In consonance and deep resonance of the lofty ideals of wisdom and spirituality enshrined in the tenets of Sikhism; bestowed upon the mankind by Guru Nanak Dev paved the way to dispel darkness of ignorance thereby heralding a new dawn of knowledge on the horizon. Initially the eloquent divine messages of Oneness of God, Universal brotherhood, Dignity of labour, Satnam (the True Name), Selfless service to mankind, Equality of women and episodes from the four *Udasis* (Missionary Travels) of Guru Nanak Dev were transmitted through holy hymns based on elementary yet enchanting musical compositions. These mesmerising divine compositions stirred an all-encompassing urge in the minds of the devout to recount these messages and episodes through narrative and pictorial forms. Thus the hand-painted *Janam Sakhis* of various versions and styles appeared, emphatically impacting the spread of the Universal message of the Great Guru. Though the basic content of illustrated *Janam Sakhis* always retained its above mentioned subject matter and spiritual flavour yet some artists had practised the liberty to improvise the contents in their own impeccable narrative and pictorial styles without sacrificing the facts and events.¹

The subject matter of the *Sikh Calendar art* which travelled through a long capsule of time has the same fragrance of divinity and spirituality. In fact it has been enriched with values of valour, saga of martyrdom, significance of selfless service and the essence of ‘Miri and Piri’ (Temporal and Spiritual power); further entrenching and fortifying the very humane ideals, preached by Guru Nanak Dev and other Sikh Gurus, *Bhagats*, *Bairagis* and Saints whose spiritual compositions or *Bani* are respectfully compiled in the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Consequently the subject matter of modern day *Sikh Calendar art* amply reinforced the earlier content matter with elaborate and enormous technical expertise and skills, establishing it as the most popular genre of *Sikh*

¹ *Daljeet, Dr;* 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.118
art, which has seen tremendous transformation and evolvement. A medley of its applications covers a wide range of spheres as it has accomplished its penetration on even mundane articles of a modern day life.

**Events from Janam Sakhis and Udasis (Missionary Travels) of Guru Nanak Dev**

The most popular and poignant subject matter of Sikh Calendar art is of course the vivid portrayal of Guru Nanak Dev flanked by his two disciples Bala and Mardana, former a chauri bearer and the latter a rababi (rebeck player) who accompanied him on his Udasis (Missionary Travels). (Plate-7) The popularity of the theme can be gauged from the fact that till today, the calendars on this theme vehemently adorn the walls of Sikh households and artists of various denominations with deep interest in Sikh Calendar art have attempted this subject in their own specific styles and mannerism choosing different mediums and genres. This theme changed hands with different conceptual phases of Sikh Calendar art and adopted an assortment of rendering techniques from woodcuts to chromolithographs, oleographs and today’s offset and digital printing processes.

Calendars on this subject depict **Guru Nanak Dev sitting cross-legged on a carpet/mat with Bala and Mardana under a banyan tree.** His half opened eyes express spiritual ecstasy and divine intoxication. This is a true depiction of Guru Nanak as an apostle of peace, kindness and wisdom absorbed in spiritual stance slightly reclining on his traditional cushion (Takia). A parrot in the cage is shown hanging by the branch of a banyan tree, a feature associated with the yogis of the Nath tradition. (Plate-8)

In this sequence the other most admired subject of the Sikh Calendar art is the **portrait of Guru Nanak Dev** painted in various artistic manifestations. Here Guru Nanak Dev has been shown with flowing white beard donning a yellow or pale small turban (ketaki) and a rosary of beads encircling it. The other
rosary is shown in his hand which is in *abhay mudra* (do not fear gesture). A spiritual halo surrounds his head; he is wearing a patched cloak on his shoulders over *Jama* (robes) as shown in most of these calendars. *(Plate-9)* Some calendars also depict Guru Nanak Dev standing with *yogis lota* (utensil) in his left hand. *(Plate-10)*

Yet the splendid calendars relating to the episodes of Guru Nanak’s childhood narrating anecdotes such as *Sarp Chhaya*- wherein Bal Nanak is shown sleeping and being protected from bright sun by an enormous cobra; *(Plate-11)* *Miraculous restoration of the fields*- Bal Nanak is shown absorbed in meditation and his buffaloes while grazing in the nearby fields completely destroy the crop. The farmer complains to Rai Bular the headman. When Nanak goes to Rai Bular he is wonder-struck by the divine look on Nanak’s face. Nanak insists that none of the crop has been harmed. A messenger by Rai Bular ascertains this fact; *Nanak debating with teacher*- Bal Nanak is shown attending school and disagreeing with his teacher Gopal Pandit’s lessons on worldly knowledge; *(Plate-12)* *Sacha-Sauda*- where Nanak is shown feeding the poor *sadhus* with the money his father gave him for starting a business and telling his father that he has done Sacha-Sauda because feeding the poor and the hungry is the most truthful business; *(Plate-13)* *Tera-Tera*- in this episode Guru Nanak is shown seated in a grocery shop owned by Daulat Khan Lodi weighing grains and uttering the words ‘tera-tera’ which denotes everything belongs to the Almighty; *(Plate-14)* Some people complain that the shop is incurring losses as Nanak is weighing more grains and distributing them to customers but when checked the stocks were in excess and Lodi was surprised and amazed; *Nai koi Hindu Na koi Musalman*- this calendar narrates that at Sultanpur every morning

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Guru Nanak used to go the local river for his bath. One morning, he did not return. When searched, he was found missing though his clothes lay on the river bank. But he reappeared the third day. He kept introspecting the whole day. The next morning he re-iterated the principle of Universal Brotherhood by uttering the words- ‘nai koi hindu na koi musalman’.\(^4\) (Plate-15)

There are some calendars specifically devoted to the theme of four Udasis (Missionary Travels) of Guru Nanak Dev such as Visit to kuaru-desh-Nanak during one of his Udasis visits kuaru-desh, a territory ruled by female magicians led by a queen called Nuri Shah. These female sorceresses magically transformed any man into an animal and this is precisely what one of them did to Mardana when he approached them at his master’s command. Guru Nanak defeated them by the power of the divine Name and they were forced to admit their defeat\(^5\); *Siddha-Goshti-* Guru Nanak’s religious discourses with the Siddhas as during his second Udasi, Guru Nanak Dev visits Sumer Parbat in the Himalayas. He brings home to the ‘Siddhas’ the futility of renouncing the world and leaving their homes “Who will guide the common folk when men of knowledge and understanding give up their responsibility”, he asks. The Siddhas were enlightened to live among the ordinary people as God is immanent in them.\(^6\) (Plate-16)

Another interesting theme of Sikh calendars is Splashing of water towards the sun- At Har-ki-Pauri, Haridwar, Guru Nanak started splashing water towards the opposite direction saying that he is irrigating his fields near Lahore and the water has got better chance to reach his fields than water being splashed by

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\(^5\) Daljeet, Dr; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.18

\(^6\) Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharma Prachar Committee, New Delhi; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum’s Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur- Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.9
Pandits towards the sun. This logic of Guru Nanak left the Pandits awestruck hereby emphasizing that meaningless rituals cannot do any good to mankind.\(^7\)\(^{(Plate-17)}\) Other amazing subjects include *Encounter of Guru Nanak with the demon ‘Kauda’*- Kuada, a cannibal involved in the habit of kidnapping passing travellers and cooking them in his large *Karaha* (Wok). Guru Nanak Dev reformed him with his wisdom and advised him not to indulge in such demonic acts\(^8\)\(^{(Plate-18)}\); *Wali Qandhari at Panja Sahib*- Wali Qandhari lived on a hill top near Hasan Abdal (between Rawalpindi and Peshwar). While passing that way Baba Nanak paused to rest at the foot of the hill and asked Mardana to go to Wali Qandhari who controlled a hill top spring. After Guru Nanak and Mardana were refused water thrice, Nanak created a spring by striking a stone after which the Wali Qandhari’s spring dried up. The enraged Wali Qandhari then rolled a huge boulder down the hill but Nanak stopped it with his hand leaving a handprint on it. The location has ever since been known as ‘Panja Sahib’\(^9\)\(^{(Plate-19)}\); *Reetha Meetha* episode which relates the event of Baba Nanak turning the bitter and inedible fruit (*reethas* or wild berries) into sweet eatable (*reethas* or wild berries) for Mardana who always pretended to be hungry.

**The importance of dignity of labour** is depicted in another appealing calendar as a wealthy money lender Malik Bhago had asked Nanak to dine with him but Nanak preferred to eat at the house of Bhai Lalo- a poor carpenter. When asked why, Nanak squeezed one of the flatbreads (*rotis*) from each of the meals. Out of the money lender’s bread came blood signifying that he lived off, the sufferings of others whereas the poor Bhai Lalo’s humble bread oozed milk bearing witness to his honest labour.\(^10\)\(^{(Plate-20)}\) Another popular calendar

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describes Guru Nanak Dev’s visit to Piri Pur (Multan), a place where Pir's often held congregations. Pir Faqirs got worried on hearing the arrival of Guru Nanak Dev and came to test him. When Faqirs presented a bowl of milk before the enlightened Baba Nanak, the Guru put a small jasmine flower in the milk meaning that the Piri Pur is already full of Pir's as is the bowl of milk and there is no place for another Pir, whereas the action of Guru Nanak meant that as the flower has been assimilated in the milk similarly my presence does not mean any harm to anybody.¹¹

Numerous Sikh calendars describe the Visit of Guru Nanak to Baghdad. On reaching Baghdad, Guru Nanak found that the water in the wells of that area was saline. The Guru got a well dug and the water of this well was clear and sweet. ¹²

An awakening Sikh calendar on the theme of Mecca Pherna or rotating of Mecca in west Asia by Guru Nanak Dev lays emphasis on the presence of God in all directions. This episode shows that while asleep Guru Nanak’s feet unconsciously turned towards Ka’aba, the holy shrine. A Qazi who came to pray felt offended. He protested against Guru Nanak’s show of disrespect to God’s house. Quietly came Nanak’s answer, “Please turn my feet to the direction where the all pervading God is not present”. Qazi was bewildered to see Ka’aba wherever he turned Guru Nanak’s feet. ¹²

Self-rotation of the chakkies (stone grinding wheels), the subject of this calendar describes how tyrant Mughal emperor Babar jailed Guru Nanak and awarded him rigorous punishment of rotating stone grinding wheels in his prison but was astonished to find that grinding wheel in front of Guru Nanak was rotating on its own thereby Babar realising his mistake of arresting a holy and truthful man.

