nuances of music.*”\(^{61}\) Jaswant Singh’s poetic temperament and a zest for fresh and noble ideas was instrumental in the creation of such fascinating and wonderful works

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59 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.84-85
61 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.84
of art which have no parallel in Sikh painting. The forms and mannerism employed in these great works speak volumes of the fountain of creativity this man had cultivated in him.

Besides these surrealistic Raagmala paintings, the other remarkable works by Jaswant Singh are portraits and paintings of Guru Nanak done in a fashion altogether different from the usual paintings on this theme. ‘Guru Nanak- the Pilgrim’ is a work of supreme aesthetic dimensions which has usually recorded the process of Nanak’s Udasis (Missionary Travels). Yet in this excellent painting, he did not paint the portrait of the great Guru but has symbolically conveyed this significant mode of Nanak’s life. Use of symbolism with appropriate colour schemes is his highpoint and thus created a benchmark for others to emulate.62 His deep interest in philosophy, psychology and musically tuned creations introduce the viewer to charismatic and pleasing masterpieces and the viewer travels with him to the depths of deep imagination and conceptualization. M.S. Randhawa- a renowned art connoisseur expressed his appreciation for this artist: “Jaswant Singh had the grip on his convictions and used his imagery to follow the new trend in Sikh painting which was quite a departure from the accepted iconography. He established himself as a serious surrealistic painter with a marked individual style. His inspiration is largely Indian.”63 Dr. Charles Fabri- the renowned art critic and art historian described that: “I find enjoyment and creative satisfaction viewing the dreamworld of this unassuming soft spoken gentle artist who has a true surrealistic vision which rides on the wings of Indian symbolism and mythology.”64 His inner vision and psyche is exposed in a marvelous work titled ‘Me and My Self’ which reveals

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62 Daljeet, Dr; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.147-150
64 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, *Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)*, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.88
some distorted lines of his face on a canvas placed on an easel at the sea shore and behind this canvas is shown roaring oceanic waves summing up that he harboured an ocean of imagination in his heart but he is still standing on the shore and yearning to touch the tide.65

Jaswant Singh bared his soul on the definition of ‘Abstract Art’ which is generally interpreted as a convenient way to do whatever one wants without attaining even the basic fundamental knowledge of painting, its essential elements, the grammar and the visual vocabulary. He avers: “Such non-serious assaults on the canvas by novices of art in fact is sacrilege of art and most young artists think it a shortcut and a way to escape the hardwork required to paint a meaningful picture which relates to human beings in a befitting manner. I call it utter nonsense and a shrewd gesture on the part of modern artists for whom distortion and bad drawing means the same whereas in the real sense ‘Abstract Art’ has some rules and fundamentals and should be attempted when your cup is full and over-flowing with creative talent and deep study.”66 The paintings of this artist bear his inimitable signature as each work stands testimony to the power of individualistic mannerism and symbolism through which he conceptualized his works and defined it in a lyrical and contemporary version.

Artist Trilok Singh’s gentle and saintly persona hardly indicates that this humble and unassuming man is infact, a walking encyclopedia of Sikh history. A devout preacher he possessed knowledge of a vast reservoir of divine gems of wisdom enshrined in the Gurbani. His mission was to understand and demystify the mystic and eternal messages veiled in the sacred hymns of Gurbani and to explore visual idioms so as to showcase the pearls of wisdom in order to create an awakening for the masses to dispel the darkness of ignorance. Thus each heart and mind will be illuminated with

65 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.89-90
66 Ibid, p.91
the divine ideals of the Gurus. His deep faith and reverence in Sikhism charged his imagination as an artist. He embarked upon a lifelong crusade to convey the strength of Gurbani in truthful and meaningful terms through his paintings laden with evocative messages of humanism as preached by the Gurus. He employed symbols and a powerful visual imagery to bring the message to the common man in simple yet meaningful stylization. His paintings prove that he lived and swam in the unfathomable depths of lofty ideals and fervently believed that only these supreme ideals will help the unenlightened souls to cross the ocean of mysterious existence. He always stressed that the words of Gurbani can bring true salvation to the heart and mind of a person embroiled in earthly turmoil. 67

