The study of the emergence and development of Sikh Calendar art will not be complete without understanding the development of Sikh art. While defining the term Sikh art the basic ingredients and elements, which have contributed towards its emergence, may primarily be the works of art specifically done by Sikh artists, on Sikh themes patronised by Sikhs or produced within the territory governed or otherwise dominated by Sikhs.\textsuperscript{1} The credit for valuable artistic contribution towards its blossoming also goes to those prominent painters who were not essentially Sikh by religion but were equally efficient and appreciative of the basic spirit of Sikhism. \textbf{The pinnacle of Sikh art was achieved during the Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh} whose powerful persistent patronage and support encouraged many admirers and connoisseurs of Sikh art, who were at the helm of affairs in the Lahore court further facilitating development of Sikh art to attain its new glorious heights and expanded boundaries. The literal definition of Sikh art thus remains Art by, for and or about Sikhs.\textsuperscript{2}

To explain the explicit version of Sikh art- the \textbf{early Sikh art was a myriad combination of the Sikh religious themes}, the life events of Guru Nanak as illustrated in \textit{Janam Sakhis}\textsuperscript{(Plate-1)} portraits of Sikh Gurus, ideals of Sikh life and canons of Sikh faith. At this stage, the Sikh themes were the essence of Sikh art rather than style. While Sikh art was essentially thematic in content and spirituality was its all-adoring flavour during this period. The ‘song’ and hymns were the reigning elements in the spread of Sikhism and its values yet the gradual emergence of visuals in the \textit{Janam Sakhis} aptly and emphatically started establishing the new genre of Sikh art catering to the devotional needs of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
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the faithful.\textsuperscript{3} The appearance of these religiously and spiritually charged visuals in \textit{Janam Sakhis} impacted the psyche of the people in direct yet all encompassing compassionate manner due to its content, stylisation and a visual feast.

\textit{Sikh art} was born in the \textit{Janam Sakhis} and apart from an isolated series of portraits, it was evidently confined to this context for well over a century. \textit{Janam Sakhis} are hagiographic accounts of the life of Guru Nanak, popular narratives that have enjoyed a considerable popularity throughout the history of the Sikh panth. The \textit{Janam Sakhis} are characterised into two basic traditions as Puratan \textit{Janam Sakhi} and Bhai Bala \textit{Janam Sakhi}.\textsuperscript{4}

The first attempt to illustrate \textit{Janam Sakhis} was made as early as 1658 during the pontificate of the seventh Guru Har Rai. With the passage of time, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the number of such attempts multiplied. The pioneers who endeavoured in this direction were chiefly \textit{Udasi, Ramraiya} and \textit{Sodhi Deras} all offshoots of the mainstream of Sikhism.\textsuperscript{5}

\textit{Janam Sakhis} helped the hagiographic growth process of Sikhism, preserved and propagated historical facts from Sikh point of view and advanced a new art style characteristically Sikh.

With the development of illustrated \textit{Janam Sakhis}, \textit{Sikh art} saw the emergence of thematic extension, imaginative expansion, fictional dimension, spiritual concern, devotional aura and artistic manifestation. It also presented a new realm of creative satisfaction and a stretch of artistic evolvement. The structural strength of the magnificent \textit{Sikh art}, which developed later on, had the strength of illustrative \textit{Janam Sakhis} in the nucleus.

\textsuperscript{3} Daljeet, Dr.; 2004, \textit{The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality}, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.127
\textsuperscript{5} Fauja Singh, Dr.; March 1969, \textit{A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak}, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4\textsuperscript{th} Session, Patiala, p.131
Thus the newly emerging prominent features such as style-portraiture, crystallisation and continuation of events, expressive narration and systematic serialisation, appearance of landscape, motifs, symbols and other elements of aesthetics such as colour balance, minuteness, detailed depiction, refinement in suitable borders and margins with floral designs added a new vibrancy to the illustrative art of Janam Sakhis where the seeds of Sikh art were sown and later on blossomed into flowering trees.⁶

The role of the Deras of the Udasis, the self appointed preachers of Sikhism acted as an active catalyst who took upon themselves the pious task of nurturing, promoting and propagation of the art of illustrating and illuminating Janam Sakhis due to their ample leisure as well as keen interest.⁷

Simultaneously the appearance of frescos and murals on the walls of deras, dharamshalas, temples, akharas, shrines, havelis and palaces depicting the life events of Sikh Gurus, their portraits and those of Mahants and priests established and further channelised the propagation of the emerging genre of Sikh art. In fact it was an arduous task to continue with this tradition, as the Mughal era is known for demolition and destruction of non-Islamic religious structures. During the Sikh Gurus lifetime the indigenous mural art tradition of Punjab had little scope for growth under the despiseful eyes of Mughals. Yet it slowly crawled to the far-off sectarian buildings mostly the Thakurdwaras of Bairagis (Plate-2) such as the one built by Sant Jagveen Das Bairagi near the Wagah border at Attari sometime in the mid seventeenth century. These Thakurdwaras frescos(Plate-3) strengthen the Sikh painting in many ways for the Hindu motifs and themes that dominated them were as much an integral part of the Sikh art tradition.⁸

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⁶ Daljeet, Dr.; 2004, The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.130
⁸ Daljeet, Dr.; 2004, The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.131
Various eighteenth century murals reported from other parts of Punjab depict significant stages of the growth of Sikh art. They include the partially washed paintings on the outside walls of the main shrine of Shri Namdev Temple at village Ghoman. The practice of embellishing walls with paintings continued well up to later half of the eighteenth century.

Another vital dimension which was responsible for the extension of Pahari art was the Sikh patronage at the very end of the eighteenth century, when Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra, the chief patron of painting in the Kangra valley was forced to seek the aid of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of the Punjab plains, to put an end to the perennial attacks and disturbances by Gurkhas in 1809. With the result, peace and tranquillity was established after the annexation of Guler in 1813 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and dominance of Sikh rulers was achieved over the hill states.

During the years 1810 to 1830, the Pahari artists themselves came forward and approached the Sikh patrons, which envisaged a keen interest in the minds of patrons at Lahore court.\(^9\) The result being cementing of the bond of Pahari painting with Sikh art and enriching it with novel, instinctive, artistic and aesthetical enhancements. Thus Sikh art became the direct successor of the Kangra School of painting.\(^10\)

During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Kotla, Guler, Kangra, Basohli, Nurpur, Chamba and other hill states of the region one after the other passed under the Sikh sway. This led to close contacts between the plains and the hills and in consequence the artists of the Kangra valley turned to Sikh themes.\(^11\) A large number of them even left the hills and settled in Amritsar and Lahore and they enjoyed rich patronage of the Sikh rulers.\(^12\)

\(^12\) Archer, W.G; 1966, *Paintings of the Sikhs*, Her Majesty’s stationary office, London, p.31
The prominent artists like Nikka, Gokal, Harkhu, Chhajju and Damodar, all of the Rajol family of artists have established connections with the Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Sher Singh and the family of the powerful Sandhanwalia Sardars.\(^1^3\)

The Sikh School of painting is the adaptation of the Kangra style of painting to Sikh needs and ideals.\(^1^4\) The first among the various subjects that attracted their attention was the portrayal of the Sikh Gurus. Both the Guler and Kangra artists tried their hands at this subject to the great satisfaction of their new political masters. Their art was still essentially rooted in the Pahari artistic tradition, but the changed conditions under which it now functioned, introduced certain important innovations in its complexion, for which reason it would be best described as the Pahari-Sikh art.\(^1^5\)\(\text{(Plate-4)}\)

The earliest paintings for the Sikhs were painted by the Guler artists in the period 1815-1820 and portray the ten Sikh Gurus which are in the permanent collection of Chandigarh museum.\(^1^6\) This testifies the fact that these hill artists had whole-heartedly started adopting Sikh themes in their works.

