HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

*Sri Harmandar Sahib* at Amritsar is a living monument of the spiritual and historical traditions of the Sikh Faith founded by Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539 AD) in the state of Punjab. By the unfailing power of the Revealed Word (*Dhur kee Bard*), Guru Nanak elevated the human psyche above the torpor of meaningless rituals and fruitless mandatory visits to places of Hindu pilgrimage (*teerathas*), and invested it with an invigorating spiritual power to enable the common man to become *sachiar*, one who would lead a life of truthfulness during workaday existence. His nine successors successfully introduced healthy and progressive practices which not only replaced the prevalent ritualism but also gave to the Sikh Faith its own distinct identity.

The establishment of new centres of Sikh pilgrimage was one of the primary ways in which the Sikh Gurus accomplished their unprecedented goals. Thus, according to Madanjit Kaur, "The founding of Sri Harmandar at Amritsar was a landmark in this respect. The Temple, in due course, became an unparalleled place of pilgrimage, sung by Sikh bards from time to time". Not only has the Golden Temple's spiritual significance enhanced for the Sikhs through the centuries but the shrine has also become a major tourist centre (sixth in order of most-favoured sites) worldwide. According to a newspaper report, Amritsar is going to be directly linked to the United Kingdom to facilitate the flow of foreign visitors.

Guru Amar Das (1479-1579 AD), Third Guru of the Sikhs, is

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2 Ibid.

* Sri Harmandar Sahib became famous as Golden Temple (*Swaran Mandir*) worldwide when Maharaja Ranjit Singh (b. Nov. 13, 1780 – d. June 27, 1839) got the upper part of the Holy Shrine copper-gilded.
believed to have conceived the idea of establishing a place of pilgrimage, in order to extend the tradition of founding centres for Sikh congregations (sangat) pioneered by his predecessors. The Guru thought it fit that his children should stay at Goindwal, and Ram Das, his son-in-law and successor, shift to Amritsar, the new site, after his succession to the gurgaddi (seat of the spiritual preceptor).

The new Sikh centre was raised on the land lying between the villages of Sultanwind, Tung, Gumtala, and Gilwali which together formed part of the Jhabal pargana.

The city takes its name, Amrit-Sar (Pool of Nectar) from the site of the Holy Shrine, which was a low-lying area with a small pond where Dukh Bhanjani Beri (Zizyphus jujube) stands even today. The pond was located in a forest of shade trees, surrounded by a number of hamlets, notably, Sultanwind, Tung, Gumtala, and Gilwali. The pond lay on the route of caravans to the north-west frontier. Its environment had a geographical importance, and provided a commercial link between India and Afghanistan. The site was, however, despite its legendary status, obscure until its rediscovery by the Sikh Gurus. With the Temple, as the nucleus, plans were made to develop and expand the existing settlements into a new town.\(^3\)

The compilation of Gurbani (Guru’s Word) into the Adi Granth (The Primal Book) was the next remarkable development connected with the construction of Sri Harmandar Sahib. This was accomplished by Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606 AD), the Fifth Guru, son and successor of Guru Ram Das. The Golden Temple was built between 1588 AD and 1604 AD. The Adi Granth was ceremoniously installed in August 1604. Baba Buddha, a contemporary of Guru Nanak, who had blessed him as a boy with the title "Buddha", meaning the wise, was appointed the first Granthi (head priest) of the Temple. Since the

\(^3\) KAUR, op. cit., p. 14.
installation of the Holy Book at the shrine, worship, keertan (hymn-singing) and prescribed religious services began to be held there regularly. And soon, the Hari Mandir (literally, God's Abode), or Sri Darbar Sahib (Court of the Lord) another name for the hallowed shrine, acquired the pride of place among the Sikh shrines. Guru Arjan Dev himself commemorated the spot as one of unparalleled beauty and glory in one of his hymns.

Since Adi Granth, now called Sri Guru Granth Sahib (abbreviated as SGGS), the Sikh Bible, is revered as a living Guru by the Sikhs, and plays a pivotal role in the psycho-social and spiritual life of the community, it is pertinent to say a few words about it at this juncture. The Holy Book is a standard volume of 1430 pages and contains, according to GS Talib, 5751 shabads (hymns), or verse-units of the first five Gurus: Nanak Dev (1469-1539 AD), Angad Dev (1504-1554 AD), Amar Das (1479-1574 AD), Ram Das (1534-1606 AD), Arjan Dev (1563-1606 AD) and the ninth and tenth Gurus, Tegh Bahadar (1621-1675 AD) and Gobind Singh (1666-1706 AD)*. The stated number includes the shabads by several Bhaktas and Muslim divines.4

The Adi Granth is written in the Gurmukhi (literally from the Guru's mouth) script which is believed by many to have been invented by Guru Nanak's immediate successor, Guru Angad Dev. This departure from the use of Devnagari script was necessary because the Revealed Word of the Sikh Faith was recorded in the language of the masses. Dwelling upon the various sources from which the "language of the Holy Granth" has been drawn, GS Talib states with conclusive evidence:-

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* Of the 10 Gurus of the Sikh Faith, the names of seven have been mentioned here by virtue of their hymns included in Guru Granth Sahib. The remaining three are Guru Har Gobind (1585-1644 AD), Guru Har Rai (1630-1661 AD), and Guru Har Krishan (1656-1664 AD).
Thus Hindi and Punjabi with an admixture of philosophical terminology derived from Sanskrit on the one hand and Persian and Arabic in the current folk forms on the other, are the main linguistic warp and woof of Gurubani. In special contexts the Yogic, Brahmanical or Muslim doctrinal terminology may dominate, of which the careful reader should take account. Besides these languages, some of the dialects of the northern India, particularly Rajasthani Dingal, Sindhi and occasionally Haryanvi may be found used. The Bhaktas coming from different language regions, have naturally employed predominantly the idiom of their respective regions. Thus, in Kabir the Avadhi vocabulary predominates. So in Ramanand, Ravidas and Bhikhan. In Namdev may be beheld prominent touches of Marathi. In Jaidev, whose medium of self-expression is Sanskrit, an adaptation of Sanskrit predominates. The holy Gurus themselves have left small body of their compositions in this tongue resembling Sanskrit, probably in contexts where the message was meant for hermits and the common folk outside the language range of Punjabi and Hindi. A variety of Sanskrit was the universal India-wide medium of exchange of serious thought5.