Trilok Singh took the initiative to convey the essence of Gurbani in symbolic terms to make it more effective. He further adds that, “Merely creating work of art without any meaning or moral message is of little use for the mankind as visual expression should be used to spread the light of truthful and pious living which remains the ultimate message of Gurbani.”68 His works dwell on the virtues of hardwork, faith, sacrifice and service to mankind. His mission and message is amply clear even in his first painting which he painted, narrating the story of a hungry wolf who did not eat a person though he was on the verge of death due to pangs of hunger simply because the man he encountered never worked with his hands, never walked to a religious place to pay obeisance, never spoke truth and did not recite the Name of the Almighty. Such philosophical connotations are portrayed in every painting he did. 69

Trilok Singh a social reformer to the core used his artistic passion to the optimum level to express his anguish at the cruel and sad traditions, customs, practices and evil acts like caste system, drug addiction, mindless violence,

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67 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.107
68 Ibid, p.109
69 Ibid, p.107
drinking, domestic violence and religious bigotry prevalent in society which hampers its progress and comes in the establishment of a forward looking honest and truthful society. A patriot at heart and tirelessly work for eradication of social injustices triggered by chaos, hatred and communal violence. He was of firm belief that art is a powerful tool which should be used in bringing about reforms in society so that reign of harmony, peace and joy prevails in the world where all human beings should live like a human fraternity. Besides painting thematic scenes from Sikh way of life, he made countless illustrative calendar-like paintings which directly impacted the viewer in the promotion of a just and dignified society based on the moral values as preached by our great Sikh Gurus.  

His works on the themes of national unity and patriotism were greatly appreciated by our national leaders like ‘Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru’ and others. Pandit Nehru aptly described him a very useful artist of this country whose tireless efforts were directly channelised towards removing the sufferings of a common man and who had a dream of India as a powerful nation where each and every citizen gets justice and knows about his rights and responsibilities.

Artist Trilok Singh harboured in his thoughts that, “Art for Art sake is a hollow concept and it is considered supreme if it is instrumental in changing the society and the world.” He further felt that, “Artists should not shun this sacred duty to bring about a healthy change in the life of a common man. The voice of the common man resonates in the paintings of a serious and sensitive artist. Art acts as a sieve through which unsavoury practices and unhealthy mental blockades can be removed so that the establishment of a free frank and civilized society is achieved.” The source of his inspiration according to him lies in the divine words of Bhai Gurdas and Gurbani and he based his paintings on this plank. Thus his thirst for portraying the spiritual aspects of the divine literature is

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70 Rani, Dr. Saroj; 2001, The Realistic Artists from Punjab, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.128-129
71 Ibid, p.66
quenched. Literary works of Waris Shah, Ferozdin Sharaf, Charan Singh Shaheed, Munsha Singh Dukhi and Hira Singh Dard, prodded him to perform the responsibility to serve his Mother tongue (Punjabi) with utmost devotion and dedication. The path he had chosen doubly satisfied his creative urges on the one hand and on the other hand, he experienced a blissful state of mind in pursuing a path of pious living.\textsuperscript{72}

In a very moving letter, Sardar Sobha Singh recognized the uprighteous realm of this saint artist, whose art and persona were the same, there were no contradiction in what he practiced and preached. He further writes that, “\textit{It is not a big deal to be an artist today but to be a man of conviction and mission is certainly rare in society. The Almighty has bestowed upon you unfathomed wisdom and faith in the tenets of Sikhism. I feel proud to be amongst the real friends you have. You have earned the reward of Waheguru by entrusting your whole life in His service. I bow my head before you for your unparalleled and unprecedented devotion towards the propagation of the message of the Sikh Gurus through your paintings drenched in spiritual nectar.}” Like all great artists, sometimes anxiety gripped him with the thought of fate of his paintings after he is gone. He has named his abode as “Chitralkot” situated in Patiala. This is the place where he used to sit in contemplation and churn his soul to bring to the surface meaningful yet visually bewitching works of art.\textsuperscript{73} He developed glaucoma in both eyes and became sad that his desire to paint till his death may not be fulfilled. In the next moment, being a believer of Gurbani he used to resign to the fate in the true meaning of ‘\textit{Tera Bhana Meetha Lage}’.\textsuperscript{74}

