Chapter I

SOCIAL CONTEXT

The Punjab, historically so known, not the present-day Punjab, comprises six doabs or intra-fluvial tracts. These are the Sind-Sagar Doab—lying between the Indus and the Jhelum; the Chaj Doab—between the Jhelum and the Chenab; the Rechana Doab—between the Chenab and the Ravi; the Bari Doab—between the Ravi and the Beas; the Bist-Jullundur Doab—between the Beas and the Sutlej; and the Cis-Sutlej Doab—between the Sutlej and the Jamuna. All these rivers have their sources in the Himalayas and the confluence of their water, except those of the Sind and the Jamuna, takes place at Panjnad in the south-west corner of the Multan district, now in West Punjab in Pakistan.

Along the northern borders of the Punjab run the Himalayas which divide it from Kashmir. In its west and the north-west lies Afghanistan from which it is separated by the
Suleiman range of mountains. On its southern borders, it
encroaches upon the great plains of the Rajputana desert. The
eastern boundary of the Punjab is not distinctly marked, but
from a point near Karnal where Jamuna plunges south-eastwards,
a jagged line can be drawn up to Panjnad which will demarcate
the state from the rest of Hindustan and the Sind desert.

Geographically, the highlands and the plains of the
Punjab can be divided into four major tracts. 'The Himalayan
Tract' includes most of the region which now falls in the new
state of Himachal Pradesh and the people of this tract mostly
consist of Hill Rajputs, Brahmins and other castes. Skirting
the foot of the hills and including the low outlying range of
the Shivaliks, runs the narrow 'sub-montane tract'. It includes
the whole of the Hoshiarpur District and the northern parts of
the districts of Ambala, Gurdaspur, Sialkot and Gujrat. Before
the partition of Punjab in 1947, the Hindu element strong in
Ambala and Hoshiarpur, gradually gave way to the Muslim element
as we passed westwards through Gurdaspur till it faded into
cumparative insignificance in Sialkot.

Below this tract, the whole region consists of a wide
expanses of plains. A meridian through the city of Lahore divides
this wide expanses into two tracts: 'The Eastern Plains' and 'The
Western Plains'. The country of the Talwara, the Doaba (Jullundur-
2 Doab) and the Rajha form 'The Eastern Plains' and this region is

1. See Khushwant Singh, A History of the Sikhs, I, p.3.
2. Also spoken of as 'Manjha'.
the stronghold of the Sikhs. Most of that area of the Punjab, which in consequence of partition, has fallen to Pakistan, constitutes 'The Western Plains'. It includes the Sindh-Sagar Doab, the Rechna Doab and the 'lower-Bani Doab'.Mohammedan population predominates in this tract.

Being situated between Hindustan and the passes through which alone access to it from the great Asian Continent is possible, the Punjab, due to its geographical position, saw many far-reaching historical developments. These shaped and conditioned whatever activity it had in the field of art, language and culture. During the long course of history, the Punjab saw invasion after invasion thus bringing diverse ethnic groups and heterogeneous masses of people to the land. Local women being taken in marriage by the invaders who settled in the Punjab led to the mingling of the blood of many races.

During the period of Mughal supremacy from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, comparative peace prevailed in the province but when Mughal rule declined, the Punjab again became the scene of irruptions from the north-west. Between 1748 and 1767, Ahmad Shah invaded India eight times and the desolation which Ahmad Shah's army brought in its train is fully expressed by the proverb still current in the Punjab: "what one eats and drinks is one's own, the rest is Ahmad Shah's".

1. Khuda pita lahe de.
Raki Ahmad Shaha de.
During this time, the Sikhs had been consistently gathering strength. The last of the ten great Gurus having died in A.D. 1708, and the spiritual organization under a Guru being no more, gradually there grew up a loose political and military confederation, the twelve misals. Though the misals had a unity and a sense of common cause against the enemy of their faith, there were occasional inter-misal wars. The history of Punjab during the terrible fifty years of the second half of the 18th century is a story of continuous war and bloodshed.

At the very end of the 18th century, Ranjit Singh appeared on the scene and found in his land a weakening confederacy which was a prey to the factions of its chiefs. At this hour, the Punjab was merely a geographical expression with no sense of co-operation among its people. With his great ability as a general, he carved out for himself a powerful and well-organized kingdom. After a very long time, he brought relative peace back to the Punjab, gave her an organized administration, gave to the people of the land in general and to the Sikhs in particular, a sense of pride and self-esteem and placed them on the road to prosperity.

The first acquisition of any Punjab territory by the British, resulted from Lord Lake's Maharatta campaign and its end in the treaty of Sarj-i-Anjanga (Dec. 30, 1803). The territory acquired was the country on the right bank of the Jamuna. The next important occurrence was Maharaja Ranjit

Singh's signing the treaty of April, 1809 which left him master of the tract he had originally occupied to the South of the Sutlej but confined his ambition to expand his kingdom to the north and west of that river. With the proclamation of protection to Cis-Sutlej States against the Lahore power, made in May, 1809, the Chiefs of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot, Malerkotla, and Kalsia were confirmed as feudal princes by the British. The treaty of 1846, after the First Sikh War, resulted in the surrender of the Cis-Sutlej districts of Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Ambala, as well as the whole of the Jullundur Doab, and the payment of heavy indemnity, in lieu of which the state of Jammu and Kashmir was ceded to the British and granted to Maharaja Gobind Singh. After the Second Sikh War, the proclamation annexing the Punjab to the British territory was made at Lahore on the 30th of March, 1849.

The new administrative set up included two classes of territory: one belonging to the British and the other in the possession of feudal chiefs. The territory belonging to the British was divided into eight Divisions embracing twenty-seven districts. In 1858, the Divisions of Delhi and Hissar were formally incorporated into the province of the Punjab adding six more to the twenty-seven original districts. The Thanesar district, however, was broken up in 1862. This division of the province into ten Divisions and thirty-two districts continued unchanged for twenty-two years. In 1884, however, the ten Commissionerships were reduced to six. The area of the British territory was 106,632 square miles and
corresponding figures for the collective Native States were 35,817 square miles.