During the early years of Sikh rule, which was established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh after turmoil and turbulence, received a limited range of interest from the Sikh patrons due to the circumstances in which the Sikh dynasty had risen to power. Though art was not entirely ignored by the Lahore court but portraiture emerged as the preferred form of painting and this demand clearly affected the direction followed by the Pahari artists who migrated to the plains. Portraiture remains the most poignant feature in Sikh art for its pageantry, vibrance, typical expression, unparalleled panache, true interpretation and

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boldness which is otherwise not found in most Indian portraits. This provided a distinct identity to Sikh art.\textsuperscript{17}

During this period, the traditions of Pahari art continued uninterrupted with new themes under the auspices of Sikh governors. The governors such as Desa Singh Majithia and Sher Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were open enough to come close to the populace of the place they were ruling and always tried to understand the cultural ethos and traditions of their places. There was no hindrance in letting the artists of those Sikh governed areas to divert their creative energies and attentions from the creative work they were pursuing. There were new additions in the themes and artists gladly adopted the subject matter which was the preference of the Sikh patrons.\textsuperscript{18}

Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s patronage was not only extended to painting but carving, armour design, brassware, jewellery, textiles and architecture were also given much needed impetus for their development. With an open heart for new ideas and thoughts Maharaja welcomed the western philosophy, culture and military discipline. He was generous in employing European generals in his powerful and well-trained army.\textsuperscript{19} Presence of numerous western visitors was the result of his warmth and keen interest in recognising and appreciating fresh talents.

The art of portraiture flourished during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in spite of his aversion for getting himself painted. A large number of remarkable portraits of Maharaja, his family, soldiers and the sketches of people were painted by many amateur and professional artists.\textsuperscript{20}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} Goswamy, B.N; 1981, \textit{A matter of taste: Some Notes on the context of Painting in Sikh Punjab}, Marg Publications, Bombay, p.77
\textsuperscript{20} Singh, Manmohan; 1977, \textit{Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s court: Painters and the Painted}, Marg Publications, Bombay, P.109 
\end{flushleft}
Besides the painters already in attendance in the Lahore court, the two painters from Delhi namely Jivan Ram and Hasan-al-din also contributed enormously to the Sikh art of portraiture and an important painting depicting the visit of the Governor General William Bentinck to Ranjit Singh at the Sikh court in 1832 is a fine specimen relating to this period which was painted after considerable efforts on the part of William Bentinck’s request to Maharaja to sit for his portrait and Jivan Ram was assigned the task of painting this occasion. Maharaja was fascinated by the way European painters drew the pictures and secretly admired their art.\textsuperscript{21}

The dazzle and splendour of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s court was a great attraction for European artists. Some had fascination for seeking their fortunes, others landed in Lahore Durbar to satisfy their curious urges and to have a look at the Maharaja of this empire who impressed one and all with his wisdom, nobility and mannerism.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{The European influence which made its first appearance in the Punjab in context of Sikh art} was through the sketches of Osborne, a member of the Macnaughten Mission to Ranjit Singh in 1838 and Emily Eden who accompanied her brother Lord Auckland during his visit to the Punjab in 1839.\textsuperscript{23} The others who followed the trail were August Schoefft, Baron Hugel, Captain Goldingham, William Carpenter, C.S.Hardingne, the German painter Van Orlich, G.T.Vigne, Russian prince Alexis Soltykoff to name a few.

Among the pioneer European painters, a Hungarian painter named August Theodore Schoefft who visited India in 1838 laid the foundations of western style of painting in Sikh art. He was renowned for his competence in oil paintings and painted vast canvasses depicting the scenes of Ranjit Singh’s court.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Archer, W.G; 1966, \textit{Paintings of the Sikhs}, Her Majesty’s stationary office, London, p.31
\item \textsuperscript{22} Aijazuddin, F.S; 1979, \textit{Sikh Portraits by European Artists}, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p.13
\item \textsuperscript{23} Fauja Singh, Dr.; March 1969, \textit{A Study of the paintings of Guru Nanak}, Punjab History Conference Proceedings, 4\textsuperscript{th} Session, Patiala, p.134
\end{itemize}
Sher Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a great admirer of western art and was immensely impressed by Schoefft’s style of illustrative work. The Sikh rulers as well as the painters of the Punjab were for the first time introduced to western style of painting through Schoefft’s works. His huge canvases painted in oils were the first step towards the journey of development of Sikh art, which imbibed western styles, techniques, mannerisms and composition. 

While talking about portraits of Maharaja Ranjit Singh by European painters, the most poignant and authentic portrait that comes to mind is the portrait by Lord Auckland’s sister Emily Eden. Her well-known portrait of the Maharaja shows him sitting on a chair with one leg pulled up and the other resting on a foot-rest and his left hand finger is shown pointing in a characteristic posture of earnest gesture. Hardly any other portrait of Maharaja can surpass the superb handling and delicate artistry of this portrait.

This truly was an era of transformation of Sikh art from Janam Sakhis to canvasses in oils, sketches, engravings, lithographs, etchings, woodcuts, pen-portraits, water-colours, line drawings and miniatures on porcelain. The Europeans found the settings very exotic and the subjects saw a sea change in Sikh painting now the portraits had backgrounds with landscapes, buildings, royal group portraits in royal settings, drapery, ornamental furniture, weaponry and tamed animals etc appearing in most of the works. The popularity of these works of art was the depiction of realism, border perspective, foreshortening, unconventional approach, elaborate backgrounds, highlighting, intricate representation of jewellery, embroidered costumes which amazed Indian artists to a great extent. The beauty of the landscape, handsomeness of Sikh faces, the prosperity that came under Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s reign provided an idyllic and mesmerising setting to painting.

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The popular paintings of this period depict the splendour of the Sikh court of Ranjit Singh, its treasures and its robust and handsome Sikh warriors, architectural magnificence of Lahore Durbar, portraits of famous personalities of Ranjit Singh’s court- Maharaja’s sons Sher Singh, Kharak Singh, Naunihal Singh, infant Daleep Singh, his favourite boy Hira Singh is shown; Dhian Singh is respectfully standing at the back and occasionally shown with his brother, Suchet Singh and Gulab Singh of Jammu. In some works, Maharaja Ranjit Singh is shown sitting with his non-Sikh courtiers such as Finance minister Dina Nath the Brahmin, Foreign minister Aziz-ud-din and Jamadar Khushal Singh who was actually a Brahmin. There are also portraits of his generals like Sham Singh Attariwala, foreigner army trainers like Allard Ventura, Vo’n Cortland and Honibeger. The most lyrical depiction of Shalimar Garden and Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s palace have been done in lithographs including a most exquisite one which featured in ‘The court and camp of Ranjit Singh’ by famous European artist W.G.Osborne.

With the British annexation of Punjab in 1849, subjects of the painting which were earlier confined to the elite classes and royalties now shifted their attention towards the quaint and the exotic occupations and trades of the bazaar such as carpenters, blacksmiths, comb makers, weavers, potters, masons, water-carriers, dyers, beggars, snake charmers, armoured nihangs, sadhus, banjaras and vagabonds etc. The Punjabi artists for the first time attained orientation in understanding and capturing visual experiences rather than the prescribed and stylised versions. The depiction of the common man engrossed in his daily chores initiated a stupendous bulk of art activity in the last two decades of nineteenth century and the first few of the twentieth century.