\textbf{Master Gurdit Singh was a contemporary of artist S.G. Thakur Singh and he too shared the same vision to pledge his life and creative energies to}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{72} Chittrakar, Ajaib; 1995, \textit{Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi)}, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.109-110
\bibitem{73} Ibid, p.114-117
\bibitem{74} Rani, Dr. Saroj; 2001, \textit{The Realistic Artists from Punjab}, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.130
\end{thebibliography}
the promotion and propagation of the true tenets of Sikhism through his emotive and appealing paintings. The course of life he chartered for himself was not easy as painting the Sikh history in right perspective with utmost authenticity demanded a deep and continuous research. He immersed himself in available literature to study the root causes of the historical events during the rule of the Mughals and the period thereafter, to polish his intricate knowledge he used to hold discussions and discourses with the noble and literary persons. The paintings he produced depicting the carnages and massacres reveal his mastery over the subject and his matured capacity in portraying the eventful scenes in rare artistry.

Master Gurdit Singh, who was born in Amritsar, had received his art education from the Royal School of Arts, London and had naturally adopted some of the finer nuances of western painting in terms of academic excellence. The finished appeal in his work is reminiscent of Renaissance painting. Portraiture was his another interest and he had received numerous commissions from the rich and aristocratic patrons besides regularly pursuing the painting commissions offered to him by the Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar. Master Gurdit Singh was fortunate enough to see various art galleries, museums spread across India and Europe. He was amazed to see how the art of the regions was respectfully displayed and documented in a systematic way. His visit to a number of art schools and academies encouraged him to establish a flourishing academy of art that would be instrumental in imparting professional training in art besides such an academy would also offer privileged chances to the upcoming and established artists to exhibit their works. In this direction the credit for

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

76 Singh, Principal Satbir; Ed. 1991, Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar, Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurudwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.97
establishing a full-fledged professionally managed art gallery and academy goes to this celebrated artist. Thus we see the coming up of prestigious Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar where due consideration was used to be given to the systematic academic training in art. This academy enabled the new generation artists to equip themselves with all technical as well as aesthetical aspects of painting in different mediums and styles. After establishing this landmark academy, Gurdit Singh devoted his relentless efforts in establishing the Central Sikh Museum in the precincts of Golden Temple, Amritsar which houses the largest collection of historical paintings and portraits of Sikh Gurus and Sikh personalities who carved a niche for themselves in the cause of Sikh religion. The museum also has professionally maintained and displayed weapons and other artifacts relating to the Sikh Gurus. This is perhaps Gurdit Singh’s most commendable contribution towards the propagation and preservation of Sikh art. The masterpieces displayed in this museum have inspired a whole lot of new generation artists to come in direct contact with these works and get inspired for continuing the missionary task of promotion of Sikh art. In-depth study of the historical material and scrutiny of the period costumes, weapons, architecture and interiors complete with furniture items and artifacts enhance the realism in his works which reveal his matured grasp on the composition of a particular subject. His main mission which impelled him to paint the remarkable works is primarily the documentation and propagation of Sikh history and ethos. He had the capabilities of a good administrator and excelled in organizational works. His disciplined hand and faith in the Sikh ideology propelled his energies towards establishing gigantic tasks in dedicating these monumental institutions. These two institutions are a source of inspiration in guiding the spirit of young talents.

77 Sharma, Shivani; November 14, 2009, City set to get haven for budding artists, The Tribune.
78 Singh, Principal Satbir; Ed. 1991, Album Central Sikh Museum, Golden Temple, Amritsar (Keynote), Editor: Sardar Mohan Singh (Curator), Publisher: Sardar Manjit Singh (Manager), Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Golden Offset Press (SGPC), Gurudwara Ramsar Sahib, Amritsar, p.6
The magnificent collection of paintings preserved here has set up a benchmark and most of these works can be considered as excellent specimens of *Sikh Calendar art*.