The Punjab, in the first half of the 19th century, was a relatively thinly populated country. The Sikhs, the Hindus and the Mohamadans were the three major communities. H.M. Lawrence, at the middle of the century, loosely estimated the population of the Punjab at about a quarter of a million of Sikhs, half a million of Musalmans, and three quarters of a million of Hindus, but this was a wild guess. The successive censuses taken in 1853, 1866 and 1881 put the total population of the Punjab at 15,161,321; 17,609,518 and 18,850,437 respectively. The figures pertaining to the followers of the three different communities given in these three censuses show that the Musalmans always numbered more than the combined numbers of the Hindus and the Sikhs.

"Region, race and tradition are the collective determinants of art, and it is not easy to isolate the influence of each single factor on art product of a particular country or people." The history of the Punjab makes it clear that its people seldom had an opportunity to experience 'peace', and consequently remained devoid of all the blessings which the 'reign of peace' freely confers on humanity.

5. Hbetson, op.cit., I, p.109
Inhabitants of the Punjab were constant sufferers of war and rapine, nevertheless they had a taste for beauty. They indulged in creative activities whenever peace prevailed, even if for a short period. But historical conditions seldom allowed them to create masterpiece in any field of art. The tragedy was that whenever any plant of creative activity sprouted, its root was chopped off by fresh state of anarchy.

Although the Sikhs' "unitarian form of belief and the ban against image-worship left very little scope for the development of visual art for needs of religious worship" yet they helped its promotion, primarily because the Sikhs were as fond of decoration as the Hindus were and spent large sum of money for the beautification of their shrines. In Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time Sikhs had royal patronage and the Sikhs started devoting themselves to the magnificence and splendour of their shrines. Now the cult of the Gurus and the Sikhs' passionate adoration of these spiritual leaders were demanding an artistic expression. The walls of over 700 shrines associated with the Sikh Gurus in the Punjab were available for embellishment. The endowments and

1. O.C. Gangoli, "The Sikh School of Painting", Indian Art Souvenir, p. 5.
5. See Hanuman Singh, Punjab, the Homeland of the Sikhs, p. 33.
eleemosynary grants worth thousands of rupees provided for these shrines to be built in marble masonry. Contributions in the form of money, produce and labour by the Sikhs for the construction of these shrines, came in vogue. Many individuals went to the extent of getting certain portions of the walls painted as an act of dedication.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Sikhs had devoted themselves to their own preservation. The conditions of Sikh life having undergone a considerable change since the emergence of Ranjit Singh, however, an opportunity existed for encouraging the visual arts. But the limitations imposed upon the Sikhs by the absence of any artistic heritage, were considerable. All they could easily achieve was the enrichment of interiors and exteriors of their lodgings and religious edifices and get some excellent portraits of Sikh nobility painted. As has been said: "The idea of beauty that obtains at a given time, and in a given class of society, has its roots... in the historical conditions in which this society or class arose and existed."

1. See J. D. Cunningham, A History of the Sikhs, p. 385; Chopra, op. cit., pp. 126-127
2. For instance, the painting of a mural in three niches in the name of Nana (child) Bilana Singh and Mai (elderly woman) Piari at Akal Takhat, Amritsar, was provided for by Hari Singh, as is evident from the inscription on one of the paintings of these niches; see plate No.8. This practice is still prevalent at the Sanctum of Baba Bahala in Amritsar district.
3. G. V. Pikhanov, Art and Social Life, p. 184
The general prosperity of the Sikhs and their sense of self-esteem were not the only causes for the new interest in mural painting; their intimate relationship with the Hindus was also a factor in this development. The Sikhs had given up their protestant attitude towards Brahmanical Hinduism and the followers of both the orders drew so close to each other that the distinction between Sikh and Hindu became one of mere form; the Sikhs wore their hair and beards unshorn, the Hindu did not. Nearly all the Sikh villagers revered and made use of the Brahman almost as freely as their Hindu neighbours did. Their day-to-day religious practices had been affected by Hindu Brahmanical symbols and associations to the extent that at popular agricultural level worship of icons of gods and goddesses had become all but common. Even in the precincts of the premier Sikh temples, there were idols of Roma and other Hindu gods and deities.

It was through reciprocal processes that traditions and customs of the two faiths interpenetrated into each

4. Ray, op. cit., p. 167
5. See M.D. Paul Singh, "Caste in a Sikh Village", Sikhism and Indian Society, p. 36; also see Mrs. J.C. Murray Wmsley, Our Visit to Hindostan, Kashmir and Ladakh, p. 246.
other resulting in harmony and profoundly influencing their daily life. Perhaps all this originated from their mutual "emotional identification", for they had suffered together from oppression under the later Mughals. The akharas of the Udasis had served as a unifying institution for the Hindus and the Sikhs. The Hindus frequently worshipped at Sikh shrines; we even have the 'Brahamana Wala Sunder' built by Brahmans in the vicinity of the gurdwara at Tarn Taran. Even the Ram Lila used to be performed in the Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran.

The close and amicable relationship between the Sikhs and the Hindus, right from the lower strata of society, through the middle class up to the very top of the circle, was noticeable. Hindu festivals were celebrated with great pomp and show in the Sikh Court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Dusshera and Holi were functions of great rejoicing and no less than one lakh of rupees used to be spent upon the latter occasion. The attempt made by the Jat Sikh family of the

1. Sant Singh Sekhon, "Is there a Sikh Culture?", The IllustratedWeekly of India, Oct., 1971, p. 25
6. Ibid., pp. 41, 43, 44, 46, 49-50; also see Ramvir Singh Kang, "Holi in 19th Century Punjab", The Sunday Tribune, March 6, 1977, p. 5.
Sanitubwa jias for admission to the social rites of the
Kshatriyas, perhaps as a further augmentation to their
social status, bespeaks of the tendency of the Sikh
aristocracy to get incorporated into the large Kshatriya
fold through observing Hindu rituals.