¹¹ Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dhm Prachar Committee, New Delhi; 1998, Baba Baghel Singh Museum’s Paintings and their brief History, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.13

¹² Gill, Ranjit Singh; 2007, Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma), Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.60
Some artists have painted expressively on the subject of **Mughal tyranny and oppression during Babar’s rule leading to intolerance and destruction of non-Islamic shrines and structures; depicting the anguish and pain of Guru Nanak** in a calendar titled *Eti maar payi kurlane Tein ki dard na aya*. Here Guru Nanak is shown pointing towards wailing humanity and raising his head towards heavens in a dialogue with almighty God. There is a gloomy and sombre atmosphere in the background. (Plate-24)

In yet another unusual Sikh calendar painted in surrealistic form, an artist has depicted *Guru Nanak-The Pilgrim* wherein he has not shown his face and full body but has shown symbols of Guru Nanak which catches the imagination of many enlightened onlookers and art connoisseurs.¹³

A rare calendar based on the couplet *Nanak naam jahaz hai jo chade so uttare par* thereby meaning the true Name or *Nam* of God is like a ship whosoever boards it crosses the sea of life and attains enlightenment. (Plate-25) A calendar depicting the equality of genders rendered on the couplet of Guru Nanak Dev *Sau kyun manda akhiye jis jamme rajaan* was also popular which stressed upon the emancipation of woman and pleaded that why woman should be treated badly who gives birth to even kings and emperors.

Calendars showing the **bond of deep love and affection between Nanak’s elder sister Bebe Nanaki and Guru Nanak Dev** where Nanaki is shown baking bread (*chappatis*) and thinking of his little brother all the time gained immense popularity. (Plate-26) A large number of portraits of Guru Nanak have been attempted in oval shapes upto the bust (Plate-27) and some calendars include the symbol of ‘Ik-Onkar’ in the background. (Plate-28) Some other calendars depict a few popular episodes from Guru Nanak’s life in a single calendar composed in such a manner that entails mass appeal. (Plate-29)

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Significant Popular subjects related to the other nine Sikh Gurus

Guru Angad Dev, the second Sikh Guru have been illustrated in some calendars as sitting in congregation singing the glory of God and preaching that the service to mankind is the utmost noble cause besides helping the down-trodden is the duty of every human being.

Based on the institution of **Langar or Community kitchen**, two calendars deserve special mention portraying Guru Angad’s wife- Mata Khiwi engaged in preparing *Langar* and serving food with her own hands which was always available to everyone. Mata Khiwi was a noble soul and revelled in serving her master and his Sikhs. She toiled lovingly in the *Guru-ka - Langar* and served the Guru’s disciples with utmost courtesy and joy. The *Guru-ka-Langar* in her hands was a source of unlimited bounty and the harbinger of a new social consciousness. By promoting community feasting, the Guru sought to equalize all beyond caste, creed, race, religion or social status.14

Old and frail Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru used to carry a pitcher of water on his shoulder during the twilight hours through rain and storm for his Guru Angad Dev so that he may take bath in the morning. Once he fell down in the darkness and a weaver’s wife remarked sarcastically that he is the ‘Amru Nithawan’ (a person who has no place for shelter). Guru Angad Dev blessed this devotee instead prophesising that Guru Amar Das will be “A shelter for the homeless”.15 Selfless service (Sewa) and sacrifice for the comfort of his Guru prodded the attention of many painters of *Sikh Calendar art*. For the first time, Guru Amar Das conferred equal rights to the women to conduct and perform Sikh missionary and parish work thereby uplifting the oppressed and neglected gender.

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A calendar which underlines the **Sikh ideal of service to sick and suffering mankind** shows Guru Amar Das blessing and giving a bath with his own hands to a leper named ‘Prema Chaudhari’ and restoring him to good health.\(^{16}\)

In keeping with the spirit of social reformation and removal of evil traditions like *Sati Pratha* where the women who lost their husbands were prompted and forced to burn themselves in the same pyre of their husbands. Guru Amar Das forbade this practice of *Sati* as it was considered an insult to human dignity.\(^ {17}\)

The subject of a calendar depicting **the episode of rare humility and pardon shown to his master’s disobedient son Datu by Guru Amar Das** who misbehaved with him and kicked him in front of the congregation draws attention. With a rare display of sweetness and humility Guru Amar Das remained seated on the *Gurgaddi* and did not utter a word of anguish. Rather he observed, “*Your foot must have been hurt by my hard bones*”. Guru Sahib did not act by way of coercion but displayed his compassion underlining the Sikh tenet that a ‘Gurmukh’ is always humble.\(^ {18}\) These calendars always served the noble messages preached by the Gurus eulogising the basic tenets of Sikhism.

A subject painted in religious fervour and reverence showcases **Guru Ram Das laying the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar**. The devotees have been shown visiting the holy city for having a dip in the sacred *Sarovar*. This holy city became an important centre of trade and business.\(^ {(Plate-32)}\) With the help of ‘*Kar Sewa*’ (Self-help)\(^ {(Plate-33)}\) rendered by devotees under the guidance of Sikh religious preachers the water source was turned into a beautiful *Sarovar* given the name of ‘Amrit Sarovar’ meaning ‘Pool of Nectar’. Initial digging

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work for the Sarovar was started by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru.\(^\text{19}\) Guru Ram Das Sarovar nahate sab uttare paap kamate meaning whosoever takes a dip in this Sarovar washes off all his sins. These lines project the importance of this holy tank inscribed on the Sikh calendars of this theme.

A calendar depicting **supreme humility and unfathomed emotions of Selfless service projects** a scene of Guru Arjan Dev serving the lepers at Taran Taran. In the house of Guru, protection used to be provided to the sick, poor, needy and helpless. Guru Arjan Dev knew the plight of the lepers. Even their close relatives would not touch them. Guru Arjan took special care of the lepers and got constructed a leper’s home (Pingalwara) near the sacred Sarovar of Taran Taran Sahib. Guru Sahib made it a point to personally look after the lepers by providing them medicines, dresses and profusely showered his blessings on them. The Sikh devotees followed these humane examples of the Guru.\(^\text{20}\)

**The compilation of Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan Dev and Bhai Gurdas**- After the completion of sacred tank (Sarovar) \(^\text{\text{Plate-36}}\), Guru Granth Sahib was taken to Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar with reverence and for its installation there. \(^\text{\text{Plate-37}}\) This theme expresses how the presence of reverent Guru Granth Sahib and its first ever recitation by Baba Buddha deeply moved the devotees present in the congregation and put them into a holy trance.\(^\text{21}\)

Perhaps the most pragmatic and popular Sikh calendar on the subject of **Martyrdom of fifth Sikh Guru- Guru Arjan Dev** at the hands of tyrant Mughals graphically illustrates the inhuman torture matted out to the Guru while making him sit on the large hot plate with burning fire underneath and hot sand was poured on his body by the tormentors but the Guru remains calm and unmoved.

\(^{19}\) Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum’s Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.18


\(^{21}\) Ibid, p.46-47
and uttered the words “Tera bhana meetha lage” meaning ‘Thy will is sweet’. He was also put in a boiling cauldron to shake his faith in his own religion and ideals for which he was known. Guru Sahib resisted the onslaught of emperor Jahangir on freedom of religion and as a result sacrificed his life and became the first martyr of Sikh tradition.\(^{22}\) (Plate-38)

Guru Arjan Dev was a great reformer and always thought of innovative ideas to help the common man in their daily hardships so that their lives could be easy, comfortable and prosperous. He advocated the importance of using technology and taught the farmers to take advantage of the six-channel Persian wheel (Chhcharta) to enable them to draw water from the wells to irrigate their fields. This way elevating their sufferings from the arduous task of drawing water by hand.\(^{23}\) A skilful rendering of the scene portrays Guru Arjan Dev teaching the use of Persian wheel to his followers.

The foresighted Guru Arjan Dev had insisted that oppressive and tyrant Mughal emperors would soon resist and restrict the spread of religious freedom and will try to suppress the spread of Sikhism with force and military prowess. He encouraged his followers to be ready for this onslaught and to learn the skill of horse riding. He advocated the business of buying good horses, as the main strength of the Mughal forces was good cavalry. The calendar on this subject vividly illustrates the topical content in unmatched artistic excellence. (Plate-39)

The invincible Guru- several efforts were made on the life of Guru Hargobind- the sixth Sikh Guru right from his infancy. A snake charmer was bribed who let loose a poisonous snake. But the great Guru overpowered the snake.\(^{23}\) (Plate-40) A calendar celebrating the concept of Miri (Temporal power) and Piri (Spiritual power) represented by Guru Hargobind Sahib. Guru Sahib used to

\(^{22}\) Daljeet, Dr; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.39

tie two swords instead of usual one, one each on right and left, to symbolise a Sikh Guru’s two roles and to empower the Sikhs with pride and fearlessness and make them able to protect their right to worship their own faith which was under threat from intolerant Mughal rulers. This paved the way for martial training adopted by Sikhs.24

In recording the chronicles of Sikh history and its important events, **Sikh calendars have truly played a significant role in documenting the glorious past.** A calendar which is of immense significance showcases Bandi Chhor Guru related to Guru Hargobind Sahib. As the tyranny of the Mughals had increased day by day and non-Muslims had to undergo great atrocities in following their faith that they were compelled to take to arms. This annoyed emperor Jahangir who ordered arrest of the Guru Hargobind in the Gwalior fort. But soon he realised his mistake and ordered Guru’s release. Guru Sahib refused to accept this offer till fifty-two innocent Rajas were also freed along with him. Instructions were issued that whosoever holds the Gurus dress will be freed. Guru Sahib wore a special robe with fifty-two strings attached to it. Each Raja held one string and walked into freedom.25 (Plate-41)