From the foregoing account, it should be clear that the three most important pillars of the Sikh Faith were raised by Guru Arjan Dev: place of pilgrimage (teeratha), the Holy Book (Sri Guru Granth Sahib), and the Holy Shrine (Golden Temple). The significance of the Pool

5 TALIB, op. cit., p. xliii.
Guru Arjan Dev built in the middle of the Pool made by his Holy father, Guru Ram Das, a temple that he named Hari Mandir, in which the One Formless Supreme Being, Ek Oankar, Akal Purakh of Guru Nanak Dev's revealed vision, should be lauded and worshipped and no deity, visible or invisible. This great Temple, now the centre of great concourse of pilgrims everyday and the holiest of holy of the Sikh faith, is known as the Golden Temple, because of its walls and domes being plated with sheets of gold in later times. This Temple and the Pool became to Sikhism what Mecca is to Islam, Jerusalem to Judaism and Christianity, and Bodh Gaya to Buddhism. Besides establishing the Pool and the Temple, Guru Arjan Dev composed himself a large volume of sacred verse, re-enunciating the teachings of his predecessors, elucidating and amplifying them and adding visions and insights of his own. To the compositions of his predecessors he imparted an amplified form by adding to them elucidatory passages of his own composition or of some of these holy teachers themselves. This may be seen particularly in several Vars or long disquisitional compositions which form part of the sacred volume of the Granth Sahib.

PS Arshi has called the foregoing activities as the first phase of the architectural history of the Golden Temple. He states that from its very inception the Temple attracted the notice of the Mughal rulers.
who were not favourably inclined towards the Sikh Faith. And they read ulterior motives in the establishment of the new centre of pilgrimage as a potential danger to their authority. Thus the Mughals, as well as the Muslim rulers of Afghanistan, started assuming militant postures against the Sikhs. Ahmed Shah Abdali demolished the Temple as many as seven times. The last demolition took place in 1764 AD.  

After installation of the Adi Granth in the Golden Temple in 1604 AD, Guru Arjan Dev envisioned the development of the holy shrine within "a sprawling, flourishing town" to make it the Mecca of the Sikh Faith. The Guru thus instructed the Sikh sangat, to begin with, to undertake the construction of the main gateway (darshani deorhi) to the Temple on the western side of the Amrit-Sarovar. This exhortation had a two-fold function: one, to enhance the architectural composition of the shrine and two, to help defend the Mandir from the persistent attacks of the invaders.

The construction work of the complex was completed with the voluntary services (Kar Sewa) rendered by people of all shades and sensibilities. Kar Sewa is a socio-cultural principle of the Sikh Faith which makes it truly a religion I call "Pragmatic Spirituality". It is enjoined upon all Sikhs to observe three injunctions with undiminished zeal: (a) earn by honest, hard work (kirat), (b) share the fruits thereof with the under-privileged (wand chhakna), and (c) constant contemplation of the Holy Name (naam japna). Thus, the completion of the sacred project warranted a celebration steeped in prayers of thanks-giving to the Lord God. The following shabad sprang spontaneously from Guru Arjan Dev’s soul on such a unique occasion:-

God Himself hath come to fulfil the task of the saints

Yea, He Himself hath come to do the work.

And, now blessed is the earth, the Tank and the nectar with which it is filled.

Perfect is the blessing of God, and all our wishes are fulfilled.

And our victory resounds through the Universe, and all our woes are past.

Eternal is our perfect Lord, the Purusa, whose praises the Vedas and the Puranas sing.

And Nanak contemplates the Lord's Name. Thus doth God manifest His innate Nature.

By bathing in the tank of Ram Das

All the sins that man committh shall be done away,

And he shall become pure by his ablutions.

The perfect Guru hath given us this boon.

When we meditate on the Guru's instructions,

God bestoweth all comfort and happiness,

And causeth the whole cargo to cross over safely.

In the association of the saints uncleanness departeth,

And the Supreme being abideth with us.

Nanak by meditating on the Name.

Hath found God the primal Being8.
(quoted by PS Arshi)

Chequered was the history of *Sri Harmandar Sahib* during the Mughal regime. The holy shrine achieved its highest architectural glory when the Punjab was under the Sikh Rule (1802-1849 AD). Maharaja Ranjit Singh's assumption of power as a sovereign ruler stabilised the political condition of the province. According to Madanjit Kaur, when he occupied the city (ie Amritsar) in 1805, he went to Hari

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8 ARSHI, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.
Mandir to offer his homage by making large cash offerings at the Akal Takht as well as the Hari Mandir. The Maharaja built his bunga (rest-house) towards the north-west of the Hari Mandir, close to the sacred tank, for his stay whenever he came from Lahore to visit the holy shrine. The Hari Mandir became popularly known as Swaran Mandir (Golden Temple) when its upper part was covered with gold-plated copper sheets during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Most of the architectural design of the present building of the Hari Mandir as well as decoration of the holy shrine, however, is believed to have been completed in the 19th century.