Hindu-Sikh relations, amicable as they were, had
far reaching effects. The veneration of Hindu gods did
not at all affect the Sikhs' devotion to their Gurus,
and the holy Guru Granth Sahib continued to be their
supreme spiritual guide. On the other hand, it modified
the earlier orthodox attitudes of the Sikhs which made
them refrain, among other things, from depicting their
Gurus in pictorial art with its association of image-
worship. Portraits of the Sikh Gurus began to be painted
on walls as well as on paper. The building of Hindu
temples by the Sikhs and installation of idols in the new
shivalaes by them, resulted in the appearance of Sikh
themes in the wall-paintings of temples devoted to Hindu

1. See Cunningham, op. cit., p. 304, Appendix IV.
2. Though the Sikh Gurus condemned image-worship, they
were not against representational art.
3. One is reminded here of the modification wrought by
social forces in the religious outlook of the disciples
of the Buddha which resulted in the appearance of
Buddha's image in art; see Radha Kamal Moorkerji, Ancient
India, p. 236
294, wherein it is stated that Shivala of Ek Onkar in
district Karnal was built at the expense of Maharaja Ranjit
Singh; also see Objects of Antiquarian Interest in the
Punjab and Its Dependencies, pp. 4-5, wherein it is stated
that Shivala Har Vir Bhan at Amritsar was built by
Sardar Dasa Singh.
 Similarly the building of *gurudwara* by Hindus led to Hindu themes being painted on the walls of Sikh shrines.

The fact that there were Hindu priests at certain Sikh shrines and Sikh priests at certain Hindu shrines, also caused this exchange of themes which did not extend only to mural painting but also percolated into other areas like Janam Sakhi Paintings and wood-carving.

The Muslims in the Punjab who outnumbered the combined Hindu and Sikh population, did not favour painting at least on the walls, due to the general prejudice against 'the image' in Islam. But even here, they had been influenced by their contacts with the Hindus.

Speaking of the characteristics of race being more deep-rooted and enduring than those of religion, Cunningham points out that many Mohammedans clung sometimes to the beliefs and faiths of the Hindus from whom they had

1. See Guriaspouri D.C. 1982-84, p. 98, wherein it is stated that Diwan Hanak Bakhsh offered a sum of Rs.50,000 for the building of *gurudwara* at Dera Baba Nanak.
2. The priests of Manj Devi Temple near Mani Majra, now in the Union Territory of Chandigarh, were Sikhs. See Ibbetson, _op. cit._, p. 137.
4. For example, a beautiful wood-carved lintel of 19th century at the entrance of the house of Sati Som Nath at Baldarian on the Malerkotla-Habba road, depicts Guru Gobind Singh on horseback in its extreme left panel while the rest of the panels depict Hindu gods. Also see Kanwarjit Kano, "Wood-carving in Punjab and Haryana", _The Sunday Tribune_, May 1, 1977, p. 5.
5. Cf. "Painting, contrary to the popular idea, is not forbidden by any passage of the Koran, and the hostility to it only took proper theological form towards the end of the 8th century A.D." — _The Encyclopaedia of Islam_, L, p. 612.
6. _op. cit._, p. 12.
writes Ibbetson, "retain and see Brahmans as a matter of course; while some actually employ them to conduct their marriages after the Hindu ceremonial, only adding the Mohammedan ritual as a legal precaution." Living thus side by side with their Hindu brethren in the same or the next village, sharing property in the same land, and forming a part of the same family with them, it was impossible that the Muslim converts should not have largely retained their old customs and ideas.

There were many areas of contact and mutual influence. Thus, many tombs of Muslim saints were venerated both by the Hindus and the followers of Islam.

2. Ibid., L, p. 112 "In 'The Eastern Plains' of the Punjab, the change of faith from Hinduism to Mohammedanism was usually confined to one or two members of a brotherhood and it was common to find one branch of a joint village community Musalmans and the other Hindus"; see ibid., op. cit., L, p. 142.
3. Ibid., p. 142.
Muslim ghadis and rababris were the chief musicians at the 1
Sikh shrines in Amritsar and Mankana Sahib. The Sikhs also 2
shared in Muslim festivals like Moharram and attended 3
fairs at their shrines. They also paid respect at the tombs 4
of various Muslim saints.

The queer manner in which religions were intermingled
in the 19th century Punjab is demonstrated by the principal
shrine of Sahib Sarwar Sultan at Nigaha in the Dera Gazi Khan
district which, besides containing a tomb of the prominent
Muslim saint and his wife, also had in its complex, a shrine 5
to Guru Nanak and a temple to Vishnu. It does not come
as a surprise then when we find that Muslim masons worked 6
for the construction of Hindu and Sikh shrines; that 7
Muslim painters painted murals on Hindu, Sikh and even 8
Jain themes, and that Muslim craftsmen carved figures of

1. See Sant Singh Sekhon, loc. cit., p. 25.
3. Ibid., p. 8; Mohan Lal, Travels in the Punjab, pp. 17-18;
also see M.S. Randhawa (ed.), Punjab (P), pp. 204-205.
5. Ibid., op. cit., I, p. 119.
6. For example, two Muslim masons, Shara and Nikal
worked for the construction of Haru Ka Mandir at
Shahpur, in Sangrur district. The names of these
masons are written on one of the walls of the said
temple.
7. See Gian Gian Singh, Tavarkh Sri Amritsar (P),
p. 50-51, wherein Mistry Mohamed Yar Khan is stated
to have been entrusted with the work of gilding the
domes of Golden Temple, Amritsar.
8. See V.P.S. Rau, "A Golden Chapter from Cis-Sutlej History",
The Sunday Tribune, Feb. 21, 1971, p. 5, wherein the
author states that the murals in Chandhry Chandrasep's
Devankhanda at Dadri were painted by a Muslim painter
Vazed Khan.
9. Shri Satpal Jain, who was interviewed at Zira told me
that the murals in the Jain temple of Zira were painted
by Nazar Mohammed.
Hindu gods on wooden lintels of Hindu houses; on the other hand, the Mohammedan tradition of decorating walls of shrines with texts from the holy book was adopted by the 1 Sikhs, and texts from Guru Granth Sahib began to appear 2 on the walls of gurdwaras as one of the forms of mural arts; The painting of exquisite floral designs, in which Mohammedans had excelled since time immemorial were adopted by Hindus and Sikhs and became an integral feature of mural decoration on their edifices.

