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MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH, COURT, AND CULTURE OF LAHORE DARBAR

Abstract

The study of the court and culture in Lahore Darbar under Maharaja Ranjit Singh is the primary purpose of this paper. Maharaja Ranjit Singh created an environment of peace and stability, resulting in the making of Lahore 'center of cultural activities'. Another objective of this paper is to explore the significant developments in all domains of art and culture, and especially the impact of various religious traditions on the court and culture of Lahore Darbar. The overall development and new themes in Art, Painting, crafts, industries, luxury carpet waving, metalwork, astrological instruments, textile, vessel, gardens, and monuments are analyzed in this paper. A historical, analytical, and descriptive approach is adopted.

Key Words: Ranjit Singh, Sikhs, Punjab, Court, Culture

After becoming Maharaja of Punjab, Ranjit Singh provided an environment that permitted and encouraged the growth of the whole state's cultural life. However, this aspect of his administration is not highlighted much because of his other essential and dominant characteristics. The most important thing in this respect was that Maharaja provided complete peace and harmony to the region from foreign invaders and eliminated internal chaos. That environment was essentially needed to encourage overall cultural activities, cultural development, and industrial growth in the region. Harmonious co-existence and patronage, provided by Maharaja to all communities and followers of every religion, took 'Sikh art' beyond the inflexible limitations. Hence Sikh Art & Culture can be seen as having much variety in its themes, inspirations, styles, methods, and techniques. On one side, a manifestation of the past is evident in it. On the other side, there are many new patterns introduced, particularly in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's era. The art of that era was inspired by Mughal and Iranian arts and their patterns and various religious traditions, e.g., Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism. There were appointed many court artists by Maharaja, belonging to every religious denomination.¹ They worked for him uniformly irrespective of their religions. Hence, Muslim and Hindu experts were also hired with Sikhs, even to accomplish the tasks particularly of Sikh character or related to their religious concern, for example, architectural adornment of Golden Temple at Amritsar or images of Ten *Sat Gurus*.

It may be noted that during this period, there were many notable developments in all spheres of art, such as; architecture, painting, textile designing, designing of military equipment, metalwork tradition, dresses, jewelry, vessel art, court interior, and so on. That developmental model of Lahore Darbar was later on followed by Rajas of various other states, such as Jind, Nabha, Kapurthala, and Patiala. All the visitors, especially Europeans, highly appreciate the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. They have described in detail the magnificence and splendor of his court setting in their accounts. The court of Ranjit Singh's artistic life had its own active centers e.g.; Lahore, Amritsar, Srinagar, and many more in the Sikh empire. These centers produced art crafts for Maharaja and most prominent associates of the court, native and European. Entrenched traditional industries flourished and grew under the patronage of Maharaja and his courtiers. Strong Mughal influence can be seen on the court. For example, daily chronicles were recorded in the Persian language, which was made as *Durbari Zuban* (court language) by Mughals, and the same language was used for the protocol.² Even his seal and coins struck under his order had an inscription in Persian. Moreover, Maharaja also adopted the Mughal style in his reign to build monuments.

Therefore, Punjab was the center of production and cultural activities before and during Maharaja's reign. An eye view of the Mughal era shows that the center of Punjab, Lahore, was famous for producing crafts, industries,

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¹ Susan Stronge, ed., *The Arts of Sikh Kingdoms* (London: V&A Publications, 1999), p. 11.

² Susan Stronge, ed., *The Arts of Sikh Kingdoms, Ranjit Singh and the image of the Past*, by A. S. Melikian – Chirvani (London: V&A Publications, 1999), p. 62.

luxury carpet weaving, metalwork, and astrological instruments during that age. Some other Punjab cities were also renowned for particular things, such as Sialkot being famous for producing high-quality paper, weapons, embroidered cloths, Multan for silk production, and Gujrat for firearms. All these industries kept on flourishing during Maharaja's period.