The contribution of the British regime to the physical development of the Holy Shrine was confined to its electrification. According to Madanjit Kaur:-

The electrification of the Golden Temple was achieved towards the closing years of the nineteenth century. The issue had been a subject of bitter controversy between two rival Singh Sabhas, one of Amritsar and the other of Lahore. The Lahore Singh Sabha vehemently opposed the electrification of the Temple, whereas the Amritsar Singh Sabha strove hard for getting it. The resolution in favour of the installation of electricity was moved by Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia on 26 January 1896 at the 23rd annual session of the Singh Sabha at Amritsar. An eleven-member Lighting Committee was set up under the presidentship of Sardar Arjun Singh. A campaign for raising funds was started in towns as well as villages. Maharaja Bikram Singh of Faridkot, through his representative, announced a cash grant of twenty thousand rupees at the Akal Takht on 25 April 1897. On
the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of the rule of the Queen Victoria on 22nd June 1897, arrangements were made to display electricity with the help of a generator installed temporarily for the purpose. Later on, Maharaja Bikram Singh of Faridkot donated one lac of rupees for installing electricity and for raising new building for the langar. A generator and its accessories were purchased out of this fund.

Some people and parties inimical to these developments embarked on a vicious propaganda against the scheme through tracts, pamphlets, letters and editorials in dailies. They were, however, brought round and the scheme to electrify the Temple, was pushed through in 1898. Strangely enough, electricity was used for lighting the exterior parts of the Temple only, it was not admitted inside the central shrine and the Akal Takht. Complete electrification of the Temple, however, came much later, in the earlier years of the twentieth century.

The Golden Temple, beginning as a somewhat modest project at the turn of the 16th century, has been developing to highly elaborate grandiose schemes, which make it truly the Mecca of the Sikh Faith.

Since Amrit-Sarovar, or Pool of Nectar, is a very important component of the Golden Temple complex, it is necessary to say something about its maintenance. This has been done by kar sewa (service from voluntary labour). The kar sewa rendered for the desilting of the tank in the summer of 1923 was a memorable event in the history of the Temple. Undertaken by SGPC (Shiromani

9 Kaur, op. cit., pp. 82&83.
Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee) the project was inaugurated with gold spades and silver baskets after the ardaas (invocative prayer addressed to the Lord God) had been performed and prescribed religious ceremonies observed. Thousands of Sikhs from India and abroad came to partake of the consecrated operation. It was a massive gathering of the Sikh sangat drawn from all ranks and classes. The desilting operation was completed in 22 days (June 17-July 8). The whole scheme was executed in accordance with the plan. The Holy Tank was properly desilted, repairs of the substructure carried out, and the tiles laid. The sarovar was refilled with water on 9 July 1923. A similar event took place on 31 March 1973.

**Islamic Architecture**, which is always alluded to in any discussion of Sikh Architecture, had its beginning in India with Qutab-ud-din Aibak (d.1210), the founder of the Slave dynasty. Introduction by the Muslim builders of the arch, an indispensable element in building construction, was accepted hesitantly by the Indian masons who continued to combine "the system of bridging a space in the indigenous manner by means of a lintel" with the arcuate system, apparently because "they were not convinced of the latter's bearing capacities". A major achievement of what is historically designated as the Imperial style of Delhi was the use of "squinch" (an arch-vault device) in the "phase of transition" from a square base to a round support for the dome. The squinch system, according to Percy Brown, consists of projecting a small arch or similar contrivance across the upper part of the angle of the square hall, thus converting its square shape into an octagon which again, if necessary, may be transformed in the same manner into a sixteen-sided figure, a convenient base on which the lower circular rim of the dome may rest without leaving any portion unsupported. In this instance, the squinch takes the form of small vault or half dome, with an arch on its outer and diagonal face. The Indian masons were using their own brand of arch by the corbelling method of overlapping courses of brick
or stone, and then cutting the jagged shape into an arch of the desired curvature. This was not "true" arch and therefore technically "unscientific". The production of true arch by means of radiating voussoirs (wedge-shaped bricks or stones) is thus a fact of extraordinary significance, structurally speaking, to Indian architecture.

A recurrent problem was that the **dome** would be hidden for the most part by the spread of the rectangular or square structure under it. This remained unsolved until the building of Humayun's Tomb in Delhi in 1564 AD, when a **drum**, or collar-circular wall on which the dome rests, was introduced as an ingenious structural solution. Contemporaneous with the building of the Golden Temple (1588-1604 AD) are buildings of the Mughal period during the reign of Akbar the Great (1556-1605 AD) and those of the provincial style of Bijapur (16th and 17th centuries). The style of building that evolved under Akbar's patronage was chiefly executed in red sand stone, with insertions of white marble often made for architectural emphasis. According to Percy Brown:-

In principle the construction was of the trabeate order, although the "Tudor" arch was often used but mainly in its capacity as decorative arcading; as a matter of fact in its appearance but not in structure the style was arcuate and trabeate in almost equal proportions. It is also possible to see by its character that it was not far removed from a wooden archtype, a method of construction that was still practiced in the more northern parts of Hindustan as may be observed in the secular architecture of the Punjab at such places as Lahore, Chiniot and also in Kashmir. During this earlier Mughal period the dome was of the "Lodi" type, sometimes
built hollow but never technically of the true double order. The pillar shafts were usually many-sided and the capitals were almost invariably in the form of bracket supports. As to ornamentation, carved or boldly inlaid patterns were common while painted designs were often introduced on the interior walls and ceilings\textsuperscript{10}.