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Punjabi painters took to painting portraits in oils with increased interest and zest, which resulted in greater experimentation and achievement of excellence in painting techniques. Some of the Punjabi artists were spellbound with the superb technique of water-colour painting and ventured to paint in newly acquired skills and techniques learnt from the European artists. The foremost among the Punjabi artists was Kehar Singh who flourished at Lahore and Kapurthala in the second half of the nineteenth century was the first to adopt western style of painting especially oil painting. He painted contemporary life in a vivid manner. He was the first painter who abandoned the flat colour treatment typical of indigenous painting in favour of light and shade. A portrait of Ranjit Singh in which he is shown seated on a chair is an excellent specimen of the art of Kehar Singh. He also painted people from all walks of life especially people engaged in various trades and occupations which gives us a glimpse of life in the Punjab. Under the British rule in 1864 a first ever exhibition of art was held in Lahore in which Kehar Singh and other prominent Punjabi painters of this period participated.

Close on heels was yet another remarkable painter known for his magnificent paintings in oils and water-colours and who was a court painter of Kapurthala was Kapur Singh whose contribution to Sikh art is of immense value. He excelled in Indo-European style of painting which he learnt through observation while he used to be assigned the job of fanning the European painters who were then working in the court of Kapurthala. His artistic forte was portraiture and his sketches are in Central museum, Lahore and Chandigarh museum. His paintings are comprised of figures which he composed with deep understanding of composition and considerable proficiency in action. There is a spark of fair knowledge of drawing in his works.

29 Ibid. p.36
His two nephews who were equally talented and carried on the tradition of painting in the family were Kishan Singh and Bishan Singh though their preference was more for Kangra-Sikh style of painting as they were more close to master painters of the Kangra school then residing in Lahore. Amongst them Bishan Singh’s work was highly decorative with elaborate floral designs as he excelled in the art of floral decoration and was called a Naqqash whereas his brother Kishan Singh was a Chitera meaning who excelled in drawing and painting. Credit for painting frescos of this period goes to these painters. Bishan Singh’s two sons Jawahar Singh and Nihal Singh followed in the footsteps of his father but there is no indication to suggest that they also worked in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.30

Lahore was the chief centre of painting in Punjab and Amritsar was the second well-known centre of Sikh art, this city had a complete alley (Gali) of painters and was famous as Gali Naqqashan. Today this Gali is known as Pratap Gali.31

Yet some painters continued the tradition of painting in Kangra style in spite of the new exposures and improvisations till the early years of twentieth century. The works of painters such as Sardul Singh and Bawa are noticeable and worthy of mention. They were amongst the last few painters of Sikh art who continued to work in traditional style of painting in spite of the new winds of change which came with the western style of painting there by starting a whole new style of Sikh art. Much of Sardul Singh’s work can be seen on the walls of temple ‘Daryanamull ka Thakurdwara’ in Katra Mohar Singh.32

The artistic contribution of Puran Singh who continued to paint portraits of Sikh Gurus till the end of nineteenth century in Amritsar is of great significance in continuing and enhancing the traditional Sikh art.

30 Aryan, K.C; 1975, Punjab Painting, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.20
31 Ibid, p.21
32 Aryan, K.C; 1971, Some Punjabi Artists, Roopalekha, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.35
Alongside Puran Singh *Musavvar*, other artists who worked here were Amir Singh, Aroor Singh, Ganesha Singh all of them were *Naqqashas* of considerable standing. Their point of excellence basically was floral decorations that had no dearth of clientele. Yet some artists whose names deserve mention and who were close to famous architect Mian Karam Buxe were Ishar Singh, son of well-known painter Bhai Ram Singh and Mehtab Singh was important amongst traditional *Naqqashas*. They were hired by Mian Buxe architect to decorate the murals of Hindu temples in Amritsar.\(^{33}\)

With the change of the rulers of Punjab, the artists had to cater to the new patrons of art keeping in mind their different tastes and preferences. This way Punjabi artists started getting commissioned work from the Britishers which gave impetus to their financial prepositions slowly yet steadily establishing the ‘Bazaar school of painting’ which was a combination of Indian and western styles of painting as well as folk art forms and paintings of native subjects. Many small art studios saw the light of the day where artists and their pupils were engaged in doing commercial painting for their clientele both European, rich and the elite.\(^{34}\)

The introduction of Printing presses especially Lithographic printing processes in the 1850s wholly revolutionised the propagation of *Sikh Bazaar art*.\(^{35}\) This was the turning point and works which were only available to the elite now were being mass-produced and sold in the market at nominal rates thus awakening the whole new resurgence of Sikh consciousness and developed into a new stream of publishers, printers, journalists, authors and painters/illustrators.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{33}\) Aryan, K.C; 1975, *Punjab Painting*, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.21

\(^{34}\) Ibid, p.23


The technique of Lithographic printing was used extensively for printing books some with occasional illustrations and elaborate title covers of the publications. For example the ‘Tulsi Ramayan’ in Gurmukhi was published in 1871 at Lahore and ‘Qissa Puran Bhagat Jati da’ in 1872 with a number of impressive Lithographic images of Puran Bhagat. Janam Sakhis and important Punjabi love-legends like Heer Ranjha were also published by Lithography technique spreading their wider circulation, which became an element of Popular Sikh art/ Sikh Calendar art. Also available were the much appreciated dasti, hand held or portable prints some of which satirize the rapid shifts in Punjab society.\(^{37}\)

The publication of Janam Sakhis with appropriate and individual illustrations and texts became the hallmark of this new found Popular art using the techniques of Woodcut, Lithography and Letter-Press printing for wider distribution. Though many may believe that the illustrations of mass-produced Janam Sakhis did not compare well with the quality of illustrations which were hand-painted earlier. In the beginning as only the elite and aristocrats of the Punjab were the chief patrons who hired the artists engaged in illustrating Janam Sakhis. But Janam Sakhis of the nineteenth century received constant and tremendous popularity amongst the masses.\(^{38}\) The printed versions of Janam Sakhis were not very astride and aesthetically rich but the content and the message they carried though crudely was very well received by a large number of Sikh community and the process of popularity of Sikh art leapt by leaps and bounds. As the visual narration of Sikh religious messages and history became a roaring success, Bazaar prints or Popular Sikh art prints are the successful implementation of the new acquired technical skills and advancements.


\(^{38}\) McLeod, W.H; 1991, Popular Sikh Art, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, p.18
A large number of woodcuts are also available from this period dealing with various themes including the portraits of Sikh Gurus and other Sikh heroes and warriors. These woodcuts in their style and content are the direct antecedents of the highly-coloured calendar prints of today. In terms of format these woodcuts closely resembled the Anglo-Mughal style of format as here the twelve heroes of Sikhs were presented in a head and shoulders portrait surrounded by an oval frame or as figures on oval rings in woodcut. This type of stylisation exists till today in popular Sikh calendars in which the ten Sikh Gurus are presented in chronicle order using bright colours and intricate margins. One such woodcut in the similar fashion and stylisation mentioned above shows Guru Nanak surrounded by his nine successors, his two attendants Bala and Mardana and an unidentified figure beside a horse. Here Guru Nanak is supported by the traditional cushion (Takia) on an elevated platform (Chauki). These two are the symbols of both royal and spiritual authority and an overspreading tree behind Guru Nanak defines a version of royal umbrella (Chhatri). The nine Sikh Gurus are seated on a carpet and in the centre a utensil covered with cloth is supposed to contain Karah Prasad (Sacred food) and an open copy of Sri Guru Granth Sahib has been placed on a portable lectern behind Guru Nanak Dev. A parrot in the cage hanging by the branch of the tree a feature associated with the yogis of the Nath tradition.39

Some of the other themes in the woodcuts were ‘Babe Nanak Mecca Phereya Apni Kala Dikhai’ as Guru Nanak is shown revolving the Mecca. This print was commissioned by Bhai Vasava Singh, as inscription of this detail is clearly visible on the print at the centre in Gurmukhi. Another woodcut with the theme ‘The Ten Sikh Gurus’ bears the name of the artist as Naqqash Sobha Singh in Gurmukhi. Yet another print carries the theme Guru Gobind Singh hunting wherein the inscription which is visible at the right end bottom of the

print shows the name of the printer as Bhai Gujjar Singh and the number of editions as two thousand. Other print in the series depicts the isometric sketch of the Golden Temple titled as ‘Naqsha Darbar Sahib Shri Amritsar ji ka’ has beautifully depicted the atmosphere around the Golden Temple with ducks, turtles and fishes swimming in the Holy pond (Sarovar). This print was printed by Bhai Gujjar Singh, Proprietor of the Faiz Printing Press near Akal Bunga in Amritsar.