A rare Sikh calendar narrates the *Visit of Mughal emperor Jahangir to Golden Temple, Amritsar* to pay obeisance to Guru Hargobind Sahib. Emperor Jahangir entered the parikrama and bowed before Darbar Sahib. He made an offering of five hundred mohras (gold ginnies). Listening quietly to the Kirtan sung by Bhai Satta and Bhai Balwand, he was so much enthralled that he got engrossed in the holy recitation of the *Gurbani* for a long time.26

The other unfamiliar subject of *Sikh Calendar art* is *Guru Hargobind giving audience to queen Nur Jahan*. Nur Jahan once went to Lahore to seek the

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24 Daljeet, Dr; 2004, *The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality*, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.41-42
26 Ibid, p.56-57
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.\textsuperscript{27}

A calendar recounting \textit{Guru Hargobind blessing Mata Sulakhani}. Mata Sulakhani is remembered in history as a woman of deep faith and piety. Here she is seen seeking the blessings of Guru Hargobind as she was childless. After receiving the blessings of the Guru, she had seven children who sacrificed their lives for the cause of the Guru which she accepted with faith and resignation.\textsuperscript{28} (Plate-42) \textit{Tread with care} is a delicate and inspirational subject matter of a Sikh calendar projecting an anecdote related to Guru Har Rai - once the child Guru Har Rai was strolling in the garden. A rose fell down, when it got struck with the fringe of his robe. Guru Hargobind, a symbol of sympathy and humility, told his grandson Guru Har Rai to take care while walking since, flowers and plants are also living organism, lest the act is repeated. Guru Har Rai followed this advice throughout his latter life.\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Guru Har Rai curing Dara Shikoh}- Dara Shikoh, the elder son of Shah Jahan fell ill. Inspite of the best efforts of \textit{Hakims}, he could not be cured. The rare medicine needed for his ailment was nowhere available. Information reached the royal \textit{Hakim} that required medicine was available with Guru Har Rai. He came personally to the Guru Sahib and requested for the medicine required for the treatment and Guru Sahib also sent a pearl which was to be ground into fine powder and taken with the medicine eloquently advocating the fact that the sick persons need not be discriminated on caste, creed and religious basis.\textsuperscript{30} (Plate-43)

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{27} Gill, Ranjit Singh; 2007, \textit{Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma)}, Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.161
\item \textbf{29} Daljeet, Dr; 2004, \textit{The Sikh Heritage-A Search for Totality}, Prakash Book Depot, New Delhi, p.45
\item \textbf{30} Ibid, p.46
\end{itemize}
Guru Harkishan dhayaiye jis dithe sab dukh jaye- these divine words of the everyday prayer or Ardas of the Sikhs sum up the coveted eminence attributed to Guru Harkishan Sahib as during his short life span he performed gigantic tasks of removing the sufferings of the masses. He devoted his life to eradicate epidemics and cured the worst cases with his kind and dedicated approach to serve the mankind. He visited Delhi where an epidemic was spreading. He went all over the city in narrow lanes and gave succour to all in distress without any discrimination of caste, creed and religion. His very presence and the divine look would rid the patients of their sufferings. The subject of this calendar underlines the essence of kindness and service without any personal gain ‘Nishkaam Sewa’ in Sikhism.

A magnificent calendar attributed to Guru Harkishan conveys the message of humility and shunning the arrogance and pride. The episode of arrogant wise Brahmin named Chandu Lal who boosted of his knowledge in front of the Guru and the gathered devotees. Guru Sahib humbled the arrogant Pandit by making a mute and illiterate poor water carrier name Chhajju to recite Salokas from Gita and explaining its true meaning by just placing a stick on his head. This left the Pandit and the congregation dazed and amazed.

The ninth Sikh Guru- Guru Tegh Bahadur known as ‘Hind-ki-Chaddar’ who sacrificed his life for the protection of Hindu Dharma and for the freedom to worship their religion marked a very significant and revolutionary event in the Sikh history. At Anandpur Sahib, the aggrieved and harassed Brahmans from Kashmir narrate their woeful stories of atrocities inflicted upon them by the Mughals forcing them to adopt Islam and abandon Hindu Dharma. In this calendar, the child Gobind Rai is shown pointing out to Guru Tegh Bahadur, his...
father that none but he (the Guru) has the impending courage and sagacity to save the Brahmins from imminent catastrophic fate.\(^{33}\) (Plate-47)

After the martyrdom of the great Guru Tegh Bahadur at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi where Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib is situated. The severed sacred head of the Guru Sahib was saved from humiliation by Bhai Jaita who daringly took possession of the severed head and carried it respectfully all the way to Anandpur Sahib. There Guru Gobind Singh complimented him for his sterling bravery. He embraced him and uttered the words ‘Rangretta- Guru ka beta’: Rangretta is the son of the Guru.\(^{34}\) (Plate-48) Such specimens of calendars move the inner chords of the masses and a sense of pride erupts in their hearts. This is a celebration of bravery and fearlessness shown by a humble Sikh disciple (shishya) in respect of his Guru.

Some calendars show heartrending scenes of real life valour and strength of character of Sikh devotees such as Bhai Mati Dass who accompanied Guru Tegh Bahadur on way to Delhi and was executed by the Mughals alongwith the Guru. His body was split into two parts with a saw but he remained a picture of firm faith and resolute devotion with his body still reverberant with the sounds of Japuji. (Plate-49) The other Sikh disciple named Bhai Sati Dass who was also martyred alongwith his brother Bhai Mati Dass in the presence of Guru Tegh Bahadur conjures empathy. He was wrapped in cotton and burnt alive by the oppressors. (Plate-50) Bhai Dyala, another follower of Guru Sahib and brother of Bhai Mani Singh was also executed alongwith Guru Sahib by putting him in a cauldron full of hot oil at Chandni Chowk, New Delhi.\(^{35}\) (Plate-51)

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33 Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi; 1998, Baba Baghel Singh Museum’s Paintings and their brief History, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur- Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.26

34 Bains, K.S; 1995, Sikh Heritage in Paintings, Perfect Press Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, p.69

35 Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi; 1998, Baba Baghel Singh Museum’s Paintings and their brief History, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur- Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.28-30
The calendar depicting the horrific scene of mutilating of body parts of Bhai Mani Singh presents a picture of tremendous faith and deep resolve in the minds of the martyrs to protect their religion. (Plate-52) Bhai Taru Singh another Sikh follower of Guru Sahib was also executed on the order of Zakaria Khan as his hair were removed alongwith the skull but he quietly recited the Jap when his skull was being hacked oft.\(^\text{36}\)\(^\text{(Plate-53)}\) These calendars have been painted in a very shocking graphical detail of gory tortures where the blood of the martyrs was shed to convert them to Islam and have a very sensitive and deep-rooted impact on the heart of the Sikhs who recognise their martyrdom with deep sense of gratitude and thankfulness. These pages of the history in the form of calendars have captured the imagination of Sikhs all over the world.

Though the Sikh history is replete with stories of unparalleled valour, sacrifice and bravery, the Sikh calendars painted on the life of tenth Sikh Guru-Guru Gobind Singh right from his childhood to the most poignant and famous event on the concept of *Waho waho Gobind Singh ape Guru chela*. He chose five beloved ones (Panj Pyaras) from the congregation who are ready to sacrifice their lives and administered Nectar or *Amrit* and in turn they were asked to administer *Amrit* to the Guru thereby underlining the equality amongst the disciples and the Guru. He established Khalsa Panth on the auspicious day of Baisakhi at Anandpur Sahib and baptised the Panj Pyaras.\(^\text{37}\) This theme of ‘*Amrit Sanchar Ceremony*’\(^\text{(Plate-54)}\) is perhaps the most preferred subject of many Sikh calendars which have been painted by various artists in a number of styles and in narrative epoch-making descriptions. This calendar has been attempted by nearly all stalwart artists of *Sikh Calendar art*. As this event of birth of Khalsa was a

\(^{36}\) Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharma Prachar Committee, New Delhi; 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum’s Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.44-45

revolutionary step which changed the course of history for the Sikhs and the struggle and strive which followed afterwards against the Mughals inspired great number of artists to attempt these glorious episodes which offered such powerful content to the artists who painted them in vibrant and vivid descriptions giving stress on the subject for which Sikh martyrs were known for.

The calendar titled- *Neela ghoda banka joda hath wich baaj sajaye chalo singho prabh darshan kariye Guru Gobind Singh aye* which fascinates the masses relates to Guru Gobind Singh- the tenth Sikh Guru riding a powerful horse decked in decorative ornaments and a falcon perched on his hand, bow and arrow on one shoulder and sword hanging from his waist. *(Plate-55)* This calendar represents a picture of a bold valiant warrior with a deep resolve on his face yet the eyes are soft and thoughtful giving a hint of Saint Soldier-‘Sant Sipahi’. This is an ideal picture of iconic stylisation of the most loved subject in *Sikh Calendar art* and has been painted by artists in countless versions, backgrounds and compositions. Some artists have stressed upon his royal attire and others have given stress on the posture to portray the inner and outer strength of this legendary protector.

*Chidiyon se mein baaj ladaun tabhi Gobind Singh naam kahaun* meaning that ‘Call me Gobind Singh only when I transform the sparrows to fight an falcon’ is yet a poetic version of the calendar which aesthetically illustrates the concept of Guru’s power of character building and endowing the poor and meek common man with such magnificent qualities of bravery and boldness, a symbol of united fight against an oppressor howsoever strong, defeat him in the battlefield implores this calendar.

*Sura sau pehchaniye jo lade deen ke het-* Guru Gobind Singh being the charismatic hero of the Sikhs, his pictures always moved the Sikhs and the non-Sikhs alike and people looked at his pictures with admiration and gratitude in their eyes as he emerged as a saviour of the oppressed and the down-trodden and
set such glorious examples of divinity, strength and sacrifice which have no parallel in Indian history. He practiced what he preached and united the nation which stood like a rock against the tyranny and bigotry. The saga of valour, wisdom and truthfulness epitomised this Guru and naturally these divine qualities prompted the artists to work on this subject in very expressive and dedicated approach.