The architecture of Akbar’s period that remains in the fortress at Lahore is similar in style to that at Agra, as it is mainly in red sandstone with a combination of beam and bracket forming its principal structural system. There are certain characteristics in the fully matured architecture of Bijapur which are unmistakable. Chief among these is the all-important feature, the dome, which, in buildings of average proportions, is almost spherical in shape, and rises out of a band of conventional petals at its base. These forms, writes Percy Brown, were repeated to a small scale as an ornamental finish to the turrets also prominent elements in the style and which surmount the principal angles of the building like slender minarets. The shape of the arch, too, is distinctive; it has lost the angularity and forced ogee outline of its Bahmani (rulers at Bidar during 14th and 15th centuries) prototype, and assumed contours of more suavity and grace. Evidences of the expressive low impost in the archways, derived from Gulbarga (1347-1422 AD), are still observable, but this feature in the course of its transfer has been converted into a form of considerable shapeliness.

Percy Brown adds that the typical Bijapur arch is of the four-centred variety, not unlike that of the Tudor Gothic (the late perpendicular style which flourished in England from the reign of Henry VII to that of Elizabeth, 16th century), fuller in its curve. In common with all the Deccan styles, largely owing to the design and

\textsuperscript{10} BROWN, Percy., \textit{Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)}, DB Taraporevala, Bombay. P. 92.
manner of construction, the pillar is rare in the architecture of Bijapur, its place being taken by substantial masonry piers, usually rectangular in section. Finally, there is the cornice or chhajja, a characteristic architectural ornament in most of the buildings, remarkable for its size and projection and for the closely-ranked decorated brackets by which it is supported11.

Percy Brown notes four representatives examples of Bijapur architecture: the Jamia Masjid, one of the earliest to be constructed and therefore, the most powerfully simple; the Ibrahim Rauza, one of the most elaborate; the Gol Gumbaz (the correct Persian word is Gunbad), showing the style in its most grandiose form, and the Mihtar Mahall, depicting it in its miniature and, at the same time most refined and delicate manner12.

Two examples of great technical interest are the ceiling of Ibrahim Rauza and the construction of Gol Gunbad at Bijapur. In the former case, it is a room 18-feet square with a gracefully curved and coffered ceiling. This device gives the room elegant proportions while separating it from the large void of the dome above. The masonry of the ceiling is joggle-jointed and thus appears to have no visible support. Such a skillfully-built hanging ceiling shows that, in structural technique, the Bijapur masons were masters of their craft.

The second example is the interior of Gol Gunbad which consists of one chamber only, but it is a hall of majestic proportions. Like the Pantheon at Rome (118-119 AD), and St Sophia (or Hagia Sophia) at Istanbul (573 AD), is one of the largest cells ever constructed. The grand vaulted hall has tall pointed arches which support the circular platform above, to receive the base of the dome. The system of construction is simple, and begins with a square plan. As the walls gained in height the square was changed into an octagon,

11&12 BROWN, op. cit., p. 74.
and thence into a circle. This was achieved by ingeniously arranging each arch so that its feet stood within the sides of the square plan, but its plane of surface at an angle, the intersection above producing the eight-sided figure on which the circular cornice was projected. The interior surface of the great dome is set back some twelve feet from the inner edge of this circle, so that a proportion of its weight is transmitted directly downwards on to the four walls, the remainder being carried on the intersecting arches which also receive and counteract any outward thrust.

Percy Brown has classified Indian Architecture of the "Islamic Period" into three styles: (i) The Delhi or Imperial style (1200-1526 AD) beginning under the Slave Kings (in AD 1200-1246) and ending with the Lodhi Dynasty (1451-1526 AD), (ii) The Provincial styles (1150 AD—from 15 century) and the buildings of Sher Shah Sur at Sasaram (1530-40 AD) and Delhi (1540-45 AD), and (iii) the Mughal period (1526-1707 AD), beginning under Babur and ending with Aurangzeb.

Characteristics of the Imperial style, along with those of the provincial style of Bijapur, relevant to the scope of this study, have already been highlighted. It should be helpful if a brief account of the provincial style of the Punjab (1150-1325 AD) is given. Percy Brown has dated the eight principal provincial styles as follows: Punjab (1150-1325 AD), Bengal (1203-1370-1573 AD), Gujarat (1300-1572 AD), Jampur (1376-1479 AD), Malwa (1405-1569 AD), Deccan (1347-1617 AD), Bijapur (1499-1656 AD)/Khandesh (1425-1650 AD), and Kashmir (1410 AD onwards). This classification is convenient in so far as it designates separate and self-contained developments in Islamic Architecture in India as "provincial", even though they may be considered subsidiary to the main style termed "Delhi" or "Imperial". Provincial styles were affected chiefly by two factors: (i) Degree of

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13 & 14 BROWN, op. cit., pp. ix-x.
influence exercised by the parent art at Delhi through a relatively longer period of association with the Central power, and (ii) Character of the indigenous arts which prevailed within the area of the province concerned, where these actively flourished and the guilds of local artisans had produced in the past the finest temples, there developed the most elegant mosques and tombs. Besides these, unusual climatic conditions in certain parts of the country necessitated special treatment and finally there were technical differences, one kind of building materials being common in some regions and rare in others all of which naturally affected the character of the building art15.

The earliest provincial style to emerge was on the territory of the Punjab, as here the first contacts with Islam were made through principal centres: the cities of Multan and Lahore, situated about the 320 kilometres apart. According to Percy Brown, although two cities of Lahore and Multan received their Muslim attributions from different sources, with the result those of Lahore were of Ghaznavide-Saljuqian origin while those of Multan were of an Arab-Persian derivation, it is more than likely that on the whole the Indo-Islamic art culture at both centres had much in common. Such building art as these two cities produced may be regarded as one style, that of the Punjab. Since suitable stone was not readily available in the alluvial plain of the Five Rivers (Punjab), pre-medieval architecture of this province was constructed mainly of brick.