In many woodcut prints of this period Guru Nanak is depicted as a venerable father figure and Guru Gobind Singh as the valiant Warrior. The popularity of these woodcut Prints and lithographs can be gauged from the fact that they were easily available in most of the semi-urban towns and adorned the walls of the houses of a large populace. From here on, there is a clear-cut indication that these prints were on their way to perhaps the first popular specimens of Sikh calendar art with newer and less popular themes from Sikh history and folklore entering their ambit. These prints are the indicators of the change of parameters of taste of the vast population who admired them for their content and simplicity.

The credit for this vast and rare collection of prints goes to J.Lockwood Kipling, principal of the Mayo School of Art in Lahore but for his dedication and understanding of popular Sikh art and the care with which he collected and preserved these prints. These prints would have been lost to oblivion forever. His effort to collect these prints is praiseworthy and at the same time he deserves gratitude and appreciation for studying them analytically and demystifying the psyche and the spirit, which went behind the production of these popular thematic prints. He was so fascinated with these prints that he

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endeavoured to visit fairs (melas), bazaars and streets to collect them from the vendors and printers in and around Amritsar and Lahore.

The pioneering work of J.Lockwood Kipling resulted in an album containing nearly 196 prints, paintings and drawings in pen and pencil together with 37 loose pages of paintings, calligraphic drawings and outline pen drawings. This prestigious collection of Popular Sikh art now houses Victoria and Albert museum, London which was presented by his son Rudyard Kipling in 1917. The themes depicting in these prints form the basis of many a calendars of Sikh art in the years to come with added improvisation and individual stylisation by numerous other artists on the way.

There seems to be some stagnation in promotion and practising of Sikh Calendar art during the first half of the twentieth century mainly due to two probable reasons. Firstly the general disfavour with which the members of Singh Sabha Movement had accepted the commercial popularisation of Sikh Calendar art probably due to the instance with which Sikh scriptures described the almighty God as Nirankar, the Formless one and also the preacher through whom the God speaks. Though we see lots of embellishments of Gurdwaras during this period in the form of wall paintings, frescos and murals depicting calligraphic motifs and floral designs. Drawing and painting from imagination done on Sikh themes was not favourably received by the members of the Singh Sabha Movement. This fact is referred to in Kahn Singh’s magisterial Mahan Kos. Photography was considered more truthful depiction capturing the actual pictures of people, places and events.41

The other most valid reason for the slow down of the development of Sikh Calendar art was the apprehension and fear of the members of the Singh Sabha Movement that imaginative depiction of Sikh Gurus may make them iconic

figures as no true and actual portraiture of a particular Sikh Guru was available and the practise of iconic figures being worshipped in the Gurdwaras was to be discouraged. But with the passage of time more liberal representation of the Sikh themes started getting acceptance and artists continued to paint on these themes in various materials i.e. from woodcuts and lithographs to drawings, watercolours, oil paintings in well accepted western techniques which by and now had become quite popular as Punjabi artists had acquired proficiency in handling these techniques with dexterity. New editions of *Popular Sikh art* continued to pour in the market establishing a well laid out circle of production, promotion and circulation of *Sikh Calendar art* in an organised link between the printer, the artists and the clientele.

Later half of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of Art schools by the British in different parts of India on the lines of art schools in Britain. The British painters and art teachers who worked in these art schools followed the Victorian style of painting and then they shifted to Greek style of painting and art teaching model which actually has harmed the country’s artistic spirit as gradually Indians started imitating this model which has done considerable damage to traditional Indian style of painting. Britishers flooded the Indian markets with prints from Britain, as they being novel were source of attraction for Indian buyers being depicted in life-like figures and landscapes. Local painters did not lag behind and gradually started painting in the same manner to beat the influx of these western type prints in the market. Traditional Indian painting was harmed by this transformation.⁴²

**During the first decade to third decade of twentieth century three categories of artists emerged in Punjab.** Firstly there were artists who were intoxicated and motivated with the early traditional *Sikh art* which was the culmination of Kangra School style with Sikh themes who refused to change.

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their artistic tracks and kept on working in the lyrical and ornamental style. The second category of artists belonged to those painters who can be called pseudo-academicians i.e. they followed the latest European/western trends imitating the British School of painting which was being taught in Punjab through the newly flooded art prints wherein life study was a major aspect of the painting and considerable attention was also paid to the background i.e. the landscape, buildings etc. Punjabi artists who adopted these techniques were partially successful in their depiction and newly attained proficiency in oil painting techniques. The third category of Punjabi artists can be called bazaar painters who established small shops cum studios and were basically involved in decorative and commercial work. There was some spark of true artistic mannerism in their works. Most of their works remained popular because of the skill with which they depicted scenes and floral decorations for the backdrops of theatrical companies and some of these works were also got commissioned by the aristocracy of Punjab for the decoration of their havelis etc. In this genre the name of Hussain Buxe of Lahore, Mohammad Alam, Malla Ram, Hari Singh, Allah Buxe of Lahore, Thakur Singh and Sobha Singh of Amritsar are prominent.43

Malla Ram who possessed an imposing personality was known in the art circles as he had worked in Kapurthala court and later established his studio in Amritsar, excelled in portraits and historical compositions. He dressed very elegantly and enjoyed painting theatrical scenes. Allah Bux of Lahore was a well-known painter who had mastered the art of draping his paintings in mysticism with a mastery over colour scheme and craftsmanship. His prominent work includes a series of paintings from Krishna legend. Yet another painter Hari Singh who was a disciple of Malla Ram excelled in the art of fresco painting is set to have painted houses of aristocrats in Italy, sadly being a modest person no

specimen of his work is available in Punjab today. The second reason being for the non-availability of his excellent works which he did for Royal Talkies in Amritsar was set ablaze in the days of partition. Artists like Hari Singh had to seek other avenues of livelihood due to the fading popularity of theatrical companies as films were becoming more popular.44

The painters who left their mark are Sobha Singh and S.G.Thakur Singh who worked in contemporary style of paintings. The elements of Bazaar style painting i.e. commercial and realistic are evident in their works. Their styles have won popular acclaim and they produced some significant works, which are popular even today. Thakur Singh’s body of work includes portraits, landscapes in photographic realism. Being an academician, he preferred painting in oils, pastels and in water-colours. His main contribution towards propagation of art was the establishment of an art academy and an art school in Amritsar. He became a legend during his lifetime.

A painter who was later to be known as a saint painter and who excelled in religious and mystical themes and paintings of love legends in unsurpassed technical excellence and astonishing realism was Sobha Singh. His best known works include portraits of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, lovers of Punjab- Heer Ranjha and Sohni Mahiwal and many other saints and paintings of the people of Kangra valley. Prints of which are appreciated and brought in Punjab and other countries where Punjabis have settled. He had settled in the hills of Himachal Pradesh near Palampur in a village called Andretta.