The supply of daily needs in Maharaja's court was the responsibility of *Toshakhana* (treasury) of his palace. The treasury was housed in it, and the gifts presented by the visitors and notable overseas were also kept there. Gifts for distinguished guests, especially for Europeans, Afghans, Iranians, Nepalis, and Indians, in the form of *Khil'ats* (robes of honor), were also arranged by *Toshakhana*. Moreover, gold coins, jewels, horses, and carpets were presented to important delegations and individuals according to their designation and status.³ *Khil'ats* and other goods were imported in *Toshakhana* from the whole empire and around its boundaries. A lot of artisans were also associated with *Toshakhana* for preparing, purchasing, and presenting these items. Ranjit Singh appointed Mir Beli Ram as the caretaker of *Toshakhana*, who very keenly assessed and valued all the purchases.

The throne of Maharaja was a clear depiction of his refined taste. He did not use a throne like Mughals but in a chair known as '*The Golden Throne*,' made in *Toshakhana* of Lahore by Hafeez Muhammad Multani. It was of high quality and showed the height of proficiency. It is one of the most spectacular art crafts which have been survived.⁴ It not only represented Maharaja's taste but the wealth of his court. It was made of wood and resin core covered with sheets of embossed gold.

Maharaja's vessels were made of bronze or tinned copper and imitated Mughal designs to much extent; even the inscriptions found on them were in the Persian language. However, the inscriptions and calligraphy patterns of Mughals were usually avoided and were not so prominent on vessels of the court of Lahore. It might be because Ranjit Singh wanted to avoid associating these to Sikhism or himself; this showed his secular nature. It proved that Maharaja was much conscious not to harm anyone's religious sanctity, even in secular matters. The exclusion of ornamentation and the predominant calligraphy trend destined that the vessels and equipment had no instantaneous illustrated relations with a given religious denomination.⁵ Extreme care taken in this regard by Ranjit Singh made it possible that plain vessels became famous in his court only with structural features as faceting, ribbing, and molding, without any decoration or inscriptions. The ascetic tendency, which was so evident in the early days of Sikhism, and the self-effacement perceived by Sikh rulers, particularly Ranjit Singh, might have encouraged a liking for non-inscribed appearance devoid even of the patron's name. Maharaja was much keen to collect the Mughal vessels. There was a candlestick preserved in his court with the inscription of Heydar al-Hoseyni dated HS 1026/AD 1617.

The large part of the treasury of Maharaja Ranjit Singh consisted of the most valuable jewels, diamonds, and pearls. Visitors and writers have pointed out his most magnificent and legendary '*Koh-I-Noor*,' the biggest diamond of the world. Maharaja was always eager to show off his jewels to the visitors, whether officers of high ranks or individuals. *Koh-I-Noor* was added in Maharaja's treasure on 1st June 1813, and Maharaja placed it in an armband along with two additional hefty diamonds, which he brought from Amritsar.

Maharaja was much fervent to collect historical jewels of Shah Shuja. Maharaja also owned the one precious stone of outstanding worth named '*Timer Ruby*.' It belonged to Shah Shuja and was an inherited Mughal Jewel. A Persian inscription recorded its ownership of emperors Jahangir, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, Farrukhsiyar, Nadir Shah, and Ahmad Shah.

³ In 1838, the gifts assembled for the entourage of the new governor-general Lord Auckland demonstrate how closely rank determined the value of an individual's *Khil'at*. The court chronicle listed them, the most senior officer accompanying Auckland, Macnaughten, was to be given 15 garments, a pearl necklace, a jeweled armband and a jeweled pair of gold bangles, an elephant with a silver seat, a horse with a golden saddle and a jeweled sword. The value and range of the presents descended the scale until the clerks of the various officers were reached; these were to receive small cash gifts or textile of low value. The governor-general and the most senior companions received no fewer than eleven *khil'ats* each, and his sisters were given ten each.

⁴ Susan Stronge, ed., *The Arts of Sikh Kingdoms, The Arts of the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, by Susan Stronge (London: V&A Publications, 1999), p. 82.

⁵ Susan Stronge, ed., *Ranjit Singh and the image of the Past*, by A. S. Melikian – Chirvani, p. 70.

He was much passionate about collecting expensive jewels and had a large number of valuable gems.⁶ The British Political Agent, Henry Edward Fane, described Maharaja's collection of jewels in these words.