Though in Lahore, with the exceptions of the remains of timber construction, there are no examples of the building art of this period, but in Multan a group of five tombs is there to throw light on the style which immediately succeeded it. These tombs are (1) Shah Yusuf Gardizi (1152 AD); (2) Shah Bahau-l-Haqq, died 1262 AD; (3) Sadna Shahid, died 1270 AD; (4) Shah Shams-ud-din Tikrizi, died 1276 AD; and (5) Shah Rukn-i-'Alam (1320-24 AD). All are built of brick and

15 op. cit., p. 30.
there is a certain amount of woodwork in more than one of them, while glazed tiles find a place in the decoration. The first four are square in plan, but the largest and most important of all and the final example of the series, according to Percy Brown, is that of Rukn-i-'Alam, which has an octagonal plan, and a pronounced sloping outline in its lower storey. This mausoleum of a famous saint was built at Multan to the order of the Delhi ruler Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq (1320-1324 AD) and, therefore, contemporary with the construction of his royal sepulchre at Tughlaqabad. The lowest storey, though octagonal in plan, like the middle one, has a pronounced slant with the structure emphasised by the addition of tapering turrets at the angles. This is a prominent architectural feature which attracted the attention of the enthusiastic builder Firoze Shah Tughlaq, who some twenty-five years later reproduced it in his own style of architecture at Delhi.
PART - II

PRECURSOR OF THE GURDWARA

Gurdwara, as the most important building-type of Sikh Architecture, gradually evolved from its earliest counterpart called dharamsala, which remained the nucleus of the community life of the Sikhs. It proved to be such a perfect precursor of the gurdwara that it unperceptibly slipped into the latter's role. Guru Nanak, the Prophet of the Sikh Faith, has proclaimed in the 34th pauri of Japuji: “He (ie God) created Night and Day, seasons and occasions; So also Air, Water, Fire and the Nether Regions: Amidst there has He fixed The Earth, the place for Righteous Action” (ie Dharma-saai). The Guru himself established the first dharamsala at Kartarpur (founded by him) where he finally settled after his extended tours (udasis) spread over nearly three decades. It is said that the founding of dharamsala was an act of submission to God's own Edict-Fiat (hukam) which Nanak received in his Revelation: “...Inculcate men's devotion towards me and strengthen their obedience to dharma. As Vaishnavas (followers of Vishnu, the provider in Hindu trinity) have ramsal (temple), the Jogis (ascetics devoted to a yogic way of life) have their asanas (seats) and the Muslims their masjids (mosques), so your followers shall have their dharamsala.”

In the light of the foregoing exposition, therefore, theologically speaking, for a Sikh (Guru-guided seeker of Truth) whole of this earth is veritably a dharamsala, a place to practise dharma (Cosmic Moral Law). From this position, two significant points emerge. Firstly, for the Sikhs, the dharamsala was a divinely-ordained institution. Resultantly, to build it, or to make contribution towards it in any manner, was to participate in a divine mission. Secondly, it provided the Sikhs with an alternative locus for worship which was quite distinct from places of worship of other religions. Thus, to evolve as well as to preserve the Sikh identity in the early phases of Sikh
history, the institution of dharamsala had played an important role such as eventually led to the development of an entirely new (ie not derived from other religious buildings as many a scholar wrongly presumes) building-type: the gurdwara.

Balwant Singh Dhillon has written that

The evidence at our disposal suggests that the institution of dharamsala was introduced in Indian sub-continent almost simultaneously with the foundation of Sikhism. In the century that followed with the active involvement of the Sikh Gurus and the hard work put into by the Sikh missionaries the dharamsala became an essential and distinctive symbol of Sikhism. Within a short span of time the entire country, especially the Punjab and trade routes running between Chitagong and Kabul on the one hand, Agra and Burhampur on the other, were found studded with the Sikh dharamsalas.

—The Institution of Dharamsala: origin and development

The term gurdwara, in terms of its historical development, is a near-synonym for the term dharamsala. The Sikh chronicles frequently mention the establishment of dharamsalas. According to the Janam Sakhis (hagiographic accounts of the lives of the Sikh Gurus and events pertaining to them), after Guru Nanak’s visit to a particular place, a dharamsala was established by the devotees there to hold their daily religious discourses. The institution of gurdwara thus germinated in the time of Guru Nanak himself but its proper development as an unprecedented institution took place after him.

The laying of the foundation-stone by his successor, Guru Angad, of a dharamsala at Khadur, was thus a forward step in that direction.

According to Dalbir Singh Dhillon :-

Shabad-kirtan and Guru ka langar became two integrated parts of the dharmasala under the second Nanak. Dharmsala at Khadur also acquired some other special features. It also functioned as a school where ‘Gurmukhi’ script was taught. Under Guru Amar Das, the third Nanak, a dharmasala at Goindwal was another addition to the number of the dharmasalas. It also gave a new dimension to the functioning of a dharmasala. It now became an important center of all Sikh activities. Under Guru Amar Das, the addition to dharmasala activities started a definite phase in the building of the Sikh Church. The fourth Nanak, Guru Ram Das, dug a tank over the land lying between the villages of Sultanwind, Tung, Gumtala and Gilwali. The neighborhood of tank developed in the form of a town, known as Ram Das Pura, and it became the religious capital of the Sikhs.

—The Institution of Guru (Guruship), Gurdwara, Sangat and Langar17.

Shabad-Keertan is the singing of hymns from Guru Granth Sahib strictly in prescribed ragas, tune, and style. Guru ka langar is the Holy Preceptor’s community kitchen where all partake of food prepared by an unremitting labour of love whereby voluntary service is sanctified. Guru Nanak himself, after the daily congregational prayer, sat with the sangat to take his meals in the langar.