A true artist understands his duty to portray the real picture of a society and the social set up around him in right perspective. It is a matter of pride for him to portray the glorious historical events of bygone era. To pay his humble tribute to the great men and women who without any selfish ends had devoted and sacrificed their whole lives for bringing transformation in humanity by virtue of their deep vision and a sense of service to the mankind. These thoughts always resounded in artist Amolak Singh’s mind and amply explain his innermost psyche where he harboured a burning desire to further the cause of Sikh tenets and philosophy. Showering of the universal messages of humanism, love, faith and hope on the whole human race by Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh impelled this unassuming artist to embark upon a task of painting the ideologies and priceless values gifted to the devout Sikhs by the saints and Gurus. He in a rare gesture of gratitude started his quest for depicting these ideals in mesmerizing works of art. He felt that each human being can raise the mental stature of his mind and soul by truthfully following the virtuous examples set by these great preachers of Sikhism who always practiced what they preached. An artist can repay the debt by devoting his creative impulses to familiarize the common man with the oceans of wisdom bestowed upon us through the spiritual hymns contained in the Gurbani. This divine task he thought can be accomplished by an artist using his creative talents and devotional energies. He touched upon some rare events in the life of Sikh Gurus after carefully studying them and having discourses with the learned and enlightened individuals.

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Amolak Singh was open to new and fresh ideas and did not restrict his expertise in learning of new techniques in painting. He experimented with free flowing brushstrokes and even adopted the use of knife painting to create certain textures and effects in his large mural-like paintings. The main element in these fabulous works is the power of his imagination and virtuosity in experimenting with elements of the composition emphasizing on diverse angles and perceptions. The marvelous control over his work was the result of handling large banners which he painted in Delhi and Bombay to earn a living but his heart was always engrossed in creating works of everlasting spiritual beauty for which he yearned earnestly and he came back to Punjab to take up the painting of Sikh history after getting advice and training from the doyen of Sikh art- Sardar Sobha Singh. He sat at his feet and observed him keenly and silently. He wanted to grasp each moment of this union with his master. Sobha Singh was very appreciative of his dedication and devotion and blessed him profusely. He usually found himself stuck in the rut of doing cheap commercial art and nursed a desire to free himself from such useless pursuits. He found his real satisfaction in the work he did while painting the portraits of Sikh Gurus and episodes from the Sikh history. He found creative salvation by visiting Andretta, the abode of Sobha Singh and he used to come back charged with magical energies. Thus Amolak Singh proved himself and was a true follower of the great master in letter and spirit. In response to a question that which work of his is the greatest masterpiece. The artist replied: “An artist never preconsiders painting a masterpiece. Each work demands utmost attention, love and affection of the artist. But generally it is seen that the works which are immensely popular and widely accepted as masterpieces are painted during the period when all falseness of your hair fades away and an artist is left with silver grey hair.”

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80 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.158
terms an artist has to paint picture after picture to reach certain creative pinnacle. It is like the meditation of Yogis who lose themselves to their meditation and come out with some enlightenment.

Amolak Singh considered the works that relate to the viewer and form an instant bond with him is in fact a painting of some value. An artwork which does not capture the imagination of the viewer can hardly be described a work of high merit. Mutual harmony between a viewer and a work of art is established only after it has the power of mesmerization and if it offers food for thought. People find that his works had the same quality that is why his work reaches out to the masses in a big way. Their repeated reproductions genuinely establish the fact that they are immensely popular amongst the masses. Major patrons of Sikh Calendar art like Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, Dharam Parchar Committee: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi, Bank of Punjab, New Delhi, Markfed, PNB Finance have bestowed upon his work the well deserved attention and reproduce it in large numbers in the form of calendars. A self-respecting artist does not care for any awards and honours given by academies and organizations as he had a bitter experience witnessing the inner functioning of these academies so-called art promotion organizations where the curse of nepotism and groupism prevails. Genuine artists are seldom considered for awards by such institutions. For him the true award is the acceptance of his works by innumerable people who cherish to adorn the walls of their houses and business establishments with his paintings and calendars. Commenting on this ideology in art, Amolak Singh shares that: “I found true spiritual satisfaction in the paintings of Sikh Gurus whose lives were like lighthouses guiding the ships of humanity sailing in the rough and rowdy oceans of ignorance.”