Some artists have worked on the theme highlighting the kind and tender heartedness of Guru Sahib as a father embracing three of his sons (Sahibzadas) and the eldest riding his horse in the background. (Plate-56)

Uch da Pir Banana- this theme showcases Guru Gobind Singh’s sufferings in the forest of Machhiwara where he was lying wounded and uttered- ‘Mitr pyare nu haal muridaan da kehna’. Some of his Muslim admirers dressed him as a Pir and carried him in a palanquin to get out of the dense forest. (Plate-57) Another emotionally charged Sikh calendar shows Guru Gobind Singh sitting in a battlefield, wounded and dying forty Muktas (warriors) are begging the Guru to tear the resignation they had submitted in repentance so that they may not be cursed and discarded in the brave Sikh history. (Plate-58)

One of the most popular calendars in Sikh art is the bricking alive of two younger sons (Sahibzadas) of Guru Gobind Singh at Sirhind by Wazir Khan, a Nawab of Sirhind who forcibly wanted to convert them into Islam. This represented a picture of unmoved and unshakable faith in their religion and a resolve lit large on their faces that they will prefer laying down their lives then converting into Islam. Such ghastly oppression on the small children had shaken even the followers of Islam, as it was an example of spine chilling and unprecedented torture. (Plate-59)

Sirhind di gadhi- where two elder sons (Sahibzadas) of Guru Gobind Singh, sacrificed their lives for the sake of the nation and their faith. (Plate-60) Thande Burg di kaid meaning ‘Jail in cold tower’- artists have painted the sufferings of two younger sons (Sahibzadas) who were jailed in the cold tower along with their grandmother Mata Gujri before their execution. 39 (Plate-61)

Dev shiva bar mohe hai shubh karman te kabhun na tarun, Na darun ar so lag jaye ladun nishchey kar apni jeet karun- In this calendar Guru Gobind Singh has been shown in a praying gesture looking upwards resting his chin on his folded hands asking blessings from the almighty to enable him with a resolve to achieve victory in such endeavours. In the background snow capped mountains have been depicted in great detail and realism. (Plate-62)

The calendar- The battle of Bhangani (Paonta Sahib) represents Guru Gobind Singh at Paonta Sahib getting ready to face the future. The hill chiefs did not like the growing influence of Guru Gobind Singh and attacked him. A battle took place at Bhangani situated on the banks of Jamuna, few miles away from Paonta Sahib. It was the first battle fought by Guru Gobind Singh. The brave Sikhs emerged victorious. In this battle Pir Buddhu Shah’s sons along with seven hundred disciples of the Pir fought for the Guru and attained martyrdom. 40 (Plate-63)

The fortress at Chamkaur- soon after Guru Gobind Singh had abandoned the Anandpur fort, his two younger sons (Sahibzadas), his mother Mata Gujri and innumerable Sikhs were separated from the Guru when they were crossing the river Sirsa. The moment the Guru along with his two elder sons (Sahibzadas) and other Sikhs entered the Chamkaur Fortress was surrounded by the Mughal

39 Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharma Prachar Committee, New Delhi; 1998, Baba Baghel Singh Museum’s Paintings and their brief History, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.37

army. The battle ensued. Guru Gobind Singh himself armed his son Ajit Singh who while fighting fiercely against the enemy laid down his life and attained immortality. Darbar of Sri Guru Gobind Singh this calendar highlights the glory and resplendence of the court of Guru Gobind Singh.

**Portraits of Ten Sikh Gurus**

Attractive and vibrant posters/calendars depicting the Ten Sikh Gurus in head and shoulders form in oval frames and decorative and ornamental patterns are quite popular wherein there is depiction of Sikh religious symbols such as Ik-Onkar, Khanda-Kirpan and occasional appearance of Sri Guru Granth Sahib surrounded by flowers project an iconic compilation which is compact, concise and very appealing in an aesthetic parlance. The main emphasis though which is a persistent and repeated projection is that the portraits of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh are juxtaposed in these compositions with maximum space reserved for the first and the last Sikh Guru.

The subject of painting single portraits of Sikh Gurus either head and shoulders or sitting or standing full length presents an appealing prospect for artists wherein detail and importance of proper background plays a great role both artistically and aesthetically. These calendars are surrounded by margins and borders with floral patterns and resemble like golden frames. Articles related to specific Gurus are also incorporated and costumes, beads and pieces of jewellery present a royal and majestic look to the portraits of Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Harkishan and Guru Gobind Singh with headgear bedecked with diamonds, pearls and the royal plume (Kalgi). Forts and Sikh Gurduaras in the background add a new dimension to the particular portrait of Sikh Gurus.

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41 Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and Dharm Prachar Committee, New Delhi: 1998, *Baba Baghel Singh Museum’s Paintings and their brief History*, S. Ajit Singh (General Manager D.S.G.M.C.), Gur-Updesh Printers, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi, p.36
though are magnificently decorative as flora and fauna, fountains and forests with waterfalls and streams lend a charm of its own enriching the portraits to superlative aesthetic content. *(Plate-74)*

**Pillars of Sikh Militant strength**

Though there are numerous calendars done on the theme of Sikh martyrs yet the calendars which come to mind and are visible till this date are the ones related to Baba Deep Singh Shaheed (Martyr) who is shown engaged in a battle on to Amritsar with a large sword in his right hand and his decapitated head on his left hand who vowed to evacuate Sri Harmandir Sahib from the unholy possession of Qazi Jahan Khan. Deep Singh swore to evict the foul transgressor or die in the precincts of the Temple. While engaged in battle near Amritsar his head was cut off and when he reached the pool of Ramsar on the outskirts of the present city and there finally he succumbed. A hexagonal stone set in the paving surrounding the Golden Temple marks the spot where the hurled head landed. *(Plate-75)* Baba Deep Singh’s significance is symbolic and the notable popularity of his picture dramatically demonstrates the power of the symbol. Baba Deep Singh as a symbol represents Khalsa loyalty, bravery, militant action, resistance to oppression and martyrdom.

Continuing in the same breadth the other act of bravery shown by Sukha Singh offers the similar stimulus for painters/artists. Sukha Singh with his few fighters speared the head of Massa Rangad who tried to desecrate the Golden Temple and filled the sanctorum with dancing girls and concubines. *(Plate-76)* In this calendar, powerful illustration of Sukha Singh on horseback with Massa Rangad’s head mounted on the spear again emphasizing the very ideals of Sikhism of resistance and punitive action against the aggressors and invaders which naturally attracts the followers of Sikhism.

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43 Ibid, p.137
The subject which conveys the act of unprecedented bravery shown by Banda Singh Bahadur and his warriors in taking the revenge against the Nawab of Sirhind- Wazir Khan for bricking alive the two younger sons (Sahibzadas) of Guru Gobind Singh inspired the artists to depict this saga of valour in Sikh history in their own visual narrations as this event was a turning point and Banda Singh Bahadur after a pitched battle achieved victory over this barbarous and inhuman Nawab thereby establishing Khalsa Raj dedicated to the principles of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak Dev. (Plate-77) His portrait as a victorious Khalsa General is also a prized and precious specimen in Sikh Calendar art. The theme of lionizing and transformation of the weak and timid persons to brave and fearless soldiers was attempted by many artists specially the subject of Madho Das Bairagi (earlier name of Banda Singh Bahadur) sitting at the feet of Guru Gobind Singh near Nanded who was an ascetic in his early life was baptised and transformed into a powerful Sikh General who with Guru Gobind Singh’s blessings achieved the task of finishing the enemies of religion.44 (Plate-78) This episode has been painted in a number of styles and artistic formations effectively and expressively and is the popular subject matter of Sikh Calendar art.

In the series of calendars on the importance of martyrdom, the bravery of Mai Bhago has been immortalised by artists in calendars portraying her as a woman of chastity, faith and courage. Her blood boiled at the timidity of those who smitten by the ravages of a prolonged siege, disclaimed Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib and returned to their homes. Mai Bhago charged them with cowardice and lack of faith and led them back to fight with the armies of Wazir Khan of Sirhind at Khidrana now Muktsar. She herself fought with valour and redeemed the faithless.45 (Plate-79)

44 Gill, Ranjit Singh; 2007, Ten Masters (Ten Gurus of Sikh Dharma), Aravali Books International Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.219
Selfless Service (Nishkaam Sewa) or ‘Sarbat Da Bhala’

The calendars celebrating the concept of service of mankind without consideration of caste, creed and religion intensely capture the spirit of Sewa Panth by reminiscing the historic event which highlights the noble act of serving water and medicine to the wounded soldiers in a battlefield where a Sikh devotee (Sewadaar) of the Guru- Bhai Kanhaiya is shown serving drinking water to the wounded and the thirsty Turk soldiers alongwith the Sikh soldiers irrespective of whether they are foes or friends- Sikhs or Muslims. This was perhaps the first ever instance of towering level of kindness and service and can justifiably be the beginning of Red Cross Movement and a golden example of human values and rights.46

The three basic principles of Sikhism (i) Kirat Karo (do honest labour), (ii) Nam Japo (remember the Almighty) and (iii) Vand ke Chhako (share whatever you have with others) have been translated into visual adaptations by artists in scores of Sikh calendars.47

Through these calendars miserable hardships faced by Sikhs when they were reduced to utterly frugal living due to never ending atrocities perpetuated on them by the Mughals made them live together in a spirit of true brotherhood sharing their belongings, remembering the name of the true Guru in the face of adversities while toiling hard to sail through.