*"The dresses and jewels of the raja's court were the most superb that can be conceived; the whole scene can only be compared to a gala night at the Opera. The minister's son, in particular, the reigning favourite of the day (Hira Singh) was literally one mass of jewels; his neck, arms and legs were covered with necklaces, armlets and bangles, forms of pearls, diamonds and rubies, one above the other, so thick that it was difficult to discover anything beneath them."*⁷ *"It was beyond the power of verbal description and surpassed all that European imagination had convinced even of Oriental luxury and splendor."*⁸

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was also much interested in collecting the finest swords, especially of jewel. When Fane saw Maharaja's collection of treasures, he noted several deluxe jewels of the world in that and wrote:

*"The swords were many of them of great value, their blades alone being in some instances valued at 1,000, and the gold and the jewels upon their hilts and scabbards at five times that sum. Many of them had been squeezed out of the Shah Shuja, the ex-king of Kabool."*⁹

During Maharaja's reign, Lahore was famous for manufacturing refined and highly sophisticated arms and armors. For example, a set of mail and helmet of Sher Singh was 'manufactured in Nurwaghur, polished and repaired in Lahore. Ranjit Singh established that foundry at Lahore in 1808. There were a lot of 'Kuftkars' (gold-inlayers) belonging to the Lahore court. It is pertinent to note that the foundry of Lahore made the finest guns as a British has recorded:

*"The guns were well cast and carriages in good repair; they had been made in Lahore and cost him [Ranjit Singh] Rs. 1000 each"*¹⁰

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court of Lahore presented an appearance of unrivaled magnificence to everyone who visited it. It was mainly due to the significant utilization of exquisite, cheerfully dyed silks, shawls, and gold brocade fabric to impress individuals who had left accounts in black and white. Major General W. G. Osborne presented a picture of Maharaja's court in these words;

*"The floor was covered with rich shawl carpets, and a gorgeous shawl canopy, embroidered with gold and precious stones, supported on golden pillars, covered three parts of the hall"*¹¹

Sir Henry Fane wrote in his account;

"The dresses and jewels of Rajah's court were the most superb that can be conceived".

"The scarlet semianas (shamianas: awnings) and kanauts (qanats: screens) of Ranjit's pavilions looked beautiful from the opposite bank of the river, and when nearer, the illusion was not dispelled; for in addition to all the tents with shawl

⁶ Stephen Howarth, *The Koh-i-Noor Diamond: The History and the Legend* (London: Quartet Books, 1980), p. 109-110.

⁷ Henry Edward Fane, *Five years in India* (London: Henry Colburn, 1842), p. 10-24.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 165-6.

¹⁰ Susan Stronge, ed., *The Arts of the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, by Susan Stronge, p. 89.

¹¹ Hon. W. H. Osborne, *Court & Camp of Runjeet* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 72.

*carpets and interior lined with Seikhs (Sikhs), in their picturesque and variegated dresses”.*¹²

Emily Eden wrote about the court:

*“It reduced European magnificence to a very low pitch”.*¹³

Dr. Sir John Login painted a vivid picture in these words:

*“for camp-equipage, old Ranjit’s camp was the very fines and most sumptuous among all the Princes of India” “Now when you are told the tents for the little man himself are all lined, some with rich Cashmere shawls, and some with satin embroidered with gold, semianas, carpets, purdahs (curtains), and floor-cloths to match, and that the tent-poles are encased in gold and silver...you may fancy that we shall look rather smart!”.*¹⁴

Emily Eden describes the court bodyguards in these words;

*“One troop (of bodyguards) was dressed entirely in yellow satin, with gold scarfs and shawls; but the other half were in that cloth of gold which is called kincob-the fond (background) being gold and the pattern scarlet, or purple, or yellow...most of them had a silver or gold tissue drapery; which they bring over their heads and pass round their beards to keep them from the dust...”*¹⁵

Osborne was also impressed by these bodyguards and wrote:

“Handsomely dressed in chain armor and quilted jackets of either a bright yellow, green or scarlet color”. *“There shawls of lilac, white and scarlet, twisted very round and tight.”*¹⁶

Although Maharaja was surrounded by a splendid environment and the outstanding outfits of Maharaja’s *Durbaris* (courtiers) and bodyguards fascinated the visitors, but he usually wore simple clothes, generally a simple gown along with no more than a few selected pearls and diamonds for beautification. Sikh chiefs and courtiers of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were habitual to be dressed in tight cotton Robes and shawls wrapped around shoulders, occasionally tied loosely around the waist, or some used a baggy *Choga* (outer-robe) in place of the shawl as an outer garment.