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81 Chitrakar, Ajaib; 1995, Punjabi Chitrakar (Punjabi), Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.158-159
Before the partition of India, a journey which started from Lahore took young and energetic artist Mehar Singh to various paces in search of a true master who would show him the real path to achieve success in the field of art. Even in his teens, Mehar Singh was raring to fly as his mind was surging with dreams for accomplishment in art but he had no clue how to proceed further till he reached Andretta and sat at the feet of great artist Sardar Sobha Singh who after seeing his genuine enthusiasm and a spark of dedication adopted him as his disciple. The basic fundamentals of art, its philosophy, essence and the technicalities of painting were learnt at this village in the solitude of Dhauladhaars. Sobha Singh poured his soul and guided him to enhance his conceptual imagery. Here he learnt the value of disciplined life and experienced that there was no shortcut in achieving excellence in art. After the partition of India, there was chaos and social and political upheaval all around, which disturbed the mind of this young artist as everything was in turmoil and turbulence. People were rendered homeless, friends turned foes and the barbarism in man bared its fangs. No one was left untouched from the suffering of devastation and forced departure from their homes and hearths. The blooming career of this young artist was disturbed and in the milieu he had to shift to Delhi alongwith his family where there was a large concentration of refugees who had lost everything. He picked up the threads of his life and slowly and steadily started his artistic career again. But he had very limited opportunities and he thought it best to pursue a diploma course in art from the Delhi Polytechnic so that he could get a suitable government job. Thereafter he joined ‘American Embassy’ as an artist and received accolades due to his good grasp at portrait painting and illustration. He reinvented himself and started working in all branches of commercial art and design. A turning point came to his artistic career as here at the Embassy Library he was exposed to works of art done by
contemporary painters from all over the world.\textsuperscript{82} This exercise sharpened his acumen as an artist and he found a new meaning and versatility in art. He started dabbling in imaginative compositions and soon mastered the skill of handling works commissioned on varied subjects by rich and famous people. He used to visit museums and art galleries to update his artistic caliber, studying new concepts and styles. The urge to work independently without any constraints took deep root in his mind and he decided to have his own studio. In the studio work, he excelled in commercial and promotional aspects of applied art which brought him in contact with prominent patrons of art who were appreciative of his fabulous and free flowing brushwork and his keen sense of colour.

Besides painting portraits, Mehar Singh attempted paintings on Sikh themes and thus new openings provided him some commissions from Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. He alongwith the help of other artists was instrumental in establishing small art galleries in the premises of the Gurdwaras. This much needed exposure introduced him to Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi and other Regional Lalit Kala Akademies. He became very popular artist and was rewarded by a number of leaders from all walks of life. Later on he shifted his base to Chandigarh and Department of Cultural affairs, Government of Punjab nominated him as Chairman of the Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi.\textsuperscript{83} Whenever he was offered a project he used to devote days and weeks in researching the historical, social, psychological and religious angles related to a particular subject and did rough sketches to arrive at the final product in his mind. After due visualization he would start the painting and would devote his creative energies to capture the soul of the subject. This is the very reason why each work

\textsuperscript{82} Rani, Dr. Saroj; 2001, \textit{The Realistic Artists from Punjab}, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.116-117
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, p.51
done by him is of utmost artistic merit and is infused with aesthetic richness.\textsuperscript{84} 
He had a great fascination for the magnificent works of some European artists who had painted large works relating to Lahore Durbar but while painting on the similar lines, he added some new dimensions by experimenting with more bright and vibrant palette. The element of the Sikh Calendar art entered in his works as he started using various features normally employed by the artists of this genre like depiction of drapery, time furniture, ornaments and other artifacts associated with Sikh culture and traditions which provided a majestic look to the painting. He duly recognizes the influence of European art on his painting yet he successfully retained the flavour of Indianness in his fascinating works by organizing the conceptual preferences in his compositions.

Portrait painting according to Mehar Singh is not merely painting the physical appearance of a person but a real portrait has the inbuilt strength of capturing the essence of the character. In pursuance of this aspect, he is in the habit of spending sometime with the character and knowing his/her mental attributes and talents so that he is able to capture the person in totality.\textsuperscript{85} This showcases his respect and reverence for personalities who have made their mark in literary and artistic domains. Mehar Singh did a series of portraits of such stalwarts as Prithvi Raj Kapoor (actor), Nanak Singh (novelist), Kartar Singh Duggal (writer), Balraj Sahni (actor) and other theatre personalities and well known decorated Army Generals. Today Mehar Singh stands in the front row of portrait painters of Punjab who have inherited the glorious traditions of portraiture from Sardar Sobha Singh- the legendary father figure of Sikh painting.