While Muslim painters painted murals in Hindu and Sikh edifices with human figures, in their own buildings they confined themselves to the painting of floral designs. It is only very rarely that they took the liberty of painting birds, animals or human figures on the walls of Mohammedan shrines. We know of the village of Khangah Dogran in Gujranwala district where tombs of Muslim saints

2. As is evident from the interior walls of the Golden Temple, Amritsar.
were painted with pictures of birds and animals. There is, likewise a painting of camel and a dog on one of the walls of the mausoleum of Lapa Shah at Jagraon. Mural paintings with human figures are also extant in the Mohammedan tomb at Aandlu, a village in district Ludhiana, and in the Khangah of Dargahi Shah in village Bhan Bhojswal in district Amritsar. We even hear of a tombstone receiving the attention of a painter, Mr. H.B. Edwards who saw this in 1847 in the hereditary cemetery of Khyreah and Bhusurb villages, near Sultan recorded thus:

Rule figures of flowers are scrawled in whitewash over the upright stones, and on one of the more pretensions than the rest was an attempt at Mulukpol-moust, riding on his ghastly charger, but bearing in his hand a cup of water, a sign that the dead man lived well and died in peace.

But this must be seen really as an altogether uncommon occurrence.

With no taboos of any kind in this regard restricting them, the Hindus had a great deal of painting. On many religious festivals and other social occasions, the Hindus made use of mural art in the form of ceremonial

1. See R.W. Trafford, "Pictures on Musalman Tombs", Indian Antiquary, XXVII, May 1903, pp. 140-
2. See Gazetteer of India—Punjab, Ludhiana, p. 658 and see plate facing p. 658;
3. See plate No. 23.
4. See plate No. 73. Architecturally this Khangah appears to have been constructed in the 17th or the early 18th century.
paintings which were different from the murals executed as permanent works of art. Homes were decorated or marked with hands and other designs each of which originally had a symbolic meaning of its own. In Haritsar and Gujrat, thus, figures of deities were drawn on the occasion of chath or house-warming ceremony. This type of ceremonial decoration was popular also in the Eastern Punjab and is still in vogue in many villages. Similarly the painted or carved image of Ganesha, to be seen in countless Hindu shops received worship before they commenced their business in the morning. It was customary to have a figure of Ganesha painted above most of the Hindu doorways. If, as has been observed, it was the chief ambition of the Hindus in the 19th century Punjab to build a brick house of their own, the lime-plastered walls of their houses provided an ideal ground for mural work.

Murals also appeared all over the countryside in the Punjab on samadhi and masar of holy men in India the process of deification (being) aided by the tendency to develop the tomb raised over a man of eminence into a temple.

2. Ibid., p. 913.
3. Ibid., pp. 913-915.
5. See W. J. Wilkins, Modern Hinduism, p. 52.
6. See Punjab Notes and Queries, 1, May 1934, No. 5, p. 87.
7. See Inbetson, op. cit., I, p. 102.
8. For instance, the temple of Ramachandra at Nathana in district Bhatinda, Ramana sub-cast of the Jat Sikhs' gave its allegiance to this place, see Bal Mukand Das, Jat Sahib Ramachandra (P.), pp. 162-232.
9. Crooke, Religion and Folklore of Northern India, p. 182.
were everywhere. Villagers who migrated from their original places would periodically make long pilgrimages to worship at the shrine of their ancestors, and if the distance was too great, would bring a brick from the original shrine and use it in the foundation of a local new shrine. It was not the Sikhs and Hindus alone who frequented such places; the Muslims had their own places of worship in this category. Pilgrims came to these cemeteries in order to beg for a boon or to express their gratitude for a wish granted. The mahants of these ghaads did their best to keep the appearance of these shrines in order to attract and impress the masses on festive occasions. Thus mural paintings and similar embellishments were pressed into service to create an aura of sanctity and glory. In the paintings the virtuous deeds of the departed saint were often depicted.

Besides small shrines of limited influence, there were also in the Punjab large monasteries that belonged to important sects. Each sect, old or new, felt the need for having its own temples. We know of several sizable

2. "Even the Muhammadans", writes Cunningham, "whose imagination must not be assisted by any visible similitude, is prone to invest the dead with the powers of intercessors, and to make pilgrimages to the graves of departed mortals ...." See op. cit., p. 10.
Vaishnava establishments in the Punjab including those at Pindori, Demthal and Syararpur. The monasteries that belonged to the Udasi or Nirala sects were known as akharas and many of these had more than one branch. In the absence of any centralizing system governing these akharas, the mahants of individual akharas were their own masters, and vied with each other for turning their establishments as sumptuous as their means or taste allowed. In the process murals were extensively commissioned.

An occasion on which murals were always seen by large multitudes was the much-loved mela or fair. Hundreds of religious places, big and small, belonging to the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims in the 19th century Punjab, had their melas to which people flocked by the thousand, often coming from miles around. They came to pay respect to the shrine around which a mela was often held to enjoy an inexpensive yet delightful day's outing. Under the Sikh regime some fairs were sponsored by the Government itself. The fairs used to be full of crowds and entertainment. There was wrestling, sword-play, tricks of acrobats and tumblers, performances of conjurors and the

1. For instance, the akhara of Bala Band at Amritsar was initially a branch of an akhara at Jhelum. I came to know of it from Shri Chander Prakash, the present mahant of the said akhara, interviewed at Amritsar.


3. See plate No. 80.


5. See plate No. 83.
music of Ghadis singing the tales of Sir Ranjha, Mirza 1
Sair Ban or Laile Majnu. The shrine, being the pivot of the
fair was the centre of attraction; Anybody who attended
the fair paid respect at it and was naturally delighted
to see its walls painted with murals displaying not only
religious themes but a panoramic view of the fair itself.

The shrine was refurbished from time to time in
preparation for the great gathering. Portions of the
paintings that had been peeled off the walls were
2
renovated and seriously damaged murals were sometimes
3
painted afresh.