The academician painters who were products of art schools who received art training according to the curriculum which included stress on life drawing, illustration, drapery, nature study and composition in the manner of European style produced some interesting works worth mention. Among them were

44 Aryan, K.C; 1975, Punjab Painting, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.27
M.A.Aziz Din and Sri Ram. Their works were interesting and popular and in the collection of fellow artists, friends, admirers and their pupils. But most of them were destroyed during the partition in 1947. Some works of M.A.Aziz Din who was profusely influenced by British painter called ‘Leader’ had masterly quality of projecting the minutest details. He migrated to Afghanistan and never returned to India.45

Sri Ram was also called qualified artist who was master of painting commercial art and worked for Dadabhai theatrical company, Bombay being art director and stage decorator. He has proved himself as a superb academician as his works speak volumes of his creative competency in nature and life studies. The elements of commercial art are visible in his exciting works which have the mark of skilful drawing and composition imbibed from the European painting. He returned to Lahore and a great number of Punjabi painters were influenced by his work.

To understand the trends in Indian art especially in context of painting the British had made calculative moves to impose their ideas on art as well as other offshoots of civilization in second half of nineteenth century as they were the political masters of India by now. English language became official language in 1835 by replacing Persian language. With art schools came the art of consumer education- a systematic pattern of teaching art was enforced which was linked to the scope of extension of consumerism i.e. art should relate to market and bazaar. The seeds of factory made commercially viable prints, engravings and reproductions were sown which in a way started the decline of unique Indian cultural ethos and artistic heritage. Art was gradually being placed on the same pedestal as a trade or commerce. “We have become hybrid in dress, in thought, in sentiments and culture,” lamented the renowned C.R.Dass of Calcutta in 1917.

People who professed western ideas and adopted European mannerism and who spoke English were given preference over the others. Thus many artists in Punjab who were masters in their own right but did not know English language were neglected and pushed to the background and received little recognition. In Mayo School of Art in Lahore only S.N.Gupta the then principal could speak English and the other members of faculty such as versatile and talented artists like Hussain Buxe, Brij Lal, Hari Singh and Allah Buxe did not receive the acclaim and recognition they deserved. Though Brij Lal was awarded a cash prize of Rs.100 for his painting titled ‘Eternal Bliss’ being adjusted as best work in an art exhibition in 1937 in Lahore could not be projected as a master painter.  

A large number of educated Indians had started expressing their thoughts in English effectively, there were painters too who started imitating the western style and produced works relating to everyday life in Punjab in western style. 

In Calcutta and in Shantineketan, the latter being a university set up by Rabindranath Tagore in rural surroundings with a peaceful and environment friendly atmosphere continued the traditions of Bengal School. Similarly some painters had attained a limited recognition in other cities such as Ramgopal Vijayavargiya of Jaipur, Bhuvanvarma of Delhi, A.R.Chugtai and Roop Krishna of Lahore. They created works of excellence and had great appeal vis-à-vis saleability and Popular art. The impact of their works was visible in many other parts of the country and painters found new ways to exercise improvisation. 

The work of A.R.Chugtai is a classical example of newly acquired expression and artistic facility. He was a teacher at Mayo School of Art, Lahore. Bengal School had also cast its spell on the principal S.N.Gupta but he soon realised that he should evolve his own style which was amalgamation of Bengal and Persian style. Painters were striving hard to merge the traditional styles into

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46 Aryan, K.C; 1975, Punjab Painting, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.28  
47 Ibid, p.29
modern western styles, which were more appealing to the masses and had the qualities essential for being commodities of art. This propelled the sales as prints started being produced for wider circulation finding new clients and giving an edge to the Bazaar art or Calendar art. These works were lyrical and romantic in content and thought, as some of the works depicted Omar khayyam and Ghalib. A.R.Chugtai being himself from a Persian origin had ample creative powers and talent to produce such captivating and enchanting works, as he was skilled in illustration too. Two other painters Mohammad Abdul Aziz Din and Sri Ram were also in the same league but they were not suitably recognised.

All these artistic endeavours however did not result in any mass movement, which failed to influence more painters in Lahore. The need of the hour at that point in Punjab art scene was the necessity of a towering and truly influential painter who could transform the traditional indigenous art of Punjab into a new direction thus creating a truly modern style of its own. To achieve breakthrough in art scene the efforts of artist Roop Krishan in Lahore are worth mention. He had a limited following of some minor budding artists but could not achieve any worthwhile results in forming a new style. He migrated to London and died there very early.

This formidable task of creating a new Punjabi art style or to be more precise truly modern Indian style was undoubtedly initiated by the great Amrita Shergil. Punjabi themes found a new avatar in her emphatic and impressive works. These works had the aroma of Punjabi soil. Group of figures painted by her, seated in solemn moods in rare rustic charm, women with haunting and empty eyes hurdled together in their Punjabi robes and village priests/Pandits seated on coir cots against the backdrop of white Gurdwaras and buffaloes and other animals lazily sitting in the forefront make pictures that were novel in style,

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48 Randhawa, M.S; 1971, Sikh Painting, Roopalekha, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.32
a truly western style and a true Punjabi content. She had attained excellence in oil on canvas technique as she spent a considerable time in schools of art in Paris and Italy. This painter was in true sense a mixture of western knowledge and Indian ethos as far as her parentage is concerned her father was an aristocratic Sikh and her mother was of Hungarian origin. Both had a unique vision and had developed a plethora of sensibilities both European and Punjabi. As she was a genius, Amrita Shergil was a rebel too. Clinging to one style was not in her nature and the content kept on changing from region to region. She died in the prime of her youth (1914-1941).

It is in the veins of Punjabis to adopt new directions in whatever field they are engaged. Primarily due to the fact they have inherited a history which was ever changing with emergence of new cultures, entrance of new people and with them new ethos and thoughts. They were the first to adopt the new techniques in painting introduced to them by the Europeans and had a natural talent and calibre to learn quickly and achieve a considerable mastery over the fresh techniques. Punjabi painters did not wait for any artistic movement to emerge and kept on refining their techniques and using them in their works which had truly Punjabi historical and religious themes as these were the themes who were very close to their heart and were being adored by masses as well as classes.

**Around India’s independence two major developments in Sikh art were taking roots, one was the availability of mass-produced colourful stylised pictures produced by painters in Amritsar** and some of them were even carrying on the *Bazaar style Calendar art* in Delhi and other places which chiefly had paintings of Sikh Gurus, Gurdwaras, prominent Sikh martyrs and warriors. The **other development that was taking shape was the emergence of painters who were highly skilled and were able to produce paintings for the more sophisticated patrons though they had started towards this direction**
much before independence. The main plank of their work was painting portraits of Sikh Gurus from imagination and depicting events in Sikh history underlining the Sikh psyche and ethos which may glorify the ideals of Sikhism. As by now the actual portraits of Gurus had been lost to oblivion and these painters were essentially painting the spiritual and much adored qualities of humanism, piousness and valour enshrined in Sikhism. Though some section of the society in Sikhs were not very much impressed with painting the portraits of Sikh Gurus from imagination. Each one of these artists had endeavoured to paint the portrait of Sikh Gurus and events related to their life in their own individualistic and specific styles. These artists were successful in attempting to express Sikh history and underlying ideals in a way that they appealed to large audience.

In portraiture of this genre, Sobha Singh is perhaps the most well known and a pioneer in Sikh Calendar art. The other important artist who concentrated more on historical events and vehemently depicted the Sikh history through his painterly brush was Kirpal Singh. His major thrust was Sikh wars, Ghalugharas or Massacres of Sikhs, portrait of Sikh warriors on horseback and in action engaged in fight against tyranny, scenes from the martyrdom and brutalisation of non-Muslims by Mughal rulers are heart rending. They stir in the onlooker a sense of deep anguish as well as a deep sense of pride for these brave and valiant Sikhs who stood the test of times even in the most horrible and torturous moments and defied the barbaric acts of the rulers of those times. These large paintings attracted the attention of the entire Sikh world and were commissioned by Gurdwaras, Sikh institutions, corporates and even private patrons. The popularity of these paintings is in being that the content was narrative and descriptive. These works were a fit case for Popular Sikh art and

hence innumerable calendars of these paintings were printed in large numbers, which adorn the walls of nearly every household in Punjab.