Guru Ka Langar has two interrelated aspects of pangat and sangat. Pangat means a row in which all those partaking of the food from the community kitchen have to sit on the floor regardless of

17 op. cit., p. 209.
caste, creed, colour, race, and rank. *Sangat* is the hallowed assembly of all such devotees. Thus the institution of the *gurdwara*, as the Abode of the Holy Preceptor (*Guru*), developed in the later half of the 16th century during the pontificate of Guru Arjan Dev, the fourth successor of Guru Nanak Dev. Guru Arjan Dev laid the foundation of many new *gurdwaras* and transformed the old *dharamsalas* into *gurdwaras* where large congregations (*sangats*) were henceforth continually held. During this period *gurdwaras* were built at Tarn Taran, Ram Sar, Kartarpur, Goindwal, Khadur, Amritsar, and Lahore. These *gurdwaras* eventually became important centres of the Sikh missionaries of the Punjab.

The growth of the institution of the *gurdwara* was accompanied by a new development in another institution. The *sangats* set up by Guru Nanak became the holy assembly or the *sadh sangat*. The *sangat* was the “organized fellowship” of the Sikhs. The Guru dwelt in the *sangat*. It was engaged in collective worship and organised *sewa* (voluntary labour) for the functioning of the *gurdwara*.

According to Dalbir Singh Dhillon:-

The subsequent transformation of *sangats* into *Sadh Sangats* was facilitated by the original intention of Guru Nanak in setting up these *sangats*. It has been rightly observed that the “original idea of Guru Nanak himself in setting up the *sangats* appears to have been Sat or *Sadh Sangat*, i.e. association of the pious”. Guru Nanak in one of his compositions says: “The *Sangat* is the society of the holy men. The Name of God is mentioned there”. For his Sikhs, *sangat* was an association of an individual with the ‘*Gurmukh*’. For such a *sangat* to become a *Sadh Sangat* was just a revered step. The holy
sangats were holy congregations enjoined by Guru Nanak and his successors as a commingling of holy people, which had manifold advantages. Sitting in the sangat had great influence on one's personality for even bad and wicked people could be reformed in the company of good people. This was more so because sangats of their conception repudiated distinctions of caste and birth and advocated the worship of only one God. They saw in the institution of sangat as the assembly of truth seekers and worshippers of God getting encouragement for the "Nam". Guru Amar Das stated that "associating with the Truth, one attaineth truth and loveth the True Nam".

The Sadh-Sangat was truly a revolutionary institution. It established one of the fundamentals of the social milieu of the 16th century when it removed from among those constituting the Sadh-Sangat all distinctions of caste, creed, colour, gender, and race. All were treated as equal in the true sense of the word.

Khushwant Singh has aptly highlighted the ethico-spiritual significance of Guru Ka Langar. He observes: "Guru Amar Das made the langar an integral institution of the Sikh Church by insisting that anyone who wanted to see him had first to accept his hospitality by eating with the disciples". It is said that when Akbar the Great came to see Guru Amar Das at Goindwal, he had to take meals in the langar. The Mughal Emperor was so much impressed that he made a grant of revenue-free land to the Guru as his contribution to the success of the langar institution. The contribution of the institution of langar and sangat to the growth of the Sikh Faith in the 16th century was great. They became two integrated constituents of the gurdwara

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18 op. cit., p. 211.
activities. Wherever the sangat was established it led to the emergence of langar. Underscoring the spirit of social welfare among the Sikhs, developed by the institution of langar, the Sikh Gurus have pointedly referred to it in their Bani. Guru Nanak avers: “He alone, O Nanak, knoweth the Way (to God-realisation) who earneth/By the sweat of his brow and shareth it with others”.

The Sikh Faith is a Religion of Pragmatic Spirituality developed on the principle of practical, individual and public morality or dharma (Cosmic Law of Ethics) by the Sikh Gurus themselves. To spread this unique, divinely-ordained message of the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God dharamsalas were established as addition of a new building-type to the repertoire of Indian architecture. In fact, dharamsalas steadily grew into well-knit centres of far-reaching ethico-spiritual import.

According to Balwant Singh Dhillon: “Towards the close of the 16th century, besides Kartarpur, founded by Guru Nanak, there were Khadur, Goindwal, Ramdaspur, Tarn Taran, Kartarpur (Doaba) and Sri Hargobindpur, which developed into important Sikh centres primarily because they had been founded by the Sikh Gurus themselves... With the introduction of the institutions of manji and later on the masand system, the Sikhs appointed on these institutions played significant role to build up dharamshalas in their respective areas and zones”.

**Design Criteria for Dharamsala:** For the Sikhs, the entire world is a dharamsala, sacred because it is God’s own creation, and, as mentioned earlier, they are supposed to perform their religious and secular activities in accordance with the Cosmic Moral Law (dharma). The Sikh Faith does not subscribe to the belief, as other religions do, that God resides at a specific place or in a particular direction. Therefore, the Sikh dharamsalas, unlike the Hindu mandir and the

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19 ibid.

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Muslim *masjid*, were not built on axis oriented in the direction of any prescribed cardinal point. The early *dharamsala* may have been a small and simple structure usually consisting of a single room large enough for a congregation of the local Sikhs most of whom belonged to the working classes and were not financially well-off. One may conjecture that the local or community *dharamsalas*, which had come up in the countryside, small towns, and *qasbas* were simple oratories for daily prayers. With the compilation of the Sikh scripture, the *Adi Granth* became the most prized possession of the *dharamsalas*, and was ceremoniously installed and prominently displayed in the congregational hall. These *dharamshalas* were generally without big, complex, and decorative furnishings such as are a familiar sight in modern-day *gurdwaras*.