Toshakhana (treasury, store-room) of the Maharaja was filled with treasure, in which the huge collection of wonderful Kashmiri shawls was prominent. Isabelle has described:

*“Very handsome, consisting of shawls, kincobs, silk, satins, horses with their trappings, a beautiful sword, jewelry etc., etc., . . . perhaps above all, the immense collection of magnificent Cashmere shawls, rooms full of them, laid out on shelves and heaped up in bales – it is not to be described.”*¹⁷

¹² Fane, vol. I, p. 134.

¹³ Emily Eden, *Up the Country: Letters from India* (London: Curzon press, 1978), p. 227.

¹⁴ Lady L. Login, *Sir John Login and Duleep Singh* (London: William H. Allan & Co., 1890), p. 163.

¹⁵ Eden, p. 206.

¹⁶ Osborne, p. 63.

¹⁷ Susan Stronge, ed., *Textiles in the Punjab*, by Rosemary Crill, p. 118.

Ranjit Singh was keen to have a large fabric store, especially of high quality and matchless Kashmiri shawls. This extensive collection of textiles was used for interior decoration of Maharaja's court, but he was also used to give it to the visitors as Robes of honor or *Khil'at*.

Srinagar was the hub of these shawl production and shawl trading, and Lahore stood second in this regard. European travelers described in large the production, trading, and quality of Kashmiri shawls in their accounts. Mainly, it can be seen in the writings of Warren Hastings and William Moorcroft. Warren Hastings sent some shawls as a gift for his wife and wrote her, "*beautiful beyond imagination.*"¹⁸ Moreover, Moorcroft described the complicated process of fabrication and selling of shawl production in his account.

These shawls were very trendy in that period, so Maharaja Ranjit Singh worked a lot for their trade up-gradation. He very technically used European officers of his court for this purpose. It led to great success in developing textile trading with Europe in general and with France in particular. Ranjit Singh involved his two great Napoleonic generals Jean-Francois Allard and Jean-Baptist Ventura, in shawl trading. They exported shawls from Punjab to Paris, designed particularly for the French market.¹⁹

At that time, the shawls were woven on looms in a single piece, which was a much complicated and long procedure and took a long period of nearly 18 months or more. During Maharaja's period (first half of 19th century), many changes occurred, and the production method was changed somehow, and a new way was introduced. Now shawls were woven in parts (small pieces) on many looms, then '*Rafugars*' (expert darners and embroiderers) swan these pieces together, and in this way, shawls were finally ready to sale. The process ultimately led to making a shawl in hundreds of split parts.

Regarding the design of Shawls, embroidered designs named '*Amlikar*' rather than woven (Kanikar) were also introduced. Some distinctive styles in this regard were the *Chamba Rumal*, *Phulkari*, and *Chope*. Moreover, a new trend of human figures and flora and fauna as motifs on the edges of *Chogas and Patkas* was introduced.

This trend became much famous. Even Maharaja himself ordered a couple of embroidered shawls with the graphical depiction of his victories in wars. He paid 50 thousand rupees for this purpose in advance. But G.T. Vigne quoted that only one shawl was completed ever.²⁰ The popularity of shawls with this type of pictorial embroidery can be judged from the fact that work was done in this regard on a large scale. Many samples were survived in which there were shawls with embroidered maps of Srinagar and Kashmir. The densely embroidered shawls dated 1852 belonging to Gulab Sing were also preserved, and one of them showed an episode from *Sikandar Nama* (Book of Alexander the great).²¹ *Dorukha* shawls (two-sided) in which both sides of shawls could be used and finishing was equal. These shawls came on the scene for the first time during Maharaja's era.

The textile industry was more developed in Ranjit Singh's era in Punjab, and several woven textiles were put on for domestic utilization on little interest than the Kashmir shawls. Silk and cotton stuff were woven, used for furnishings and garments, for example; those worn by Ranjit Singh's troops.