Sobha Singh’s paintings primarily concentrated on first and the last Sikh Gurus and events relating to their lives. He was a master of detail and perfection and his pictures depict specially the drapery and costumes in photographic details. Deep study of human anatomy, due attention to the background, choice of colours present pictures of perfection and excellence. He was inspired by the divine and spiritual glow on Nanak’s face and a spark of bravery, truthfulness, confidence and saintliness in the eyes of Guru Gobind Singh. Study of horse, the falcon and an occasional peacock in some paintings of Guru Gobind Singh captures the myriad moods of the painterly creations. The perfection in his painting techniques and his artistic calibre had added a whiff of fresh air to the creations of Sikh Calendar art and it attracted a new clientele. It was a departure from the early oddly bright mass-produced calendar prints available in the market. His work was so impressive that it was widely copied by other upcoming and budding artists and today the iconographic pictures of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh are well-accepted portraits of these Gurus and are associated to Sobha Singh.

Kirpal Singh’s paintings are an ode to the ideals of Khalsa depicted in fluent pictorial form. They are embodiment of unwavering loyalty, heroism and martyrdom. He has achieved a considerable amount of deftness in rendering huge canvases, which are bold, earthy and pastoral in flavour and the depiction of posture warranting a particular action is of profound dimension. These paintings inspire and motivate the faithfuls impacting their inner cords and impulses.

Besides these two artists, the group of artists who have contributed to the establishment of Sikh identity as the nucleus of their work throughout their careers are S.G.Thakur Singh, Jaswant Singh, G.S.Sohan Singh, Trilok Singh
Chitrakar, Amolak Singh, Gurdit Singh, Bodhraj, Mehar Singh, Devender Singh, Jarnail Singh to name a few.

S.G. Thakur Singh is known for his paintings of Golden Temple which he has painted in a light of divinity and mysticism besides that he embarked upon a journey in search of natural beauty of surroundings and its inhabitants. His mesmerising paintings of women, innocent children, poor shepherds, the portrayal of pristine glory and natural bounty of vast landscapes clearly establish his artistic and creative distinction due to deep understanding of perspective, colour and well laid out compositions. Shingaar and bathing beauties are some of the very popular paintings, which have a touch of sophistication and mass appeal and have qualities worthy of becoming good examples of Calendar art. He worked with a new zest to paint various ethnic and regional women folk in their traditional costumes and jewellery. Inevitably, there is an iota of painterly essence and quality in his works which is akin to Raja Ravi Varma’s style. He had many exhibitions to his credit at Lahore, Amritsar, Simla, Bombay and even Calcutta. Being an academician of eminence, he had a large following of artists who chose to try their hands at landscape painting and delved deep in the themes of painting common people in impressive moods and expressions.

Jaswant Singh was one of the first league artists besides Sobha Singh, who were successful in painting imaginative portraiture of Sikh Gurus with élan, inventing a new artistic imagery which had a mark and flair of its own. He went a step further by implementing liberal patterns in portraying some aspects of Guru Nanak’s life in his own inimitable style and added a new dimension to the iconographic paintings of Sikh Gurus. ‘Guru Nanak- the Pilgrim’ is a masterly example of such works. Jaswant Singh’s creative acumen lies in passing onto the masses the message of the Guru and humility being the essence of Nanak’s teachings. Nanak as a devotee and as well as an apostle of peace and divinity has been painted with deep sincerity and artistic precision.
The large painting titled ‘Guru Nanak- the Pilgrim’ which is certainly his masterpiece has depicted Guru Nanak as a traveller in such a surrealistic manner that no other specimen of Sikh Calendar art is in similar style, content and mannerism. The painting speaks volumes of the abundance of dexterity, incredible imagination and skilful execution. He was amongst one of the few Punjabi painters of Sikh Calendar art who had such magnificent creative competence and vision; study of landscape- rocks, boulders and canyons was his forte. This painting is a classic example of portraying Guru Nanak without painting his face and employing visible symbols associated with Guru Nanak such as a Simarini (Rosary), a Lota (Vessel), Choga (Robe), Wooden clogs to depict his presence. The bold conceptual novelty has raised this work of art to new ethereal level.

G.S.Sohan Singh was a stalwart amongst the popular painters of Sikh Calendar art primarily due to his traditional approach to new subjects, an eye for meticulous detail, a strong sense of design and composition, control over rendering, draughtsmanship and execution. He inherited from his father, an artist of eminence- Gian Singh Naqqash who painted murals and frescos in Golden Temple in Amritsar, love for decorative elements which he applied profusely in depiction of jewellery, weaponry and costumes of the characters. Besides being an artist of high calibre, he was equally devoted to the art of block making, illustrative work and other forms of commercial art. His quest for finding new idioms of artistic value brought him close to the study of reproductions of many European painters who did paintings on Punjab themes. This enriched his knowledge and competence and further channelised his creative energies in stretching his technical skills to new limits. Among his paintings on exceptional themes from Sikh religion, the one that deserves mention is ‘Sri Guru Harkrishan Randhawa, M.S; 1971, Portraits of Guru Nanak by contemporary artists, Roopalekha, Vol.39, No.1, AIFACS, New Delhi, p.5
Sahib engaged in curing a leper’. This is an extraordinary work wherein juxtaposition of figures is astounding, colours- hues and tints used are bathed in glowing sunlight and the moods and gestures aptly sum up the enigma of the spiritual prowess of the young Guru sitting in a palanquin being carried by grateful and astonished devotees.

Yet another painting which offers evidence of capability of his artistic insight and understanding of aesthetics presents an unusual theme from Sikh history titled ‘Maharaja Maha Singh seeking blessing from Baba Santokh Dass for his toddler son Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the premises of Golden Temple, Amritsar’. This painting has abundance of visual treat with heavenly hues and soft tones, creating a charismatic and mystic charm. Expressions on the face of Sadhus and their postures acquaint us with G.S.Sohan Singh’s interest in vivid depiction and remarkable control over composing a painting. He was well versed in creating lyrical effects by adding a distinctly handled perspective. True to the spirit of Sikh Calendar art, he attempted Punjabi themes depicting cultural events, festivals, melas and ceremonies in unparalleled virtuosity. His contribution towards popularisation of Sikh Calendar art is of enormous significance and he can be termed as a real Calendar artist as all his creations were reproduced in large numbers as calendars and posters. His works are in prized collection of Central Sikh museum, Amritsar. He was positive and progressive in approach and his paintings pleasantly enthral the onlooker.

Trilok Singh Chitrakar had a fascination for the art of painting from his early childhood and he pursued it seriously under famous Bengali artist H.M.Majumdar and S.G. Thakur Singh in Calcutta. He was a very sensitive person and lived a very simple life. His honesty and dedication were admired by whosoever met him and he had a genuine concern in his heart for social causes.

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51 Saroj Rani, Dr.; 2001. The Realistic Artists from Punjab, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.66
and always gave deep thought to the burning problems in the society. Being a patriot at heart, he wanted to express his true feelings for the upliftment of the downtrodden and the neglected masses. There was poetry in his heart. He attempted some paintings on environment preservation and Kashmir issue. He had high intellect and there was in him a great understanding of Gurmat Vichar. He analysed everything in spiritual perspective i.e. the futility of wars and causes of human sufferings. Through his works, he was successful in highlighting the national and political issues, which vexed the nation such as Tibet problem and wars with China and Pakistan. This projected his love for nationalism.