\textbf{Artist Bodhraj is one such meritious artist whose artistic creations were immensely utilized by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee,}

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\textsuperscript{84} Rani, Dr. Saroj; 2001, \textit{The Realistic Artists from Punjab}, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.118
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, p.122
\end{flushleft}
Amritsar, Dharam Parchar Committee: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi for bringing numerous multi-coloured publications for the purpose of propagation of Sikh religion, traditions and culture. He is perhaps the most published painter of Sikh Calendar art. Bodhraj was born in Jallandhar and had the good fortune to sharpen his artistic talent while working with Hari Singh Studio at Amritsar. His mentor was a man of many multi-faceted artistic dimensions, had worked for decades with Bengali masters at Calcutta and achieved acclaim and name as foremost painter of backdrops for theatrical companies. Hari Singh founded his own company under the name of Maiden Theatrical Company at Calcutta. His work was also utilized in the ‘Alam Ara’, the very first Hindi movie. While entrusted with the task of illustrating pages from Sikh history and elaborating on symbols of Sikh faith for colourful brochures, booklets and calendars, Bodhraj was initiated into the deep study of Sikh history and about the lives of Sikh Gurus. He brought out the divine manifestations enshrined in the teachings of Sikh Gurus in his bewitchingly painted canvases. These paintings are a true testimony to his supreme talent and establish him as a painter of aesthetically invigorating masterpieces. He had developed a capacity to narrate a particular episode in effortless visual description and his paintings are richly endowed with natural details, skillfully painted landscapes and superbly composed trees and foliages with ever-changing moods of the skies. His phenomenal skill in portraying the scenes in poetic manner mesmerize the viewer and arrests his attention to carry home the message intricately illustrated in a specific work. The palette he used has a touch of realistic charm and a fully controlled perspective both linear and colour. Study of surroundings and architectural details enhances his paintings which capture the authenticity in vivid terms. Bodhraj was both

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86 Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar; 2008, Exhibition of Paintings of ‘The Great Masters of Amritsar’ (Catalogue), Indian Academy of Fine Arts, M.M. Malviya Road, Amritsar, Printer: Algon Printers, Amritsar, p.2
industrious and versatile painter whose prolific contribution to *Sikh Calendar art* is truly commendable and well recognized by the patrons of art who promoted this genre of art. A man of simple living and high thinking devoted most of his time in the pursuit of excellence and was able to establish his own style and mannerism.

**Artist Devender Singh received his initial training in art from his father Sardar Sewak Singh who was a successful commercial artist in Amritsar.** The assortment of jobs in commercial art which his father used to do very effectively included illustrations for books, catalogues, brochures, magazines and other publicity material like poster, banner, logo design and sign board designs. Devender Singh’s early interest in art was visible as he was merely seven years old when he started helping and assisting his father. Sewak Singh was thrilled to see his young lad taking to painting as a fish takes to swimming.87 Devender Singh was admitted to a course in art at Government College of Art at Chandigarh but his heart was somewhere else.88 He wanted to take up the commercial art work instantly without wasting a number of years in the art institution as he was confident of the earlier guidance and training given to him by his illustrious father and there seem to be no necessity of any academic diploma for pursuing a full-fledged career in art in his mind.89 After spending a few years with his father he soon realized that this type of commercial art did not satisfy his creative urges and he chanced upon seeing some masterpieces by Sardar Sobha Singh in calendars as well as in original. These paintings of the Sikh Gurus done by Sobha Singh greatly influenced him and he took a resolve to devote his life and art towards the portrayal of Sikh history through his paintings as this was the kind of work he always wanted to pursue.90 To reach his goal he

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87 *Rashid, Parbina*; April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune.
89 *Rashid, Parbina*; April 21, 2003, *Depicting Sikh history on canvas*, The Tribune.
spent long hours in studying the Sikh historical literature and the hymns of Gurbani especially ‘Baramaha’ by Guru Nanak moved him deeply and he painted on this theme in his own individualistic semi-abstract and pleasingly captivating style. This experimental work was adopted by Punjab and Sind Bank for their desk calendars. These works received commercial success and soon he was offered more assignments by a number of patrons and connoisseurs of art to paint scenes from Sikh history based on hymns in Gurbani. But he realized that the semi-abstract style he has chosen would not do justice to the historical paintings where episodes and stories have to be narrated in realistic manner so that the message reaches the masses directly. As he was fully equipped with the technical and aesthetic aspects of the painting, he developed his own expressive style which was pleasing to the eye and had all the dimensions of Sikh Calendar art.