A considerable amount of patronage of painting, in
the form of commissioning of murals, came from the nobility
4
in 19th century Punjab. Under the Sikh regime it was the
courtiers and nobles who were also big landlords or

1. See J.C. Oman, Cults, Customs and Superstitions of India,
p. 214.
2. These well-intended efforts often led to clumsy restoration
of the original work. One sees this in the 'renovation'
according to the murals of Baba Atal at Haritar
3. Even in recent years attempts have been made to paint
afresh damaged murals. For instance, in a Takhurdwara at
Phul in district Bhatinda, enamel paints have been used
to daub parts of the structure, with unhappy results. In
Ambala City, the new paintings in the Jain Shvetmbar
temple, are relatively pleasant.
4. See B.K. Goswami, Painters at the Sikh Court: A Study
Based on Twenty Documents, p.6-12.
The jat as, that constituted the uppermost stratum of the society. Many of the Sikhs among them had had their origin in the Sikh mohalla of the 18th century, but most of the new aristocracy consisted of self-made men who had risen through their ability from the proletariat. They did not have any great aristocratic traditions, but their interest in themselves and their surrounding themselves with style appears to have been keen. It was their interest in surrounding themselves with style which led Hari Singh Nalwa, the Bidas of Una, the Attariwalas, the Sandharwalas and other sardars and jagirdars to commission frescoes. Every sardar of any pretension lived in a feudal state in some sort of stronghold and more often than not they had portals, chambers, private villas and loggias embellished with murals. Their generally good economic conditions allowed them to employ masons for years together in the construction of their mansions in brick and lime and to commission muralists to adorn the walls. These murals for them were symbols of social status.

1. The Nihang Ranjit Singh Centenary Volume, p. 30 (see the Presidential address given by Sir Shafiuddin Ahmad Khan).
3. See B.N. Goswamy, Painters at the Sikh Court: A Study Based on Twenty Documents, p. 11.
5. The account of Lt. William Barr affords striking proof of this; see his Journal of a March from Delhi to Peshawur and from Thanes to Calcutta, pp. 69-71, 77-80, 82, 100-102, 129-140, 147, 152.
In the hierarchy, next to the courtiers, nobles and jangidars, came the graminars or agriculturalists. Except for the main entrance door, that led into the deori and its adjacent baithak or 'sitting room' which were mostly built in brick and lime, the rest of their houses consisted generally of mud walls for reasons of economy. But the portions built in brick and lime were often adorned with frescoes, the greatest attention being given to the embellishments of the gateway — the portions flanking the wooden door and the vaulted structure above it. Embellishment in the form of carving in the old tradition was extended to the wooden doors, particularly to the lintels which were often profusely carved with the figures of gods and tutelary deities.

1. There was a sharp contrast in the dwellings of the upper and the lower strata of society in 19th century Punjab. Rising to the highest station, there were the dwelling of the rich and the honoured of the land, large and imposing, built of brick, and with the top terraced to allow the morning and evening promenade and the fine lime plastered wells often painted with frescoes. Coming to the lowest station, there were the dwelling of the poor labourer, small in dimensions, made of mud and thatch and clay plastered walls, occasionally lined with rustic decorative designs and folk-motifs.

2. See Jallandhar D.G., 1915, p. 127; also see plate No. 91.
The modest living quarters of the peasants in the Punjab also received their share of adornment. While murals on brick walls in better houses were painted on fine lime plaster by professional painters and treated of a variety of subjects including the ‘portraits’ of the sirdars, heroes of Sikh history and Hindu mythology, the murals on mud walls were painted on plaster composed of clay and cow-dung and the subjects were confined generally to decorative designs, and animal and bird motifs. These decorative designs were painted mostly by women-folk not by professionals. At many places in the Punjab, this tradition still survives and one can see work done in villages around Taran Taran, Pakki, Paridhot, Sangrur and Nabha where women paint designs to celebrate occasions like child-birth and Diwali. Similarly in the areas comprising the present state of Haryana, Sanji figure was drawn by

2. The muralists had achieved perfection in making fine plaster from clay that appeared like lime plaster. The beautiful murals in the old haveli of Sandhanswalla Sardars of Raja Sanjai were painted on walls plastered with the said medium.
3. The Moghals or Punjabis who belonged to the lowest strata of the society in the 19th century Punjab lived in the simplest possible huts, and yet they endeavoured to bring grace and colour into an otherwise drab life by enlivening much walls of their huts with some simple decorations.
Jat women on walls during Navarathras, before the Dusshera festival. One gets some idea of this kind of early work from the following observation of an Englishman who visited around 1920s a house in Mullanpur, a village in Ludhiana district:

I entered the house through a large double door made of wood. I found myself in a large square room with mud walls, earthen bare floor and a lofty roof... The walls inside were quite smooth, and had the appearance of having been distempered. They were adorned with quaint black and white pictures painted on the wall itself. These represented local animals and birds; I noticed a dog, door, and two parrots.

It appears that mural painting was seen as a desirable embellishment to their houses also by the class of merchants and traders. Many Marwari traders who were invited by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to encourage trade and commerce in the Punjab, got their houses painted with murals. The followers of the Jain faith, many of whom were traders, had means enough to finance the erection of splendid temples. It is quite remarkable that several 19th century

1. See Jasleen Sethi, Indian Folk Arts and Crafts, p. 95.
4. Arjan, loc. cit., p. 33; also for instance "Haveli Nashriyan" in Gali Seth Baldev Bhatt in Ferozepur City. In local parlance, Marwaris were known as Nashrians.
5. Crooke, North-Western Provinces of India, p. 235.
Jain temples that I came across in the Punjab, bore traces of originally having been embellished with mural paintings. The houses of many well-to-do Hindus, built in brick and lime were likewise decorated with mural paintings.

At Ambara, William Barr records seeing houses of the richer 'seboos' plastered with fine chumus and decorated with paintings of various devices.

Members of artisan groups like Jarchhars and Sunars (carpenters and goldsmiths), coming from a relatively low class, and rarely living in houses built in brick and lime, retained an interest in embellishing the walls through 'rustic ornamentation', suitably applied to the architectural features of their small houses. Bird and animal motifs were most prominent. Many times these were formed on the mud walls also in bas-relief and then coloured in different shades. Grain storage spaces called gothis or gothas, generally built into a wall, received prominent attention, for their beauty was held as a matter of pride by the family and won them praise from the neighbourhood; apart from bird and

1. Thus the temples at Sadhuara, Ambara City, Lira and Poormpur Contumon.
2. Journal, p. 29.
4. Ibid.
animal motifs, kohes and lothies were bedecked with geometrical and abstract designs and decorative devices like trefoils.

With their loss of political power and dominance in the 19th century in the Punjab, the Muslims did not build any grand monuments. The few edifices they erected during this period were but shadows of the former grandeur of Mohammedan buildings. The old kashi or glazed tile decoration, being expensive and laborious were generally replaced by a comparatively inexpensive and simple medium like tempera. However the Muslim painter’s great hereditary skill in designing ornamentation seems to have remained alive.