He had a religious bent of mind and through his remarkable works he has painted many aspects of the life of Sikh Gurus and emphasizing the essence of their teachings and the glorification of human values of head and heart in Sikhism. The subject matter of his paintings establishes him as a thinker and a philosopher. He has contributed immensely to the Sikh art and has done series of detailed and well researched paintings on Guru Nanak’s Udasis- events from his life, meditation of Guru Angad Dev and Bhai Lalo’s portrait. Other masterpieces on the theme of love legends of Punjab include ‘Sassi burning in love in desert’, ‘Sohni drowning in Chenab River’ and ‘Heer in love’. An illustrator par excellence, he has done considerable work in this field and illustrated many important magazines such as Punjabi Duniya, Jan Sahitya, Dictionary Panj Jilda, Punjabi World Dictionary and Dictionary for children. He had a long stint with Language Department, Punjab and was a prolific and versatile commercial artist and did some unforgettable illustrative designs, book jackets and layouts. Love for Punjab and Punjabiat was his second religion as he had a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Punjabi ethos, traditions, literature and culture.

52 Srarj Rani, Dr.; 2001, The Realistic Artists from Punjab, Panjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh & Lokayat Prakashan, Chandigarh, p.67
Being a gifted artist, he was a master of brushwork and knew the magic of colours. His compositions carry a hint of mysticism and mystery and there is an undercurrent of poetic inclination and philosophy. He has often used soothing and muted tones, which give a queer charm to the painting and deserves appreciation no doubt his works are popular amongst the common people and the intellectuals alike. Many of his works have been converted into calendars and posters. To sum up this great artist and his contribution towards *Sikh Calendar art*, he added a new dimension to this genre of art by adding his love for nationalism, concern for social issues and his deep sense of pride for Punjab and Punjabiat, which was the hallmark of his painterly works.

Amolak Singh is from the front row of popular artists, who were known for their huge contribution towards *Sikh Calendar art* as he had a large body of work to his credit nearly four hundred paintings which are in permanent collection of Punjab and Sind Bank, PNB Finance, Bank of Punjab, Central Sikh museum, Amritsar, Baba Baghel Singh museum, Delhi and Bhai Mati Dass museum, Chandni Chowk, Delhi. Due to his rare artistic talent, mastery over painting techniques and deep knowledge of Sikh history and religion, he is one of the forerunners of *Sikh Calendar art* whose works have been profusely used in publications published by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar and large number of reproductions of his works are available in the market in the form of calendars and posters. He worked for sometime in Bombay Film Industry and was top-notch painter of backdrops and sets.\footnote{Walia, Varinder; October 16, 2006, *Artist Amolak Singh dies in sleep*, The Tribune.} Due to his versatility and outstanding control over his medium i.e. oil on canvas, he was successful in creating a number of masterpieces, which are in great demand.

The Central Sikh museum, Amritsar recognised his talents as an artist and as an organiser and appointed him as curator of this museum. He worked there...
nearly for fourteen years and credit for renovation of this museum after the Operation Blue Star goes to him. His works possess an appealing quality which is appreciated by a large number of lovers of *Sikh Calendar art* due to his magical brushwork and realistic portrayal. He touched all popular religious themes pertaining to Sikh religion and history and organised his paintings in breathtaking manner, controlled precision and skilful detail.

He touched rare themes in Sikh history which shows his deep study of Sikh history and a desire to bring alive visual representation of the original happenings. His painting titled ‘Mutual conflicts result in utter destruction’ shows Guru Tegh Bahadur bringing peace between Raja Chankardhwaj of Assam and Raja Ram Singh. Both Rajas erected a monument of peace with their weapons lying down there by vindicating Guru’s advice that hatred divides and love unites.

In the other unfamiliar theme, the artist has depicted ‘Guru Hargobind Sahib giving audience to Nur Jahan’. Nur Jahan once went to Lahore to seek the blessings of Guru Hargobind and Guru Sahib counselled her not to engage herself in the pursuit of worldly things but instead she should try to comprehend truth and discharge the duties of a true wife. In pursuit of depicting some not so popular facets in Sikh history, another painting which is evidence to the fact that he had a deep love for Sikh history. Here in this painting, the artist has elaborated on Guru Gobind Singh’s concern for handicapped and invalid followers. The tenth Guru used to exert such followers to learn the art of music and assisted them in acquiring expertise in playing of musical instruments such as *Tabla, Saranda, Rabab* and *Taus* thereby contributing to the Sikh cause in their own capacity.54

The Central Sikh museum and other historical Gurdwaras around Amritsar like Gurdwara Goindwal Sahib, Khadoor Sahib, Chhareta Sahib, Taran Taran Sahib and Gurdwara Baba Buddha Ji, all have a medley of paintings by Bodhraj on glowing themes of Dharam Prachar, sacrifices of the innumerable warriors, martyrs, saints and especially the followers of Guru Gobind Singh and his four brave sons- Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh who sacrificed their lives and became immortal for the cause of humanity, truthfulness and honour. The Dharam Prachar Committee, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar in appreciation of his artistic aptitude offered him a rare honour to illustrate countless publications, booklets, pamphlets, calendars and produced reproductions in thousands for the spread of philosophy of Sikh religion using actual tales from Sikh history and culture. Bodhraj though not a Sikh himself had studied and understood the history in detail and had such a magnificent understanding of the characters, period and surroundings that his pictures bring alive the thunder of Nagaras, the deafening sound of horse hoofs and the war cry of ‘Bole So Nihaal’ piercing through the skies in stupendous and heroic engagement of the Sikhs with the tyrant Mughals. The faces of the Sikh warriors have been shown glowing with a strange spiritualism as they were fighting the holy war of justice.

A specimen of his abundance of creative talent and mastery over the fine art of execution is apparent and visually eloquent in a publication titled ‘Saka Chamkaur- Sachitr Sakhi’ (The immortal story of Chamkaur Sahib). He has intricately illustrated scenes from martyrdom of elder Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh- Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh. The battle of Chamkaur was indeed unique as on one side there were forty brave and courageous Sikh warriors without much sustenance and with just a handful of arms and weapons facing ten lakh Mughal soldiers who were armed to teeth. It was at the battlefield of Chamkaur Sahib that they displayed an indomitable spirit of determination. The
place was further sanctified by the martyrdom of the elder sons of Guru Gobind Singh. Their illustrious father sent them into the battlefield with his blessings. When they had made the supreme sacrifice the great father shouted *Sat Sri Akal* and thanked God that the debt has been paid. A seer like Guru Gobind Singh alone could offer his gratitude to the almighty for the noble sacrifice of his dear sons. The spirit of these events has been vividly painted in very realistic style which is both impressive and heart rending.

Artist Bodhraj had a deep study of the fundamental elements which constitute the real spirit of righteous struggle of Sikhs for justice and his paintings have contributed a lot in infusing this very spirit into the community. His works are cherished all over the world and reproductions of his calendars are available in and around major centres of Sikhism, printing and publishing houses. The other major sponsors for his works were Punjab and Sind Bank, Bank of Punjab and Markfed.

Master Gurdit Singh stands tall amongst the much admired calendar artists who have ventured to paint many minute facets of Sikh history, events and people whose pious lives enriched the glorious traditions of Sikhism in a remarkably painted oil on canvas works which show a spark of renaissance in Sikh painting in mannerism and execution. Revered Gurdit Singh has painted ‘*Sain Mian Mir*’ who laid the foundation of Sri Harmandir Sahib. This theme exemplified the open heartedness and a genuine love of the Gurus for the mankind- Sikh or non-Sikh was not a point of disagreement. Holy men of all faiths were given due reverence in Sikhism. He was a true master and a strict disciplinarian. Study of drawing and proportion were his wings for creative flights and aesthetical rendering was his hallmark. His palette consists of rich, royal and classical colours which enables him to achieving wonders. His keen eye for detail has lent a queer yet truthful charm to his brilliant works.
A painting of ‘Bhai Gurdas’ speaks volumes of the creative wealth he had acquired during his lifetime. Still life, costumes, background and arrangement of elements in the foreground have photographic presentation. He has painted a large number of paintings and most of them are in permanent collection of Central Sikh museum, Amritsar. But has admirers of his art spread across the globe. His paintings truly represent his meditative attitude and a feeling of sanctity and piousness for this sacred task of painting the Sikh history. These paintings too have been reproduced in innumerable editions and are adorning the walls of Punjabi homes.