The theme of Kar Sewa has been attempted umpteenth of times in Sikh calendars. The periodic cleaning of the Sarovar (holy Tank) at Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar in Sikh tradition is called Kar Sewa.48 The Kar Sewa of the sacred Sarovar inside the Golden Temple brings forth the ennobling spirit of

brotherhood. The people join in this service, to undergo the process of elimination of ego. (Plate-82)

Sewa Panthi Bhai Buddhu exemplified the spirit of selfless service in a glorious act of breaking the doors of his house to use them as firewood to prepare Langar for the Sangat. He did this when it was raining heavily and firewood could not be procured to cook food for the Langar.49 (Plate-83)

Sri Harimandir Sahib- The Supreme Sanctorum

Sri Harimandir Sahib literally means ‘House of God’ and is considered as the most sacred shrine of the Sikhs situated at Amritsar built in the ‘Pool of Nectar’ that is the Amrit Sarovar. It was designed and established by the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Arjan Dev and its foundation was got laid down by a Muslim Saint- Sain Mian Mir being a place of an epitome of Secularism. Guru Sahib set the building with four doors opened in each of the four directions signifying its accessibility to all irrespective of caste, colour, religion and creed. In this sense, the structure of this sacred building presents the unique Sikh architecture. Guru Sahib also installed ‘Sri Guru Granth Sahib’ here for the first time and revealed the significance of this place. Harimandir Sahib, the epitome of Sikhism and centre of Sikh religious power is also called ‘Darbar Sahib’. Knowing the significance of this place, Maharaja Ranjit Singh performed the service of gold plating on it, due to which it is also known as ‘Golden Temple’.50 Being a source of spiritual inspiration this sacred place attracts millions of devotees and visitors from all over the world and has been a great source of inspiration for the artists who have tried to capture its myriad moods and create the spiritual aura around it and hereby projecting it as a temporal seat of divinity. (Plate-84)

As this holy place is witness to a glorious chapter of Sikh history it has been a favourite subject for painters who have tried to create those significant

happenings with Sikh perspective and in their specific artistic skills and have profoundly been successful in conveying the message of secularism and equality of all mankind which enumerates from this scared place. (Plate-85) The calendars on this theme are very popular and are considered as precious souvenir by the devotees who visit this place to pay obeisance. (Plate-86) The artistic compositions incorporating this subject are diverse in style, aesthetic content, ornamental aspects and present a melange of textural, religious and visual content with intricate and elaborate juxtaposition of design variations showing Sri Harimandir Sahib in the middle and ten Sikh Gurus are shown around it in attractive and appealing formations. Ik-Onkar, Satnam and the Sikh religious symbols appear in many calendars. (Plate-87) Some calendars also carry the inscription ‘Dithe sab thanv nahi tuj jeha koi’ meaning ‘there is no place such as Sri Harimandir Sahib’. (Plate-88) Yet in some calendars Guru Sahibs are shown showering holy petals of flowers on this most scared shrine. It is perhaps the most sought after Sikh calendar. (Plate-89)

**Historical Gurdwaras**

There is a great demand for calendars of Sikh historical Gurdwaras due to their religious and historical significance as important happenings in Sikh history are associated with these Gurdwaras. Similarly ‘Five Takhts’ such as Sri Akal Takht Sahib, Amritsar; Takht Sri Harimandir Sahib, Patna Sahib; Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib; Takht Sri Hazur Sahib, Nanded; Takht Sir Damdama Sahib, Sabo ki Talwandi symbolise a seat of authority combining both the temporal as well as eternal. All the five Takhts equally regarded by the Sikhs as high seats of religious authority, are equally venerated but Sri Akal Takht Sahib at Amritsar enjoys a special status. The other calendars of Gurdwaras such as Nankana Sahib, Panja Sahib, Sis Ganj Sahib, Rakab Ganj Sahib, Goindwal Sahib known as ‘Sikhi da Dhura’

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(axel of Sikhism), (Plate-95) Sri Chuni Mandi, Lahore, Taran Taran Sahib (Plate-96), Sri Muktsar Sahib, Guru ki Wadali, Amritsar, Hemkunt Sahib, Paonta Sahib, Manikaran Sahib, Chamkaur Sahib (Plate-97) and Kiratpur Sahib are associated with various Sikh Gurus and their lives. Artists find it a sacred duty to paint these places with utmost veneration and respect depicting them as abodes of divinity, spirituality and piousness. These images of Gurdwaras cater to the spiritual needs of the masses/devotees.

**Bhagats and Saints**

Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains *Bani* of Hindu *Bhagats*, *Bhats* and Muslim *Sufis*, generic names used for the works of contributors other than the Gurus. They belonged to different places were born in different castes but believed in ‘Oneness of God’ and spread the teachings of universal brotherhood. They represent four centuries of Indian religions thought beginning from the twelfth century. They are Jai Dev (Plate-98), Baba Sheikh Farid (Plate-99), Namdev (Plate-100), Trilochan (Plate-101), Ravidas (Plate-102), Surdas (Plate-103), Danna (Plate-104), Ramanand (Plate-105), Sadhna (Plate-106), Beni (Plate-107), Sain (Plate-108), Kabir (Plate-109), Parmanand (Plate-110), Pipa (Plate-111) and Bhikan (Plate-112) making Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the most secular scripture in the world, giving the well-deserved importance and eminence to Saints, *Sufis* and *Bhagats* who had contributed to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. 52 Artists have worked on the theme of portraying these holy men as a mark of appreciation and in grateful reverence. Portraits related to these specific Saints such as Baba Sheikh Farid, Bhagat Ravidas, Bhagat Danna, Bhagat Ramanand, Bhagat Surdas, Bhagat Pipa, Bhagat Namdev and events associated with their lives and their teachings and messages to the mankind have been duly illustrated by the artists as they enriched the very essence of Sikhism.

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Sectarian Mahants, Saints and Nath Yogis

Though not very popular there were some calendars relating to Sectarian and local Bhagats, Saints and Nath Yogis such as Baba Sri Chand (Plate-113), Baba Lakshmi Chand (Plate-114), Baba Balak Nath (Plate-115), Baba Gorakh Nath (Plate-116), Baba Wadbhag Singh (Plate-117) and their followers.

Kuka Movement

In calendars on the theme of Kuka Movement and their patriotism, one can see some portraits relating to the Kuka Sikh specially the portrait of Baba Ram Singh (Plate-118) who started a reformatory movement had a sizable number of followers known as ‘Kukas’. Their contribution in opposing the British invaders and standing against their oppression and atrocities have been painted as they preached non-violence. They faced inhuman tortures and were crushed under running train.

Barahmaha- Tukhari Chhant Mahala-1

Guru Nanak Dev recited Barahmaha (Plate-119) at Kartarpur (Ravi) soon before his mergence with the light Eternal. The artists have drawn paintings based on Barahmaha depicting twelve different seasons such as Chetu, Vaiskhu, Jethu, Asaru, Savan, Bhadau, Asuni, Kataki, Manghar, Pokhi, Maghi, Phalguni. The pangs of separation, longing for the divine love, the intense desire for union of the soul with the Supreme Being are some of the themes related to Barahmaha portrayed in Sikh calendars.

Royal portraits of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Apart from Sikh religious themes other specimens of Sikh Calendar art are portraits of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as ‘Sher-e-Punjab’ (Lion of Punjab) (Plate-120) with royal and majestic ambience depicting the royal palaces, his throne and other paraphernalia related to his rich, vibrant and flourishing

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54 Dogra, Ramesh.C and Dogra, Urmila; 2003, *The Sikh World- An encyclopaedic survey of Sikh religion and culture*, UBS Publishers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.57
kingdom. In some calendars, group of prominent figures of Maharaja’s court, courtiers, soldiers and other officials have been shown capturing the essence of his powerful and magnificent regime. Amongst the popular calendars of this era is the full-length portrait of Maharaja Dalip Singh attired in royal robes with a sword in his hand. (Plate-122)

**Punjabi Culture and Traditions**

It is evident from the fact that *Sikh Calendar art* has emerged adopting innumerable themes which are basically related to Sikh religion, its message and a vehicle to convey the glorious events of Sikh history and visual accounts of life and times of Sikh Gurus. Interestingly this genre of art is flourishing well with countless new themes on *Sikh art* and culture being rendered by a new generation of artists. In this series which is in vogue for the last two or three decades there is a certain departure visible in this context and day to day life of Punjabis, their culture, ethos, customs, festivals, ceremonies, traditions, literature, music and dance forms have been illustrated in eye-catching compositions in realistic as well as more liberal artistic forms thereby continuing the traditions of promotion of *Sikh art* and culture thorough these calendars. The themes which are more apparent in such calendars are Celebration of Baisakhi (Plate-123), Village fairs (Plate-124), Gurpurab celebrations, *Bhangra* and *Giddha* (folk dances) (Plate-125), Punjabi women engaged in *Phulkari* embroidery work (Plate-126), Women in *trinjan* (spinning wheel) (Plate-127), *Teej* festival- women on the swings, *Karwa chauth*, woman engaged in curd churning (Plate-128), *Lohri* festival, Punjabi bride wrapped in *Phulkari* (Plate-129), *Dastaar bandi*- ceremony of tying a turban, Ginning and spinning of cotton (Plate-130), *Sanjha Chulha*- open air group baking loaves of bread (*roti*) in indigenous mud ovens (*tandoor*), *Banjaras* selling glass bangles/ bracelets to young girls, *Rakhdi*-Raksha bandhan festival, Group singing (Plate-131), Applying henna and *Watna* to a to be married girl- a preparation before marriage ceremony, *Pani warna* ceremony- reception by the ladies of the
in-laws house, *Hola Mohalla* festival. With the change of lifestyles after green revolution an added exposure to technology and much visible financial accomplishments, new subjects on the urban and rural projections and perspectives are inspiring the artists to tackle themes which are common and a celebration of the kitsch as the line of urban and rural divide is diminishing.

**Techniques, Processes and Materials of Sikh Calendar Art**

The establishment of Sikh rule under the invincible leadership and military clout of Maharaja Ranjit Singh laid the foundations of a peaceful, prosperous and ever flourishing regime which was open to new ideas and winds of change swept across the Punjab. The splendour and grandeur of this empire attracted a large number of visitors, thinkers, philosophers, artists, writers, traders and businessmen. The westerners who were eager to visit Ranjit Singh’s empire, some were curious and others were spellbound by the warmth and open-heartedness of Sikh rulers and the majestic and royal splendour of the Sikh courts. They were so enthralled with the exotic stance of this empire that they loved to paint on numerous themes connected with the empire and produced some fantastically rich and vibrant portraits of royalties and noble men aristocrats and even were fascinated with the common man and their daily chores and trades. The technique of painting in oil on canvas was introduced by them and later on the introduction to printing press (Plate-132) and other printing techniques gave the much needed impetus to the works of art which were being reproduced in great numbers. This felicitated the spread of mass reproduction of paintings on Sikh themes painted by Indian and European artists and propelled a revolution of sorts and the masterpieces of *Sikh art* which were confined to elite and aristocratic persons reached the homes of common man.