Other integral rituals of everyday Sikh way of life have provided important building elements to *gurdwara* architecture.

Balwant Singh Dhillon writes: -

Since, Sikhism has enjoined upon its followers to observe external as well as internal purity, eventually, *isnan*, customary bath in the early morning has developed into an essential religious practice. Early Sikh literature abounds in evidence about the merits of *isnan* and its popularity among the early Sikhs. That was the basic reason that the *dharamsala* complex often included provisions for public bath. Wherever natural sources of water were not available, the *dharamsala* complex had a *baoli*, well or *rehat* (Persian Wheel) in its courtyard or a water-pool adjoining to it, which besides supplying water for customary bath, overcame the scarcity of water of the locality.²⁰

²⁰ *op. cit.*, p. 189.
As a World Religion of Revelation, the Sikh Faith has sought to show a way and view of life that is at once wholesome and holistic, synergising Body, Mind, and Soul into an eager receptacle of God’s grace, by honest livelihood, social sharing, and an unremitting Naam-contemplation to sanctify one’s thoughts, words, and deeds. In such a scheme of things, humility, which Guru Nanak has described as the virtue of all virtues, becomes a psycho-spiritual superconductor of Grace for an unaltering performance of socially-beneficent actions during a Sikh’s workaday existence. Such a life is the lot of a Gurmukh (ie Guru-oriented) devotee who constantly seeks the commandments for his multifarious activities from the Fountainhead of Divinity: the Adi Granth.

Dalbir Singh Dhillon has underscored the indispensability of the Adi Granth as follows:-

The Adi Granth became an everlasting institution of 'Guru in Sikhism'. Through the Guru's word man attained perfection. The concept of Guru in Sikhism was not an incarnation. He was God's trusted servant and messenger sent to the world, to encourage righteousness and to uproot evil. The Guru in Sikhism was a perfect man, who could convert a human being into his like. "The Guru resides in the Sikh. It is this belief which makes a Sikh a Superman". Guru Ram Das said: "The Guru is the Sikh and the Sikh who practices the Guru's word is equal to the Guru". It deserves notice that the Guru's word preserved in the form of scripture later came to be put in a revered place called Gurdwara an integrated and indispensable part of Sikh way of life. The Guru and finally his 'Word' as preserved in the scripture became the living feature of the Sikh
tenets. The Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh had invested the *Adi Granth* with guruship, and commanded the Sikhs to accept it as their future Guru. As such Guru's 'Word' [scripture] was given status equal to the Guru himself and was placed on the raised place in the *Gurdwara*. The institution of *Gurdwara* not only originated but also got its development to honour the Guru's 'Word' or scripture.21

From the foregoing exposition, it should be evident that the *dharamsala* was, indeed, a new building-type tailor-made to serve befittingly the requirements of a new religion: the Sikh Faith. Thus the *Adi Granth (The Sikh Bible)* became the presiding Guru, as a living force, to charge the entire ambience of the *dharamsala* with palpable divinity. In other words, a spiritual environment was created in and around the *dharamsala* whose nucleus became the *Adi Granth*.

Balwant Singh Dhillon has summed up this subject beautifully:

The *dharamsala* always served as a centre of Sikh spirituality. It led the way to achieve summum-bonum while residing in the family and society. It was a place where higher values like dhiraj (serenity), dharama, truth etc. dominated the environment. Guru Arjan Dev refers to atmosphere at *dharamsala* where instead of rancour, humility prevailed all around. In the words of Bhai Gurdas, the *dharamsala* alone possessed that spiritual tranquility which a seeker longed for in atmosphere of worldly tension. He is very emphatic to state that the disturbing effect of worldly wealth (maya) on the minds of the men could be removed only by experiencing the

21 op. cit., p. 207.
Spiritual environment of the dharamsala. He compares it with Mansarover lake where Gursikhs like swans assemble in the congregation. Throughout the Sikh literature the dharamsala and its successive institution, the gurdwara has been referred as the abode of God. According to Bhai Gurdas, the dharamsala served as an earthly residence for God and atmosphere designed to replicate His celestial kingdom. It was perfectly natural therefore that the Sikhs who were disgusted and frustrated with their personalities torn by inner conflicts, thronged to dharamsala in search of spiritual solace. A cursory glance at the Sikhan di Bhtgtnla, affirms that the spiritual atmosphere of dharamsala not only soothed their excited nerves but (also) integrated their personalities to the highest point of inner harmony to transform them into Gurmukhs.

With absolutely no restriction as to caste, colour, creed, gender, race, and rank, the dharamsala and its allied institutions were open to all throughout the day. Significantly, unlike the Muslim mosque, the dharamsala did not have a separate space screened off for the women devotees. The Sikh Faith enjoined upon the women not to observe purdah while visiting the dharamsala. The Sikh dharamsala, according to Bhai Gurdas, the maternal uncle of Guru Arjan Dev and a Sikh savant of exceptional learning, was such a unique religious place where the Guru and the disciples (The Sikhs), men and women, high and low, young and old, all worshipped together. By contrast, in some religions, the sanctum sanctorum of the shrine is a prohibited area for the laity. Only the clergy, priests or a few socially-privileged persons, have an access to it. Contrary to such a custom, every nook

22 op. cit., p. 199.
and corner of the dharamsala was open to public view. Besides, there is no fixed quorum for performing religious services.

Balwant Singh Dhillon writes:

Unlike the synagogue and mosque of the Jewish and Muslim community respectively, to hold the religious service at dharamsala no specific quorum has been fixed. The underlying idea behind it was that dharamsala services are continuous process. It should not distinguish between a small and large assembly. Even the needs of an individual visitor should be taken care of. However, to decide the community matters five Sikhs comprised the quorum to constitute a representative body of the community.