Large public monuments and individual houses apart, we have some interesting evidence on murals got painted on ‘community’ structures in villages. The village community being divided into groups on the basis of kinship, families with a common ancestor usually formed one group or patties. It was usual for the different patties to have separate gates built out of common funds, and leading to their dwellings, even as they served for the protection of the wards at night and during emergencies.

1. See Punjab Notes and Queries, ill, No. 13, pp. 11-12. Bars of corn were also tied in beautiful designs and hung on the ceiling.
2. In the south-eastern districts of the present state of Haryana, these groups were called as manas.
It is on these gates that the pictorial interest of the village spent itself. In villages where different patti did not have separate gates, a single main gate entrance served for the whole village. We have a description of these gates by R.S. Parry:

2. All villages have gates, generally one for each 'hissa', or ward. These gates were made of roughly turned timber, are of immense height and breadth, supporting them in a massive rectangular archway of sand and brick, with a cross-beam made from a single tree trunk. Sometimes this is decorated with crude painted figures of animals. All these figures represent scenes from the life of the Gurus, national games, and from the battle-field. Wrestling scenes depicting combats between struggling 'kunst-log' (wrestlers) stripped to the waist, are great favourites, then come lines of warriors dressed in old fashioned uniform, carrying muskets.

The different patti also built their own dhara-sala, gurudwara or thakurwara and drinking wells in the larger villages, this being done out of joint funds in small villages. The dhara-sala or the guest-house was generally situated near the main gate of the village and was an important structure. On the occasion of the

1. op. cit., p. 44
2. The town too had lofty gateways, usually on all the cardinal sides, covered with paintings of all description. See Le. Barr, Journal, p. 141.
marriage of a girl from the village, it was the place where the bridegroom's party coming from outside stayed for three or four days. The dharm-sala was also used as the common room of the village where people met in the evening and on days like ekadashi or maasapena when village folk were free from their field work. Village panchayats held meetings on its premises; generally parties itinerant performing held their shows in front of the dharm-sala. Because of its role in the social life of the villagers, thus, the dharm-sala was usually built in solid masonry, with proper rooms and doors and was frequently embellished with frescoes in bright colours to make it a 'show-piece' of the village. In the districts of the Punjab beyond Malwa, a dharm-sala was called chupal or paras and used to be the centre of attraction in the village due to its mural adornments.

The gurudwara, the thakurdwara, the samadh of the

1. It was a social usage not to yoke cattle for any purpose either on ekadashi or on maasapena. Ekadashi comes twice in a lunar month, each on the eleventh date from the new moon and full moon. Maasapena is the date of new moon; see Lewis, op. cit., pp. 321-221.
2. It comprised of a group of singers, musicians, dancers, bands, conjurors and actors, that moved from village to village to entertain village folk with their performances. Hatal or ras were what they often performed.
3. See Pullelaur D.G. 1804, p. 50.
5. Particularly in the districts of Aohtak, Sonipat and Gurgaon.
found an ancestor of the village, instituted by
the village out of community funds were thus embellished
with murals with a purpose. Dr. Malk Raj Anand's
observation in this context is relevant here:

"...there is certain relevance in emphasizing the role which
wall paintings had always played in the protected though broken
tradition of art in our country. Religion demanded a community
life, which in its turn could be sustained with the sharing of
inner values projected on the walls by every devotee, whether
he could appreciate the aesthetic content (which was seldom) or
was impressed by Eignness, the glory and the power of the shrine.
At any rate a few people could afford to buy pictures for their
houses, the walls satisfied a common need."

With regard to the relevance of themes chosen
for being depicted in mural painting, many of the
edifices bear out the observation that "the intent of
the patron of the 19th century Punjab was quite often
simply the enrichment of an interior". The owner of
the building, or the patron, was not actively concerned

1. Not only shama-salles, surushares, theharwars or
sandochs but also parapets of wells were sometimes
decorated. I came across at Thanesar, in the course
of my field work, a well with murals on its parapet.
The well was within the premises of the temple of
Kali, situated in the north-west of the city. Also see
J.R. Stride, "Guru Ganga as a snake-god", Indian
Anthropology, XXVI, March 1937, p. 84.
3. Karuna Cossy, " Frescoes in the Shah Mahal at
with the selection of the themes. The purpose behind these paintings was decorative as in the case of wall paintings in the Pahari region. But it is also interesting that edifices that displayed the most diverse assortment of themes usually were public buildings like gates, chara-salas and chonals. It appears that the diversity of themes on these buildings was due primarily to their joint serving the whole village or community. The 'democratic' nature of these buildings might have led influential men of the village or the community to assert themselves on occasions in the matter of selection of the themes. A curious mixture thus of dissimilar themes, religious, secular and genre, was the consequence.

But this surely was not the case with private buildings which also often had murals with heterogeneous themes. That the painter was most often allowed to choose themes of his own accord is evident from non-religious themes painted on the walls even of temples and gurudwaras built by individuals. In such cases, the painter seems to have picked subjects that he was most at home with, irrespective of their appropriateness to the edifice. Secular themes in religious edifices clearly served a decorative function.

Many Raj-smitras who were skilled in the dual art of

masonry and mural painting, and which we shall treat of later also, executed murals on themes of their own choice, not always relevant to the building they were engaged in constructing.

Occasionally, however, edifices both religious and secular, were painted with themes consistent with the nature and the spirit of the structure. This happened when there was care and concern on the part of the proprietor or the patron. The 19th century murals in the Bhandari Temple at Batala, thus, treat of themes selected exclusively from given Hindu episodes. Similarly, Jain temples at Sadhaura and Zira have no themes other than those related to Jainism on their walls. The majority of pictures that embellished the shooting box of Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Gujrat were, quite appropriately, of sporting feats. Sometimes portions of walls were purposely marked out for separate themes in order to maintain some order.