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55 Bhatti, S.S; 1988, *Art with Rustic intensity: Jarnail Singh’s ‘Punjab Paintings’*, The Tribune
56 Aijazuddin, F.S; 1979, *Sikh Portraits by European Artists*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p.13
To further understand the genre of *Sikh Calendar art* or *Sikh Popular Art* which was spreading through these calendars, a complete acquaintance with its printing techniques, processes and materials introduced by the Europeans needs deep study in order to follow the patterns which advanced the cause of its popularity and spread. The original works of art which were out of reach of the common man were available for a few *annas* in printed versions and as they were being sold in fairs, festivals, bazaars, religious congregations and even at printing presses. Their popularity grew by leaps and bound because of their easy availability and this further promoted the commercial aspect as with in a few decades of the emergence of new printing techniques business houses, traders, shopkeepers adopted them as a mode of advertising their goods and services in a big way making them a commercially viable proposition.\(^{59}\) Besides, being a popular form of spreading lofty ideals of Sikhism, their ethos, principles such as Universal brotherhood, Dignity of labour, Oneness of God, Equality of women, Love of mankind and other glorious pages from Sikh history of which every Sikh is proud of.

**Main Techniques/Processes and Materials of Sikh Calendar Art**

(i) Woodblock Printing

(ii) Lithography

   (a) Chromolithography or Colour Lithography

   (b) Oleography

(iii) Photomechanical Printing

   (a) Line Blocks

   (b) Half-tone Blocks/ Duo Prints

   (c) Albumen Prints

   (d) Bromide Prints

   (e) Photo-litho transfer or Photolithography

\(^{59}\) Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine; 2003, *Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.1
(iv) Offset Printing
(v) Digital Printing

(i) Woodblock Printing

One of the earliest printing techniques introduced by the Europeans in the Punjab was ‘Woodblock Printing’ which was adopted by printing presses as it was simple yet cost effective. This saw a sudden spurt in reproduction of illustrated Janam Sakhis and other religious pothis primarily in line drawing form. (Plate-133) Thereby it opened the doors to printing of Sikh calendars on themes of Sikh Gurus and events related to their life and times for propagation of Sikh religion. Excellent specimens related to this process or technique are found in abundance in the rare collection of J.Lockwood Kipling, former principal of Mayo School of Art, Lahore who thronged the streets of Lahore and Amritsar and painstakingly collected each specimen. He not only collected these because he was awestruck with this novel art form but also spent valuable time in understanding their meaning and essence by decoding and explaining the contents for the benefit of the westerners. His deliberation and understanding on this subject greatly enhanced their true value in perspective of art and aesthetics embedded in these narrative illustrations. This collection is housed in Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Technique of Woodblock Printing

The art of printing from woodblocks was invented in China during the European Dark Ages. Originally woodblock prints were used in Northern China in the T’ang period (627-649A.D) to promulgate Buddhist doctrines. The idea that text and illustrations could be easily replicated spread through the Orient rapidly and was well established in Europe by the early fifteenth century, when it

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was turned to the service of the Church, the state and the universities.\textsuperscript{62} In both areas, the early woodcuts were for the most part simple holy images for sale to pilgrims.\textsuperscript{63} The technique of woodblock printing is a form of ‘\textit{Relief Printing processes}’ because the actual surface from which the printing is to be done stands in relief above the rest of the block which has been cut away. Ink is applied to the surface of the block, and is transferred to paper by applying a light vertical pressure by burnishing or putting through a printing press.\textsuperscript{64} (Plate-134)

In woodblock printing the material used is a wooden block\textsuperscript{(Plate-135)}, usually about an inch thick. It is always part of the plank of a tree of fairly soft wood e.g. pear, sycamore or beech, sawn lengthwise along the grain, and planed down until smooth. Before use it must be seasoned to ensure that it will not wrap or crack. The artist’s design is either drawn directly on the block or on a sheet of paper which is then glued to its surface. The cutter uses a knife similar to a penknife and carefully cuts all the wood away from the sides of the lines which the artist has drawn. Chisels and gouges can be used to cut away any large areas of space. (Plate-136) When finished the image will appear as a network of lines standing out in relief. The cutting of the block is a skilled business, and from early times it was usual for the artist only to make the design on the surface of the block and then hand it over for cutting to a professional woodcutter. (Plate-137) It will be obvious that the cutter can only cope with a design drawn in lines, and if shading is required to conventions a parallel or cross hatching must be used; with cross hatching the cutter has laboriously to cut out all the interstices between the hatchings. If a mistake is made and too much has been cut away, the cutter has to make a hole in the block and insert a new plug of wood. The surface

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} Simmons, Rosemary and Clemson, Katie; 1988, \textit{The Complete Manual of Relief Print-Making}, Dorling Kindersley Limited, London, p.20
\item \textsuperscript{63} Gascoigne, Bamber; 1986, \textit{How to identify Prints- A Complete guide to manual and mechanical processes from woodcut to ink jet}, Thames and Hudson, London, p.5
\item \textsuperscript{64} Simmons, Rosemary and Clemson, Katie; 1988, \textit{The Complete Manual of Relief Print-Making}, Dorling Kindersley Limited, London, p.13
\end{itemize}
of the block is inked using a dabber or roller (Plate-138); the printing ink has to be of a stiff consistency in order to remain on the raised parts of the block and not flows into the hollows. The printing is done in a press which is the same or at least works on the same principle as an ordinary type printing press; pressure is applied uniformly and vertically but need only be light (Plate-139). Woodcuts can be hand printed without using a press. The block can simply be stamped on to the paper, or paper can be laid on the block and the ink transferred by rubbing on the back of the paper.65

The printing inks used for woodblock printing are oil-based (Plate-140) and Japanese water-based inks. (Plate-141) It should be kept in mind that while tracing the design on the wood when printed it will be reverse of the original design and thus necessary care should be taken to translate the original design in reverse.

(ii) Lithography Printing

The lithographic process (the Litho suffix means stone in Greek) (Plate-142) that employs the flat stone surface does not need any carving or incision as in other printing procedure it is a ‘Planographic Printing’ just like the offset, its well-known offshoot. Lithography printing was invented in 1798 in Munchen, Germany by Aloys Senefelder (1771-1834) (Plate-143) who, according to legend, by chance discovered the quality of a local stone that once drawn with buttery ink, could transfer on paper the original design.66

Lithography is based on the chemical fact that grease and water repel each other. If marks are drawn on a suitable printing surface in some greasy medium, the surface can be printed from in the following way. The surface is dampened with water, which settles only on the unmarked areas since it is repelled by the greasy drawing medium. Secondly, the surface is rolled over with greasy printing


66 Castelli, Enrico and Aprile, Giovanni; 2005, *Divine Lithography*, United Multicolour Printers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.40
ink, which will adhere one to the drawn marks, the water repelling it from the rest of the surface. (Plate-144) Finally the ink is transferred to a sheet of paper by running paper and the printing surface together through a scraper press. (Plate-145) The lithographic process is often described as surface printing in order to distinguish it from the relief and intaglio processes. Such in essence is the principle of lithography. The actual operations are of course much more complicated.67

The printing surface used was originally stone (Plate-146) (when the term ‘lithography’ which means stone drawing) this had to be capable of absorbing grease and water equally, and the only really suitable type was the limestone quarried in the Solenhofen region of Bavaria.68 (Plate-147) The stone can be drawn on in any way as long as the drawing medium is greasy; this explains the bewildering variety of appearances that lithograph can present. The most usual medium is chalk, (Plate-148) for which crayons of various finenesses are available. The other methods are pen and wash. If chalk is used the printing surfaces must be given a grain by grinding with an abrasive, but for pen or wash the surface has to be smooth or have only a fine grain. Once the drawing if finished the artist’s task is done; the rest is the province of the printer, whose operations are complicated enough to make it unusual for the artist to do his own printing; he may supervise, but he needs the expert’s aid. One difficulty is that the stone or plate has to be prepared before printing, and the exact process of preparation varies according to its surface, and also the technique of the drawing. Briefly the surface must be washed with dilute nitric acid to fix the image on the stone, and rubbed with gum Arabic (‘desensitised’) to prevent any further grease settling on the stone. Only then can be washed and inked for printing. The ‘gum etch’ has to

68 Gascoigne, Bamber; 1986, How to identify Prints- A Complete guide to manual and mechanical processes from woodcut to ink jet, Thames and Hudson, London, p.20
be done only once before printing, but the application of water and then ink must be repeated between each impression.69

A lithographic stone may preserve a drawing for years. (Plate-149) The drawing if properly preserved, may be renovated by means of apt chemical treatment and employed again. When the drawing is no longer needed, it can be cancelled by graining the stone, a procedure that makes the stone new again; ready for the next drawing.70

Once tuned up, lithography gave the artists the possibility to use softer tools as brush, pencil (Plate-150) and pen (Plate-151) (in comparison with chisels and gravers), a quality useful in rendering calm and romantic atmospheres. Its success in the nineteenth century was fast and extraordinary.

(a) Chromolithography or Colour Lithography

Chromolithography is a method of making multi-colour prints. This type of colour printing stemmed from the process of lithography and it includes all types of lithography that are printed in colour. Chromolithography replaced colour prints by hand and eventually served as a replica of a real painting. Depending on the number of colours present a chromolithograph could take months to produce. To make what once referred to as a “chromo”, a lithographer-using a finished painting as a model- gradually built and corrected the print to look as much as possible like the painting in front of him sometimes using dozens of layers. The process can be very time consuming and cumbersome, depending upon the skill of the lithographer.71

70 Castelli, Enrico and Aprile, Giovanni; 2005, Divine Lithography, United Multicolour Printers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.40
Chromolithographs begin to emerge in the 1870’s that is colour images printed from multiple stone blocks. The process of chromolithography is chemical, because an image is applied to a stone or zinc plate with a grease-based crayon (limestone and zinc plate are two commonly used materials in the production of chromolithographs). After the image is drawn onto stone, the stone is gummed with gum arabic solution and weak nitric acid, and then inked with the oil-based paints and passed through a printing press along with a sheet of paper to transfer the image to the paper. Colours may be added to the print by drawing the area to receive the colour on a different stone and printing the new colour onto paper. Each colour in the image must be separately drawn onto a new stone or plate and applied to the paper one at a time. It was not unusual for twenty to twenty five stones to be used on a single image. Each sheet of paper will therefore pass through the printing press, as many times as there are colours in the final print. In order that each colour is placed in the right position in each print, each stone in each print, each stone or plate must be precisely registered, on lined up, on the paper using a system of register marks.