Today Devender Singh is considered to be one of the front rank painters of Sikh history who has created a niche for himself. There is a great demand for his work and new projects and commissions keep on pouring especially from Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, Dharam Parchar Committee: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, Punjab and Sind Bank, New Delhi, Bank of Punjab, New Delhi, Markfed, PNB Finance, Gurudwara Ajaibghars (museums), institutions, libraries and many private collections specially Non-resident Indians are fond of his work which he painted in the colours of faith and lofty ethos of Sikh religion. He has touched upon many new and unusual episodes from the lives of Gurus and has devoted considerable amount of his dedicated creative endeavour to pay a tribute to the prominent Sikh women who have influenced the Sikh history and faith greatly by way of painting their portraits in unparalleled style. His dexterity and control

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91 Menon, Rathi A; June 22, 1998, The hand that gives form to Sikh history. Indian Express.
92 Rashid, Parbina; April 21, 2003, Depicting Sikh history on canvas, The Tribune.
over the medium of oil on canvas is remarkably expressive and each year new calendar art works are required by the promoters of Sikh art and culture.

Devender Singh is a man of quite persona and shuns publicity. Painting to him has become his only mode of communication and dialogue with the viewers. A disciplinarian to the core, he devotes considerable long hours of his daily routine to the painting of Sikh history. Though his forte being the Sikh history, the facts he knows cannot be twisted around. To recreate the momentous moments in the glorious past and the epic battle scenes, he however delves deep into the voluminous pages of history and at times frequents the relevant places where events had occurred hundreds of years ago. He avers: “Painting is a voice of his soul as it stems from within my heart.” He further admits that, “Painting is an obsessive preoccupation and also acts as an act of self-expression as well as livelihood for me.” On the question of commercialization of Indian painting, Devender Singh believes that this rat race has no end and the only sufferer in this exercise is the real art. The real art is affected if an artist harbours envy and jealousy for artists who make millions by selling their works in auctions, art shows and art fairs. For him painting is not only a business preposition but a responsibility left on the shoulders of an artist to contribute the high moral characteristics to the society around him as he owes of his existence to the society. Performing the sacred duty of bringing about a healthy change in the mindset of people to bring love, hope and harmony in society is of prime value and the main aim of good art. Commenting on the wise words of Henry Ward Beecher, Devender Singh is of the firm belief that, “Every artist dips his brush in his own soul and paints his own nature into his pictures.” Till today his main mission is to translate the Banis of the Sikh Gurus into paintings so that the coming generations may be able to take pride in the wise words and actions of the Sikh Gurus. His canvases are not in the nature of a ‘Satsang in colour’ but

93 Singh, Nonika; August 6, 1999, Brush with Sikh history, The Tribune.
carry meaningful delineation through the countenances of Gurus. He admits that, “I focused on realistic art, not only because the orders I get are for such work but because it is drawn from life.”

Devender Singh will be remembered as an artist who had a brush with Sikh history.

Whereas artist Kirpal Singh excelled in recording the Sikh history with a missionary zeal and has a coveted place amongst the most popular painters of Sikh art, his equally talented son Jarnail Singh chose to embark upon an altogether different dimension of Sikh art that is his main interest lies in capturing the art, culture and traditions of Punjab. A mild mannered sensitive person Jarnail Singh after doing his graduation from Panjab University, Chandigarh received no formal academic training in any art institution. He was engaged in assisting his father and he inherited some of the finest nuances of painting in terms of technique and execution. But he soon realized that war scenes and portrayal of gory torture and mindless brutal violence did not appeal to his heart. He developed a vision to paint the fast disappearing Punjabi culture and heritage due to the onslaught of technology and industrialization. His mission is to record the mélange of fairs, festivals, ceremonies, myriad traditional aspects of rural Punjabi way of life. Today he is well known for his beautiful paintings of Punjabi brides, women engaged in daily chores of life like churning the milk, busy with the spinning wheel and deeply engrossed in embroidery work. Besides these themes, the other subjects which have caught his imagination are women performing Giddha, women working at Sanjha Chulah (kitchen/tandoor), group of women indulging in gossip. The rich Punjabi culture is overflowing with zest and enthusiasm for life. Dancing and