In summary, the dharamsala emerged as a new building-type to serve the unprecedented requirements of the Sikh Faith. The installation of the Adi Granth in it made the dharamsala a prototype for the gurdwara, which, by incorporating the institution of langar and allied amenities, grew into a comprehensive complex of great psycho-social, spiritual significance. Its design criteria, such as no preference for any specific orientation, sprang from the deeper meanings of the Revealed Word (Gurbani). Besides celebrating the congregational worship, the dharamsala has also been the favoured place for public assembly. It was here that the Sikhs gathered to contemplate religious exhortations and to debate secular issues concerning their new-fangled community. Primarily, therefore, the dharamsala was the Fountainhead of Spirituality which inspired the Sikhs to cherish the higher values and to live up to their intrinsic divinity through socially-beneficent action in utmost humility during workaday existence.

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23 op. cit., p. 200.
Guru Nanak has called God by several epithets such as *Wah-e-Guru*, which means: Hail the Holy Preceptor, for, He alone can and does guide a seeker of Truth (His Own Essence) on the long and arduous journey of spiritual liberation. *Wah-e-Guru* is an acronym of four words: Vishnu (The sound of the letter 'W' is identical with that of 'V'), Hari, Gobind, and Ram, and is believed to refer to the Presiding Deity of each of the four *yugas* (traditionally taken to last together for 43,20,000 years). Guru is a compounding of two sounds: 'gu' and 'ru', and means one who dispels the darkness of ignorance. The Temple was originally named *Hari Mandir* ie Hari's Abode. The appellation *Darbar Sahib*, ie Court of the Lord, was in currency for a very long time. The Holy Shrine of the Sikh Faith became known as the Golden Temple when Maharaja Ranjit Singh had it copper-gilded and the Britons coined for it the new name by which it is now known throughout the world. If the Golden Temple is the Abode of the Lord God, His Presiding Presence is the Holy Spirit embodied in the *Adi Granth* (The Primal Book), which is the Sikh Bible.

The *Adi Granth* was compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Nanak's fourth spiritual successor, and is a 1430-page standard volume. While compiling the Holy Book, Guru Arjan took care to include in it the hymns of devotion composed by some of the so-called untouchable (*shudra*) Bhaktas (literally, those imbued in the colour of God). This was meant to demonstrate that, in the eyes of the Guru, not only should an untouchable receive religious ministrations, but should he have in him piety and enlightenment, be also set up as a spiritual teacher. Out of such Bhaktas of the lower castes were Kabir, a weaver, Ravidas, a cobbler, Namdev, a dyer; and Sadhna, a butcher. In their own pronouncements the Sikh Gurus have thus left their testament:

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God's teaching to all four castes,
Khatri, Brahmin, Shudra and Vaish may be imparted,
Whoever by the Master's guidance utters the holy
Name is liberated.
Saith Nanak: In each vessel does the Lord abide.

(Suhi, Guru Arjan Dev, 50, page 747)
Khatri, Brahmin, Shudra and Vaish — anybody may utter
God's holy mantra.
Worship ye the holy transcendent lord—
Serve Him day and right.

(Bilaval, Guru Amar Das, 5, page 800)

Installation of the Adi Granth in the Golden Temple: When the Adi Granth was ready in 1604 AD, Guru Arjan Dev appointed Baba Buddha, a contemporary of Guru Nanak, as the first granthi (priest) of the Hari Mandir. The Holy Granth wrapped in silken scarves (rumalas) was carried to the sanctum sanctorum (parkash asthan) in a palanquin on their shoulders by the devout Sikhs while Guru Arjan Dev waved the fly-whisk (chavar) as a mark of reverence, with barefooted devotees following in a ceremonial procession. The Holy Granth was installed in the parkash asthan on a cot with Baba Buddha in attendance and the congregation (Sangat) sitting all around with great devotion. Guru Arjan Dev then asked Baba Buddha to open the Granth at random and read out a hymn to the holy assembly. The Guru also introduced the institution of kirtan (literally, to sing hymns of praise to the Glory of the Lord God) according to prescribed ragas (musical modes) and tunes.

Religious Services at the Golden Temple: The Golden Temple remains open throughout the day except between 12:00 night and 4:00 a.m. when the Holy Book is put to rest at Kotha Sahib.

26 op. cit., p. 25.
(Lord’s Resting Chamber). The Darshani Deorhi is closed at 11:00 p.m., and reopened at 3:00 a.m. During this period, a few volunteers stay inside for washing and cleaning the Temple, and dusting and changing the floor-sheets. The washing is done with kachchi lassi (milk diluted with water taken from the Har-ki-Pauri). The floor is then wiped dry with towels. While the operation clean-up lasts, non-stop singing of hymns continues outside. Also, non-stop reading of the Sacred Scripture continues on the upper storey of the Golden Temple.

After the opening of the doors and installation of Guru Granth Sahib in the sanctum sanctorum every morning, non-stop kirtan renditions are made by a chain of ragi jathas (approved groups of hymn-singers trained in the Sikh musical tradition). The kirtan starts one hour after the opening of the gates in the morning and is followed by recitation of Asa-di-Var, and then the Holy Book is installed. At 12 noon the raagis melodiously recite Anand Sahib. Charan Kamal Arti is performed at 3:00 p.m. From 5:00 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. the raagis recite Sodar, and from 6:45 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. they perform aarti through keertan. After the evening service, keertan is resumed and it goes on till 9:45 p.m. With this ends the devotional singing and religious services for the day when, after prescribed ceremonies, the Guru Granth Sahib is carried back with ritualistic reverence to Kotha Sahib for rest during the night²⁷.

²⁷ op. cit., p. 51.