**Stages of execution**

Chromolithography is such precise job that it required the control of many external factors, ranging from humidity to dust; therefore the press was established in the countryside and in buildings newly built for the purpose. Artists painted in well-lighted studios which were comfortable enough for them to be working therefore several hours a day. The key figure of the production was director or chief graphic designer entrusted with the responsibility of guiding the team of drawers. Once the oil painting to be reproduced had been copied by the artist himself on the cartoon of suitable size for printing, a *masterstone* was produced. On this stone, the chief graphic designer drew the lines that bordered all the different selected colours on the

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transferred image that had already been sketched. Each of the drawers then worked on one stone attributed to a specific colour with the most appropriate tool: a pen, a brush or a pencil, within the lines drawn on the masterstone’s print. The results were of the highest quality only if the team was able to work in harmony: only then it was possible to obtain harmony of colours. After the necessary corrections were made to each of the stones, they were printed on proof paper to obtain a progressive proof. This was a precious report of the work, to be kept in order to paint again one of the stones that may have been damaged during the printing. In order to facilitate the reproduction of each drawing, an extra print of the stone was made by using each ink. The last print of the progressive proof, bearing all colours constituted the for press copy: the fresh prints were continuously compared to it to be sure that the quality was not declining because of the exhausting of one of the matrixes. The for press copy was the prototype, and it was always compared to the printed sheet. As a matter of fact, the workers were encouraged to match with its quality in order to emulate the perfect result already obtained. By observing the progressive proofs it is possible to understand some of the stylistic choices made in order to obtain the best results: the secrets of the chief graphic designer hidden even to the sharp eyes of the skilled observer, are unveiled in the progressive proof. The first colour e.g., flesh (a rosy complexion tint), yellow, pale blue were given with large brushstrokes, black and relevant details in dark colours were executed with the finest pen, the pencil was largely used for chiaroscuro.\(^\text{73}\)

Generally speaking, colours were printed at first from the lighter ones to which was then added more intense and dark ones. The analysis of progressive proofs led us to notice that fewer than a dozen colours were used and that the mastery was to obtain the requested nuances by combining the few available

\(^{73}\) Castelli, Enrico and Aprile, Giovanni; 2005, Divine Lithography, United Multicolour Printers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, p.42
colours. In the middle of the colours sequence there was always a black layer that needs some more considerations. It was executed with a thin pen which added a graphic quality to the whole, just as kohl adds sharpness to the eyes. Lastly varnish was used to finish the print and protect the colours. Unfortunately the gloss painting employed was not as steady as the colours: with time it got yellow giving old lithograph the characteristic yellow patina that obliterates the brilliant colours that were once its beauty.\textsuperscript{74}

Chromolithographs using multiple colour blocks and occasionally the application of varnish, produced images of an extreme tactility. Colours were rich and heavy with an astonishing depth and sensuality.\textsuperscript{75}

\textbf{(b) Oleography}

The art or process of printing pictures in oil colours by a method called Chromolithography is known as Oleography.\textsuperscript{76} Oleographs (Plate-153) developed from chromolithography became very popular towards the end of the nineteenth century. The process was the same but the inks used were extremely oils and differed in texture. When heavily varnished, the effect of an oleograph was almost identical to that of an oil painting. It produced closest resemblance to the original oil painting.\textsuperscript{77} The main difference between oleograph and chromolithograph is the choice of paints in the first category oil colours are used in printing process while in the second category, coloured printing inks are used.

The oleograph came in a wide range of sizes, although they almost never exceeded 70x50 cms in size and indeed the earliest prints were of that size. A majority of the prints came in two sizes- 50x36 cms and 35x25 cms. The format was determined by the size of the stone and although larger stones were

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\textsuperscript{74} Castelli, Enrico and Aprile, Giovanni; 2005, \textit{Divine Lithography}, United Multicolour Printers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi p.44
\end{flushleft}
available, they were too unwieldy given that they weighed several hundred kilos.\footnote{78} Raja Ravi Varma was the pioneer who introduced oleography printing in India and reproduced his own paintings in bewitching oleographs, \cite{Neumayer and Schelbeger} which became extremely popular object d’art and are being acquired by art connoisseurs and collectors even today. It is only through oleographic reproductions his paintings attracted a large audience, as these were look alike of the original works.

\textbf{(iii) Photomechanical Printing}

One after the other new processes with more improvisation in technology and advancement in printing aspects accelerated the process of production of better quality prints/calendars felicitating mass production and reduction in cost. In photomechanical printing processes, the printing matrix is produced by methods based on photographic technologies rather than mechanical work carried out by the print maker. The invention and development of photography in the 1820’s and 1830’s revolutionised the technical processes of print making, though it was some time before its impact was fully realized. Many photomechanical processes are based on the discovery made by Alphonse Louis Poitevin \cite{Poitevin} in 1855 that bichromated gelatine is sensitive to light: it hardens when exposed to light and remains soft where shielded from light.\footnote{79}

\textbf{(a) Line Blocks}

The Line Block printing process was developed in the 1870’s and by the 1890’s it had become the traditional method of producing printing blocks photomechanically.\footnote{80} The traditional method of block making was developed from the gillotage process. A zinc plate is coated with bichromated albumen or some other light-sensitive material. This is exposed to light under a high contrast negative; the plate is then rolled over with ink and the soft unexposed albumen

\footnote{78} Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine; 2003, \textit{Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India}, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.14


\footnote{80} Ibid, p.617
washed away. The plate is next dusted with a powder which adheres only to the
tacky ink and which is heated to form a resist; thus the background of the plate
can be etched down to leave the lines of the design standing in relief, protected
by the resist. The etching process has to be repeated four times, each time
strengthening the sides of the lines with further applications of resist powder.
The plate is then cleaned and may be used for printing in any relief printing
press. The line block is simple to produce but is severely limited in that it can
only reproduce line or granular originals. Printing only blacks, it cannot handle
transitions of tone in grey. The appearance of a line block is similar to that of a
woodcut and a wood engraving. When it has been used to make a facsimile of a
woodcut or wood engraving, comparison with an original will not show that the
reproduction has a greater regularity and hardness of line.81

(b) Half-tone Blocks/ Duo Prints

To overcome the inherent limitations of the line block process, the half-
tone method was developed so that areas of tone could be reproduced.82 The
procedure adopted is to photograph the original through a cross-line screen of
parallel horizontal and vertical lines to produce a negative composed of lines of
dots of larger or smaller size depending on the intensity of tone in the original.
This negative is then used to make a block in the same way as with a line block.
The purpose of this procedure is to break up a tonal original into a series of black
dots so that it can be turned into a relief block; yet the dots are so small that they
are individually invisible to the human eye, except under magnification. They are
instead perceived as greys, in the same way as the eye perceives the lines on a
television screen as a continuous tonal image.83 The half-tone process reduces
visual reproductions to a binary image that is printed with only one colour of ink.

81 Griffiths, Antony; 1980, Prints and Print making: An Introduction to the History and
83 Griffiths, Antony; 1980, Prints and Print making: An Introduction to the History and
This binary reproduction relies on a basic optical illusion— that these tiny half-tone dots are blended into smooth tones by the human eye. “Half-tone” can also be used to refer specifically to the image that is produced by this process.

Half-tone relief blocks have one complication. It will be obvious that the closer the mesh of lines on the screen, the greater will be accuracy of detail. But if a very fine screen is used (one hundred and fifty lines or more to the inch), the resulting dots are so tiny that they can only be printed successfully on absolutely smooth paper. This explains why newspapers, which have to print on coarse newsprint, are forced to use wide mesh screens, while the high-quality plates in books are always printed on a special glossy chalk-coated ‘art’ paper. A half-tone print is always easy to recognise; under a magnifying glass the mesh of dots will become clear.\(^8^4\) The first commercially successful use of the half-tone was patented in Germany and Britain in 1882 by Georg Meisenbach.\(^{\text{Plate-156}}\) The principle of half-tone printing was first suggested by William Henry Fox Talbot \(^{\text{Plate-157}}\) in 1852 but was not developed commercially until the 1880’s.\(^8^5\)

By the end of the nineteenth century in Punjab, many prints/calendars using half-tone plate were printed with different grains in two colours imparting to it a sense of depth and a photographic quality. Nonetheless, the plates printed employing these methods were unable to remotely match the brightness and exciting qualities of the oleographs. It was only in the 1920’s that a sizable number of half-tone prints entered the market. Since these prints carried the name of ‘Karachi Prints’ \(^{\text{Plate-158}}\), it is likely that this technique was first pioneered by the firm, Brijbasi & Sons, which was founded in 1922 in Karachi and which distributed widely across western India. The firm moved to Mathura after Independence and is still one of the major printing and distributing firms in the Indian display-print business. Most half-tone prints are small pictures printed


on a white sheet of 39x25 cms, the print in the centre never exceeding 20x15 cms in size. The advantage of these prints was that they could be produced on the letterpress. Small treadle presses of the famous Heidelberger system (Plate-159) were common in every Indian backyard and many small print shops relied on these to churn out half-tone prints. The half-tones, looked more like magazine prints.  

(c) Albumen Print

The process for producing albumen prints was introduced by Louis-Desire Blanquart-Evrard (Plate-160) in 1851. It soon became the most widely used means of producing photographic prints in the nineteenth century until 1895. Paper was coated with salted albumen derived from egg white and sensitised with silver nitrate before use. The print was made by placing this sensitised paper in a printing frame beneath a negative and exposing it to day light until an image appeared. (Plate-161) When fixed, the image was a red-brown colour with yellow highlights. From the mid 1860’s lightly tinted albumen paper became popular as a means of masking or disguising the yellow highlights; which many photographers found objectionable. Most albumen prints were gold toned to the rich purple-brown image colour often described as sepia and accepted by many observers as typical of the nineteenth century photograph.