Sardar Sobha Singh’s most dedicated disciple Mehar Singh who started his artistic journey way back in 1946 as he worked relentlessly and dedicatedly under this master painter he learnt the fine nuances of this great artist’s work and he acquired name and fame in portraiture and Sikh historical and religious paintings which he did for many patrons and prominent promoters of Sikh art such as SGPC, Amritsar; Bank of Punjab; Thakur Singh academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar; Punjab and Sind Bank; Punjab Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh; Punjabi University, Patiala and Dr. Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendra, Dehradun. He skilfully and successfully mingled creative painting and commercial art in such a way that the demand for his paintings grew from strength to strength. He has employed the painting techniques and skills, which he acquired from Sobha Singh in fruitful and befitting way. These qualities have enriched his art and enhances its value in commercial perspective.

Immaculate brushwork, understanding of skin tones and expression in the eyes have been captured in his appealing paintings. His lines are graceful, full of rhythm and without any unnecessary clutter celebrating clear vision, delving deep into the subject and mastery over division of space in a framework, which leaves an indelible impression and unfathomed aesthetic charm on the beholder. Apart from painting scores of portraits, the favourite themes which were close to
his heart are ‘Portrait of Guru Nanak’, ‘Chadar of Nanak’, ‘Guru Gobind Singh writing’, ‘Bhai Lehna’, ‘Tera-Tera’, ‘The sacred thread’, ‘Mecca Pherna’ and ‘Banda Bahadur’. He had established his studio in Delhi and worked there for many decades. Now he has settled in Chandigarh and the studio is being run by his two illustrious sons who have shifted to digital printing, making large banners, murals and printing reproductions of his father’s works which are being acquired by the admirers of Sikh Calendar art.

Amazingly prolific and versatile painter of Sikh Calendar art, Punjabi culture and literature- Devender Singh is an epitome of humility and simplicity. Yet his paintings reverberate vibrancy, lyricism and the mannerism and aesthetic idiom is by far more liberal in creative thought. There is a streak of contemporary element in his famous semi-abstract painting series on ‘Barahmaha’, which can easily be termed as fine specimens of contemporary art with Punjabi theme. Massive works of historical paintings with detailed depiction of themes, landscape and figures all exemplify his inborn talent and his dedication to Sikh Calendar art. Portrait of Sikh Gurus and historical characters have been effectively depicted in his works in lively stance and right use of colour perspective makes them exceptionally bold and powerful. Quick brushstrokes shows his mastery and control over his medium, which is mostly oil on canvas.

Another significant contribution of this artist is painting some unusual and lesser-known events of Sikh history such as ‘Mata Khiwi- a pious lady who was a noble soul and revelled in serving her master and his Sikhs as she toiled lovingly in the Guru Ka Langar and served the Guru’s disciple with courtesy and joy’; ‘Guru Amar Dass appointing women to conduct Sikh missionary and parish work’; ‘Bhai Manjh- an ardent disciple of the Guru who used to bring dry wood everyday for the langar to be cooked’; ‘Guru Ram Dass laying the foundation of Amritsar’; ‘Guru Arjan Dev helping the villagers in digging the six channel
Persian wheel (*Chhcharta*) wells which irrigated their fields’; ‘Baba Buddha blessing Mata Ganga and Guru Arjan serving the lepers at Taran Taran’. His first collection of paintings on Sikh women was brought by Punjab and Sind Bank for their calendar in 1972 and many other organisations followed suite. His paintings adorn the walls of Sikh museums in Paonta Sahib, Anandpur Sahib and Golden Temple, Amritsar. His numerous paintings have been reproduced in calendar form and are available in the market, which establishes him as a premier painter of *Sikh Calendar art*.

Jarnail Singh’s art can be classified pre-eminently into two major aspects of Punjab- firstly being its history, which is full of wars, turmoil and the bravery of its people in fighting the tyrant and oppressors. This aspect is under the direct influence of his father Kirpal Singh’s art. The other component of his painting is full of hope and he merrily narrates the cultural, religious and day-to-day life of Punjabis by depicting it in vibrant colours laced with rustic charm. With the advent of green revolution which brought well-deserved prosperity and laughter to the courtyards of Punjabi houses and a new Punjabi cultural and artistic renaissance resurrected to assert *Punjabiat* (proud to be being Punjabi) compelled this artist to paint themes such as the daily chores of Punjabi way of life, past times, its dances and music, traditions, ceremonies and festivals. This talented artist though had no formal training, worked closely with his father yet he developed his own distinct style. Women sitting in courtyards, spinning the wheel (*Charkha*) and singing merrily amply sums up his ability to capture the essence of Punjabi soil. *Kachha* houses emit the very aroma of this sun-baked land where *kikar* (acacia trees) shade the dusty villages.55

In another painting, he has shown women in *Trinjan* (Ginning of cotton). He has superb knowledge of Punjabi attire and tints-hues of sun kissed Punjabi

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55 Bhatti, S.S; 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity- Jarnail Singh’s ‘Punjab Paintings’*, The Tribune
faces. ‘Punjabi Bride’ is a very popular painting done by him which has depiction of intricate and authentic jewellery, costumes and use of kajal (kohl) in the eyes of the innocent brides. Art of embroidery has always engaged Punjabi women and a painting of this theme is a true tribute to Phulkari. The people of Punjab are brave, bold, hardworking and sturdy may be because of their simple yet sumptuous food. The tradition of churning milk in the early morning by women is usually the first chore of the day and Jarnail Singh has captured many other such scenes with skilful hand and a deep love for Punjab in his heart. Reproductions of his calendars are very popular and sold all over Punjab and elsewhere. Punjabis settled in other countries collect these reproductions to acquaint their children of the rich Punjabi traditions, heritage and history.

The source of the river of Sikh Calendar art essentially and pre-eminently is the slow and steady emergence and development of the art of illustrating Janam Sakhis drifting from one artistic characteristic to another like small rivulets and brooks passing through many rough and uneven terrains but always retaining its essence and undercurrent of this flowing sacred river being the Sikh religious history, spirituality, truthfulness and universal brotherhood which was preached by Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus spreading the aroma of these divine qualities amongst the people of this land. The river got momentum with the advent of printing press and introduction of many printing techniques and technical advancements brought in by the Europeans to Punjab. The works of art which were earlier available to a few rich and aristocratic connoisseurs or patrons of art were made available to the masses in the form of colourful reproductions at a very low cost. There is a glorious and unmatched valuable contribution of the local artists primarily the Sikhs, who strove hard and were quick to learn and pursue the newly introduced marvels in painting and printing techniques. Each one has immensely devoted his life in pursuance of refining the Sikh art in content, style and visual narration of
popular Sikh themes by mingling Sikh historical perspective and ethos with European painting trends. Today the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* is a mass movement and innumerable amateur and professional painters are seriously engaged in covering new grounds in the spread of this most popular branch of *Sikh art*. A full-fledged iconography of *Sikh Calendar art* is well recognised and individual and specific artists are busy in their artistic pursuits to pay their distinctive tributes in their own yet collective artistic endeavour using even the digital technology and multi-media processes. (Plate-6) The popularity of *Sikh Calendar art* is increasing leaps and bounds and is covering some strange surfaces and objects, which hitherto were not even thinkable. The forms of *Sikh Calendar art* are painted and printed on- notebook covers, diaries, lockets, key chains, pocket calendars, wall calendars, panels, murals, hoardings, T-shirts, mugs and objects of daily use. No doubt the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* has a bright future as now it is popular not only in Punjab and India but in such parts of the globe where Punjabis had made their homes.