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94 Menon, Rathi A; June 22, 1998, The hand that gives form to Sikh history, Indian Express.
95 Bhatti, S.S; 1988, Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh’s ‘Punjab Paintings’, The Tribune
96 Matharu, Archna; March 17, 2011, Cultural Strokes, Hindustan Times.
97 Rani, Dr. Saroj; 2001, The Realistic Artists from Punjab, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.135-142
singing is the most natural exercise performed by men and women. He has painted fascinating works of Punjabi customs and a few works on the theme of Teeiyan that is women enjoying the swings, dancing during the monsoon season are painted in the true spirit of fun and frolic which is the hallmark of Punjabi festivals. As Jarnail Singh saw around him that the real Punjabi way of life is fast vanishing and westernization of customs, habits and traditions is setting in with every passing day. There was a kind of apprehension and anxiety that if this trend goes on this will pose a great setback to our centuries old culture of warmth and hospitable exuberance. In his own words, he states that, “I have been documenting with the intent to preserve in my paintings the traditional Punjabi way of life which is fast vanishing in the villages of Punjab. I use art to depict our rich culture and heritage and show the next generation of Punjabis the beauty of our culture. I don’t want them to forget our history, culture and traditions.” As he has shifted his base to Canada where he is working persistently and holding a number of art exhibitions especially for the third generation Punjabi settlers to make them aware of the richness of our culture. He says that, “My work is frequently viewed by the third generation Punjabis living in Canada and North America. My paintings help them discover their cultural roots. Usually their grandparents take them along to my exhibitions and explain to them the traditions showcased in the paintings.” His style of painting is vibrant in colours and his versatility impacts the viewer due to the variety of subjects he chooses to paint. His works done in painstakingly detail portray the authenticity of an event or a character in visually appealing style. His paintings have the flavour of mild mannerism he himself possesses in his character. The gigantic task he undertook to portray and preserve the Punjabi culture has received

98 **Bhatti, S.S:** 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity: Jarnail Singh’s ‘Punjab Paintings’*, The Tribune
99 **Rani, Dr. Saroj:** 2001, *The Realistic Artists from Punjab*, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.77
100 **Matharu, Archna:** March 17, 2011, *Cultural Strokes*, Hindustan Times.
appreciation and honours from varied quarters as his innumerable works are adorning the walls of Punjabis in all continents. He has been successful as a crusader to bring the rich culture and traditions of Punjab to Punjabis and others who had migrated from India decades ago. Analyzing his inner psyche and an irresistible urge to paint he explains that, “I strive to create images of everlasting beauty. It is a humble effort to capture on canvas the beauty and grandeur of everyday life of bountiful Nature of our land, so that it gives joy and inner peace to viewers and instills in them a sense of gratitude for the gift of life and for Nature’s never ending generosity. I can paint forever the beauty of nature and the simplicity and innocence of native and indigenous cultures of Punjab which ultimately will be consumed by soulless consumerist culture in this fast changing world.” These words amply explain the mission of this great artist and his deep love for cultural roots of Punjab. The galaxy of artists who devoted their lives to the cause of portraying the history, cultural ethos, spiritual and religious manifestations, social and psychological aspirations, struggles and achievements, turmoils and victories of the Sikhs in right historical perspectives have accomplished a phenomenal task by painting magnificent masterpieces which showcase the essence of Sikh psyche, religion and lofty sacred mission of their Gurus in bringing about a transformation in the minds and hearts of mankind. The missionary zeal of these artists is commendable and during the course of accomplishing this sacred endeavour they had to face resistance and hardships in evolving a certain visually accepted iconography and carrying out their goodwork despite many odds especially financial difficulties. The most heartening aspect of this creative struggle highlights their inner strength and their faith in the humanistic values preached by the Sikh Gurus in the hymns of Gurbani. The sheer strength of their character and moral values sustained them through all adversities and yet produce works of spiritual and divine dynamism.