(d) Bromide Print

The term applied to the first type of gelatine silver bromide development paper, which was introduced in 1880. By the turn of the century bromide prints were in widespread use and remained the standard means of producing monochrome prints. The term ‘Bromide Print’ was commonly used until the 1920’s but with the description gradually fell into disuse.

86 Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine; 2003, Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.15
88 Ibid, p.648
(e) Photo-litho transfer or Photolithography

Photolithograph is a lithograph made from a photographic impression on a sensitised stone or plate. It was just attempted in France in the 1830’s when Nie’pce sensitised a lithographic stone with bitumen and oil of lavender. Later on experiments began at least as early as the 1850’s to achieve an image photographically on the surface of a lithographic stone. It was a natural development for lithography had proved itself the most versatile of all printing processes and photography was the latest scientific marvel in the business of image making.

In the nineteenth century, various methods of making photolithographs were used. Most were based on the discovery in 1855 of the light-sensitive properties of bichromated gelatine. Early photolithographs are in appearance very similar to ordinary lithographs. When the process is used to make a facsimile of a lithograph, the result can be very deceptive and can only be distinguished from the original by close composition. In the same way it will produce deceptive facsimiles of original drawings of a granular texture. Photolithographic lines and half-tone dots have softer edges and are less sharply defined than those printed by letter press.

The photographic transfer process was introduced in India soon after 1900 by Dadasaheb Phalke (1870-1944), a versatile artist who was to later become the father Indian cinema. Phalke was trained in England in printing technology and had set up his studio in Malavli that not only worked for the Ravi Varma Press, but also for other printers who set up shop in the area.

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90 Gascoigne, Bamber; 1986, How to identify Prints- A Complete guide to manual and mechanical processes from woodcut to ink jet, Thames and Hudson, London, p.41
92 Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine; 2003, Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.15
(iv) Offset Printing Process

Offset printing is the most commonly used printing method today. It is a printing technique whereby ink is spread on a metal plate with etched images, then transferred to an intermediary surface such as a rubber blanket and finally applied to paper/disc by pressing against the intermediary surface. Offset printing works in a simple manner. It uses three cylinders to transfer the image onto the substrate. The first cylinder is mounted with the printing plate. The image on the printing plate is ‘right’ reading or written with the right side up. The first cylinder is inked and the image transferred or offset onto the second cylinder which is mounted with a rubber blanket. The image on to second cylinder is thus reversed or becomes ‘wrong’ reading. Finally the image is transferred from the blanket cylinder onto the third cylinder or the substrate. The substrate is mounted on the third cylinder also known as the impression cylinder. The image once again is reversed and becomes ‘right reading or right side up in the printed version. The first rotary offset lithographic printing press was created in England and patented in 1875 by Robert Barclay. This development combined mid 1800’s transfer printing technologies and Richard March Hoe’s 1843 rotary printing press - a press that used a metal cylinder instead of a flat stone. The offset cylinder was covered with specially treated cardboard that transferred the printed image from the stone to the surface of the metal. Later, the cardboard covering of the offset cylinder was changed to rubber, which is still most commonly used material.

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A unique characteristic of offset printing is that the image and non-image areas are on the same surface level. The printing method uses the chemical fact that oil and water do not mix to print from a single surface level. In fact, offset printing acquired this method from lithography and thus it is often referred to as litho offset printing as well. Compared to other printing methods, offset printing is best suited for cost effectively producing large volumes of high quality prints in an economically sound manner that requires little maintenance. Offset printing is the cheapest method to produce high quality printing on commercial printing quantities.  

**The Printing Process**

Offset printing is something almost every commercial printer is involved in. However the quality of offset printing often depends on the experience of the printer and the equipment used. There are three main steps in the printing process:

**(a) Pre-press Production:**

Once the artwork has been approved it needs to be converted to films and plates for printing. The film negatives are created from the digital files. The images from the negatives are then transferred onto the printing plates much like developing photographs. Different materials from paper to aluminium are used to produce plates. Each of the four colours - Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black has a separate plate. (Plate-165)

**(b) The Press Run:**

Offset printing works on the principle that oil and water do not mix. The Press run or offset printing process or offset press is made of the feeding system, the printing system or three cylinders, the inking system and the delivery system. There are different types of offset presses as well that are used for the press run.

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The press run starts with a blank substrate and ends with a printing substrate. (Plate-166)

(c) **Bindery:**

The bindery is the stage when the printed substrate is given the final treatment before it is declared ready for use. If the substrate is in the form of a large roll, it is cut into required size sheets. (Plate-167)

Thus, the offset printing process involves a number of stages and the hardwork of many professionals. It is no wonder that offset printing is a large industry in itself and the applications of offset printing are increasing day by day.  

**Types of Offset Presses**

There are two main kinds of offset presses:

(a) **Sheet fed Offset Press**

In a sheet fed press the substrate is fed to the press in single sheets and each sheet is printed individually. The printing substrate is then collected in a tray and stacked neatly. Sheet fed presses often give better quality than web fed presses. However, the latter can be more economical for larger runs. (Plate-168)

(b) **Web fed Offset Press**

In a web fed press, the substrate is fed to the press from a continuous roll. After printing the roll is either rewound onto a spool or cut into sheets depending on the requirements. Web fed presses print at a much higher speed than sheet fed presses and hence are more economical for larger runs. (Plate-169)

Advantages of offset printing compared to other printing methods include consistent high image quality- offset printing produces sharp and clean images and type more easily than letterpress printing because the rubber blanket conforms to the texture of the printing surface; quick and easy production of

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98 Ibid, p.62
printing plates; longer printing plate life than an direct litho presses because there is no direct contact between the plate and the printing surface. Properly developed plates running in conjunction with optimised inks and fountain solution may exceed run lengths of a million impressions.

Although offset printing developed in Europe before the II World war but it reached India only after Independence, as it was necessary to change the presses and acquire the new ones, an investment beyond the range of the majority of existing lithographs at that time. But the most revolutionary invention that made offset the only system employed to print colour images was the separation that reduced the number of impressions to four main colours: Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black.\textsuperscript{99} In 1960 at Sivakasi, the printing centre in the south where the calendar business was concentrated, two-colour offset machines were installed and shortly thereafter four-colour high speed presses from the German Democratic Republic.\textsuperscript{100}

\textbf{(v) Digital Printing}

Digital printing is printing using digital techniques developed for computer printers such as ink jet or laser printers.\textsuperscript{101} The use of digital printing, applications and integrations of these applications into traditional print markets is rapidly expanding. Digital, unlike the traditional print processed, is a direct to output device process thus it does not employ a “pre-press” operation as would be associated with traditional commercial printing technologies i.e. lithographic printing. In digital printing, an image is sent directly to the printer using digital files such as PDFs and those from graphic software such as illustrator and Indesign. This eliminates the need for a printing plate, which is used in offset

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\textsuperscript{99} Castelli, Enrico and Aprile, Giovanni; 2005, \textit{Divine Lithography}, United Multicolour Printers Pvt Ltd., p.45
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\textsuperscript{100} Neumayer, Erwin and Schelbeger, Christine; 2003, \textit{Popular Indian Art- Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India}, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, India, p.15
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\textsuperscript{101} Romano, Frank, J.; 2000, \textit{Digital Printing: Mastering On-Demand and Variable Data Printing for Profit}, Windsor Professional Information, LLC, California, USA, p.16
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printing, which can save money and time. Without the need to create a plate, digital printing has brought about fast turnaround and times and printing on demand. Instead of having a print large, pre-determined runs, requests can be made for as little as one print. Digital methods are being worked on at a fast rate to improve quality and lower costs.  

The digital printing process differs from lithography and letterpress printing in several ways: as every print can be different because printing plates are not required, as in traditional methods; there is no need to bring the image “up to colour” and check for registration and position; the ink or toner does not permeate the substrate as does conventional ink but forms a thin layer on the surface and may in some systems be additionally adhered to the substrate by using fuser fluid with heat process (toner) or UV curing process (ink). The other distinct difference between the use of digital applications and traditional print is the relationship between the equipment and ink delivery system. Output devices such as inkjet printer are developed with specific ink and ink delivery system in place which is unique to each digital press.

The two kinds of equipment used to produce digital printing are the Direct Imaging Press (DI) (Plate-170) and the Digital Colour Printer. (Plate-171) Both the Direct Imaging Press (DI) and the Digital Colour Printer are used for quick, short runs of digital printing, but they are quite different and give different results. DI presses are based on an offset or conventional printing method that develops the images automatically and may be waterless. Digital Colour Printers use electrophotography, Ink Jet to develop the images with toners, dry ink or dyes. A DI press usually produces better quality results, but digital printing done with a Digital Colour Printer is still comparable with traditional offset printing.  

102 Romano, Frank, J.: 2000, Digital Printing- Mastering On-Demand and Variable Data Printing for Profit, Windson Professional Information, LLC, California, USA, p.4

103 Ibid, p.16
Digital printing technology has enhanced the quality of images in such a phenomenal way that photographic as well as artistic creations commercial or otherwise can be turned into gigantic sizes and proportions in minutes saving the laborious and tedious job works done by painters. Now a bus wrap or a building wrap with this technology has enabled the graphic artists and printers to transfer mammoth and eye-catching visuals on permanent and waterproof vinyl and flex sheet surface upto a size of hundred feet and more. We can easily print on thin plastic, fabrics, poster boards, foam boards, metal, glass, wood, paper, ceramics and tiles. Benefiting from these technological advancements in documenting and transferring of images through electronic media the realm of Sikh Calendar art has apparently been stretched to cross new boundaries and shores. Images created by artists on Sikh themes are easily available in other continents in fact it has acted as a boon to the popularity and propagation of this genre of art, which has its admirers and collectors in almost all the countries where Punjabi settlers have made their homes. The rich traditions of Punjabi culture and Sikh religion a harbinger of universal ideas of peace, prosperity and goodwill of human fraternity are being shared by the vast family of mankind. In the true sense of the word Sikh Calendar art has acted as a goodwill ambassador of Sikh religion and ethos.