The whole subject of themes is indeed of considerable interest. When it came to private dwellings, even to royal chambers, the individual

1. Most of the artisans in the 19th century Punjab did all the jobs allied to their trade; see Idetson, op. cit., I, p. 376.
3. In the murals in 'Guru Chara Pothi-Mala' at Guru Har Sahai, in district Ferozepur, the themes based on the lives of the Sikh Gurus, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and some romantic tales are thus painted in separate panels.
circumstances received obvious attention. In the
mansions of the members of the uppermost strata of
society, we hear of subjects concerned with the
important events in their lives. The walls of the
royal palace at Lahore were thus painted with, among
others, pictures portraying important events in the
life of the royal house such as the interview of
Maharaja Ranjit Singh with Lord William Bentinck at
Kopar. A scene depicting the battle of Jamrud,
where Hari Singh Nalwa laid down his life, was
painted in the fort of the said Nalwa at
Gujranwala, apparently to commemorate his great
valour. On the walls of General Ventura and Allard’s
house at Anarkali, Lahore, was portrayed the reception
of these two French officers at the court of Ranjit
Singh.

Thomas also were selected keeping in view the
personal interest and disposition of the individuals;
a chamber in Hari Singh Nalwa’s villa at Gujranwala,
‘that belonged exclusively to the fair daughters of
the eve’, had thus a number of glazed wall paintings

3. See Baron Engel, *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab*,
   pp. 293-94.
of exotic interest. A vivuble, who had a 'gargantuan'
appetite for wine and women, decorated the walls of
his bedroom with pictures of nudes and dancing girls.
That he was also interested in poetry or at least had
nostalgia for it is evident from French and Latin
inscriptions that he got inscribed over the doorway
of his residence. There was, also, entirely appropriately,
a portrait of Napoleon among the frescoes in his
living quarters. When we see Raja Sahib Dyal depicted
standing before Vishnu with folded hands it is fair
indication of his religious disposition. A painted
panel showing a lady holding a plate inscribed with
8
a Persian distich of the celebrated Sheikh Saadi, still
to be seen on a wall of the house of Shri Kondan Lal
Suniara at Dasuya, reflects perhaps quite clearly the
taste of the patron. The painter took his direction
from the patron in these cases.

1. See J.A. Barr, Journal, pp. 137-38; also see B.N. Goswamy,
   "Sikh Painting": An Analysis of some Aspects of
2. See Khushwant Singh, "Feringhees of the Punjab", The
   Times of India Annual 1968, p. 59.
4. See Joseph Wolff, Travels and Adventures, II, p. 61;
   Khushwant Singh, Ranjit Singh, p. 145.
5. See J.J. Cotton, "General Avitable", Calcutta Review,
6. Ibid.
7. This painting is extant on one of the walls of a temple
   at Kishan Kot, near Batala. The temple was got erected
   by Raja Sahib Dyal himself.
8. See Plate No. 56.
Among the motifs, as distinguished from themes, there was also great variety. But possibly it was the peacock that was the greatest favourite. We see it painted on the walls of all types of buildings from a grand palace to a simple mud hut. The immense popularity of the peacock as a decorative motif was partly due undoubtedly to the elegance and beauty of its form but also partly to its being held sacred as a bird by many.

In different regions of the Punjab, the choice of themes was often influenced by social, religious and political factors, for understandable reasons. Thus, themes related to the Sikh Gurus were most popular in Majha, Doaba and Malwa, the region being the stronghold of the Sikhs; beyond Malwa, towards the south-east, murals on themes related to the Sikh Gurus must have been seldom

1. See plates Nos. 87, 88 and 89.
2. James Coley, who happened to visit Amritsar about the middle of the 19th century, observed the houses painted all over in various themes; among which the sacred peacock predominated; see his Journal of the Sikhs Campaign of 1845-46, p. 107.
4. See Devinder R. Deen, Sketches of Hindu Life, p. 80; Crooke, Religion and Folklore of Northern India, p. 374.
5 painted. Likewise, pictures representing Guga Pir were mostly to be seen beyond Ambala in 'Sangar' area where this deity is widely held in reverence. Again, it was natural for themes related to Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his nobles to be most prevalent within the territories of Sikh Kingdom; these held lesser appeal in the Cis-Sutlej states, which was beyond the direct sphere of his control.

While, as we have briefly seen, there was a great deal of painting in the Punjab in the 19th century, with the annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849, the situation began to alter rapidly. By the end of the 19th century mural painting which had developed such a strong tradition of its own succumbed to the new social changes. In Lahore, we find industry of 'Decorators and Mural Painters' being noticed as practically dead by the end of the century. This development was part of a much larger change which was overtaking India. The Punjab experienced its own full measure of this 'transition' in the second half of the 19th century.

1. I came across no mural on the themes related to Sikh Gurus beyond Lahore and Thanesar.
2. See Doula, loc. cit., p. 94.
3. Area around Kaithal.
With the fall of Sikh monarchy, the artists who had gathered round the Sikh Court began to find new patrons. What had happened earlier with the fall of the Rajput Chiefs in the hills, was now being repeated with the fall of the Sikhs at the hands of the British. Part 1 of this process has been well described.

The decline not only in the fortunes of royal family but also of the entire nobility of the Lahore Court was so sharp that the environment changed completely, affecting artist and patron alike. In the altered circumstances it must have become impossible for the new patron to continue maintaining either the artist or the interest in art, for we are able clearly to discern a two-directional movements of the artists after about A.D. 1850. Some of them went back to the hills and sought once more the patronage of the Chiefs who still held some jagirs even if they were shadows of their former selves... The second movement of the artists was in the direction of states or rulers who had till then not been concerned with painting.

With the coming of the British, many traditions that had grown at the Court of Lahore, came to an end. The custom of taking sketches of visitors by the artists attached to the Court was naturally given up, for there was no court at Lahore. No monuments were raised by royal order and embellished with murals, British officers, who superseded the Sikh nobility, coming as they did from a different

2. See Capt. Leopold Von Grilich, Travels in India, including Sind and the Punjab, I, p. 206.
cultural milieu had very little liking for things Indian. To them traditional Indian painting, miniature as well as mural, was at best quaint. They could not have seen any reason for encouraging it.

This discouragement or lack of interest apart, the establishment of British influence at all levels — political, social, cultural — inevitably led to changes in the art wherever it survived. Western influence had already started appearing with the coming of European travellers and adventurists to the Punjab during the period of the Sikh monarchy. While western modes of seeing and western appearances by themselves were an indirect effect, even at that time, there was the direct influence in the form of the work of European artists which began to appear prominently. To the Punjab came amateur as well as professional painters, and their work being generally held in esteem even by the Maharaja, and especially his successor, Sher Singh, must have had impact upon 'native' painters who

1. It may be recorded here that on the Indian side also, several factors discouraging the survival of mural painting were operating, too. Thus, the tension that developed in the early 20th century between the Sikhs and Hindus, as embodied in the aggressive movements like the Singh Sabha and the Arya Samaj, led at a time, in the effort to save a 'Sikh' identity, to the wilful destruction of murals which had Hindu themes. Whole panels were scraped off the walls of certain gurdwaras and a general sentiment developed against representational art itself.

2. For instance, Emily Eden.

3. For instance, August Theodor Schoefft; also see Kanwarjit Kang "An Austrian Painter at the Sikh Court", Indian Express (Chandigarh edition), August 8, 1977, p.2.

had had the opportunity of seeing these Europeans making sketches and drawings.

Technique apart, the themes of paintings also began to undergo a change. We come across paintings depicting the Sikhs and the British at war, the Sikh surrender before the British, natives attending the judicial courts of the new system and the like. The railway train became a popular decorative motif soon after the railway came to the Punjab. We see panels of paintings with 'sahibs and nuns', people riding in a phaeton, armies marshalling.

On their part, the kind of art the British wanted to encourage in the Punjab was very different from that practised by the painters of the tradition. When the system of education in the Punjab began to be organised by them, attention eventually came to be paid to “fine” and “industrial” art. In 1875-76 the Mayo School of Art was founded at Lahore with the clear intention of imparting

1. For instance, in the apartment adjoining the temple at Ram Tatwali in district Noshirpur.
2. See plate No. 64.
3. See plate No. 68.
4. See plate No. 65.
5. See plate No. 66.
6. See plate Nos. 62 and 63.
training to Indians in art as the British understood it, and encouraging them to use their native talent in designing for new ends.

The Britishers, but for a few exceptions, could never appreciate the indigenous artistic expression, nor they tried to understand it in the context of the culture integral to it. Prior to Mayo School of Arts, becoming instrumental in imparting instruction to Punjabi artists and artisans, on the lines that bore but scant relation to the indigenous tradition and culture, the Britishers had been thinking in terms of bringing about a great change in the art of the province. They had considered the native painter "deficient in a knowledge of all those refinements of the art, which" were "to be acquired by taste being rightly directed...." The art produced at the school is not our concern in this study, for there was no mural work done under its aegis, but it is interesting to see that the founders of the new school of Art in Lahore, and of similar schools in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, were pleased with their efforts. When the

1. See D.C. Khosla, Lahore, Guide and Directory, p. 29;
   Asia Nash, Progress of Education in India 1907-08 to 1921-22, p. 268;
2. See H.W. Baden-Powell, Handbook of the Manufacturers and
   Arts of the Punjab, II, pp. 335;
"Committee representing Local Governments and the Schools of Art" observed that "a very real danger to Indian Art lies in the facile imitation of European designs and European methods", it was perhaps not expressing a popular view. In general European elements encroached upon Indian talent and the "Indian artist, as he had formerly existed, was superseded".

With time the outlook of the painters, rai-mistri, or mason, also underwent a change. Those among them who were now being trained in engineering and building science taught at engineering institutions, had neither knowledge of nor sympathy with indigenous forms. The traditional rai-mistri still possessed considerable skills. J.L.Kipling, Principal of the Mayo School of Art, however described them and their changed situation well:

The best men of the class are singularly modest, and only too much inclined to self-depreciation when their work is compared with that of European origin and true artists capable of really beautiful design, will sometimes humbly apologise for it as a poor 'country' effort and look with admiration on a neatly ruled and coloured mechanical drawing by an engineering apprentice.

3. Often a rai-mistri also served as a muralist; see chapter V. "Painters and Patrons".
5. From 1875 to 1893 he was principal of Mayo School of Art and Curator of the Central Museum, Lahore. See Mildred Archer, British Drawing in the India Office Library II, p. 103.
The change that overcame Indian architecture in the
wake of the new European architecture in India in itself
changed the very content of mural painting. It appeared
as if in the newer buildings the old traditional art had
no place. The well-to-do class of Indians who had earlier
got their houses painted with frescoes, now began to copy
2
British buildings, and these were ill suited totally for
the older type of mural embellishment. In fact, in many
old houses murals were obliterated from the walls. New
coats of whitewash claimed much that was old. In the
changed setting framed paintings whether on paper or
cloth fitted much better. The story of new themes and
attempted techniques in Indian painting, called for the
sake of convenience "Company Painting", has been told well
by Mrs. Mildred Archer and others. These 'Ethnological
pictures' were painted at all kinds of places. To the
range of mythological pictures painted at Lahore, Kapur-
thalal and Kangra etc., were added new themes of castes.

p. 164.
2. See R.C. Temple, "A Study of Modern Indian Architecture,
as displayed in a British Cantonment", J.I.A.A., No. 8,
3. See J.L. Kipling, "The Art Industries of Punjab", J.I.A.A.,
No. 10, April 1896 (Supplement); T. Il, Radharji, *Art
Manufacturers of India*, p. 19.
4. Ibid.
trades, professions etc. These pictures became so popular that they started being sold in the fairs and festivals. No such development was possible in mural work.

The introduction of the printing press had naturally its own impact. Hand lithographs, and woodcuts of gods and guardian deities produced by the commercial presses and displayed in large sizes began to replace costly mural work. There is not much point discussing the relative merits of these productions and traditional mural work. It is sufficient here to note the fact.

The one source of patronage that might have survived because of its traditional conservative character was the religious houses. But even here changes were drastic. Many of the endowed establishments lost a great deal of property and thus resources. For example, the Dhamar mandir of Amritsar was curtailed from Rs 107,700 per annum to Rs 9,800 per annum. Some of the sehatas of these deras became involved in the struggle of survival and had little interest left in keeping their places properly establis hed. When we see Muslim daroom,

2. An American Presbyterian Mission established the first press in the Punjab at Ludhiana before 1840; a lithographic press was set up at Lahore in January 1843; see Punjab Govt. Records, III, pp. 403, 407.
like the one of Baba Junle Shah Pir Purania at Darvesh in Kapurthala, which made an attempt to retain its sumptuous look, we find that was done through adornment with Delft plates. These plates bore the stamp: "Lewis Stewart & Co., Calcutta".

One can see that much had changed.

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