In Punjab, minimal scale farming of silkworms took place, but long silk weaving existed there. Silk was imported from Bukhara. However, silk yarn was spun, dyed, and woven at the hubs of silk and cotton industries established in Punjab in the Maharaja's era in which Amritsar, Lahore, Patiala, Multan, and Jalandhar were important. There were many famous styles in woven silk at that time, in which *Dhup-Chan* (two colored shots) and *Gulbadan* were distinctive. Lavished *Lungis* with different woven patterns, e.g., simple and versatile, were also in demand.

¹⁸ S. C. Grier, *The letters of Warren Hastings to his wife* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1905), p. 336.

¹⁹ Susan Stronge, ed., *Textiles in Punjab*, by Rosemary Crill, p. 119.

²⁰ G. T. Vigne, *Trevals in Kashmir, Ladak, and the counties adjoining the mountain-course of the Indus and the Himalaya, North of the Punjab* (London: HMSO, 1842), p. 124.

²¹ Suwarcha Paul, 'A dated *Sikandar Nama* shawl in the Chandigarh museum', in *Lalit Kala* (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1982), no. 20, pp. 35-7.

The art of painting was flourished during the Mughal era in Lahore, and there were many ‘Royal studios’ established in *Suba* (province) Lahore. Much artwork was done on Punjabi themes in those studios like Heer and Puran Bhagat’s paintings. Likewise, several portraits of Sikh Gurus were painted in a dry Mughal manner. William Finch has described many details about them in his traveling account.²²

During Maharaja’s era, the tradition of painting kept progressing in the same way, especially regarding themes that also remained the same as before. *Pahari* (hill) styles were famous in painting and were patronized by Hill Chiefs (Rajputs). Many family workshops of the painters were conducted at various places, e.g., Basohli, Mankot, Nurpur, Chamba, Kangra, Guler, and Mandi. *Pahari* work of art had a significant influence on the growth and development of the art of painting in Punjab.²³ Many other painting styles flourished in this era, used to paint rulers, governors, and families of famous painters such as Nainsukh. Many gods and goddesses were also painted. The three rulers of Lahore before Maharaja had bonded with many *Pahari* artists who worked for those Sikh rulers. Due to this connection, hill painters very soon became interested in approaching Sikh patrons and painting them. W. G. Archer has commented about them in these words:

*“The years 1810 to 1830 saw the first approach by hill artists to Sikh patrons and the first expression of interest in painting by Sikhs themselves”.*²⁴

The art of painting flourished peculiarly in Punjab during the 19th century, and it was not possible without Royal patronage and the authorization of the Maharaja himself. There are many documented proofs of this patronage, of which one is in the form of *parwana* (Royal order) released for Nainsukh’s family. There were written pre-requisites and conditions for the artist who was to be engaged for the Royal court and affirmation of land grant. This document bore the seal of Sandhiawalia Sardar, who was very close to Maharaja. Another document (*Parwana*) written by Maharaja himself was dated 1825 AD, and it was in favor of Nikka; a painter, and sealed by Ranjit Singh. The text of *parwana* was:

May the Kardar of Rihlu be hereby informed.

The painter Nikka has been, from olden times, in possession of land valued at rupees one hundred and twenty-five (RS. 125/-) per annum. This grant of land has been confirmed upon him on the recommendation of Sardar Budh Singh Ji. It is ordered that the land should be left with him and without his being subject to render any (usual) service or begar. In this matter this should be treated as a strict injunction.

Written on the 31st of the month of Asuj, S. 1882. Under orders of the Hazur at Camp: Rambagh.

*In the margin [Conveyed] verbally through Raja Sahib Jio.*²⁵

So it is proved by the study of these royal *parwanas* that these types of grants were not a big deal or an unusual thing during the Maharaja’s period.²⁶ There was also a connection between the Lahore court and Purkhu and Buddhu (artists belonging to the *Pahari* family) who visited Lahore. Deviditta of Basohli was also brought to Lahore by Maharaja. Due to this royal patronage of art and artists, marvelous work was done during his era. Lieutenant William Barr traveled Punjab during Maharaja’s rule and very keenly observed his palace, a clear depiction of Maharaja’s interest in art. He, thus, recorded it in his account in these words:

“The gateway [of the Maharaj’s palace at Lahore] which consists of a tolerably lofty archway with a tower at each side, is covered from its summit to its base with paintings, the greater number taken from the history of Krishna as related in the Prem Sagar, though a few describe the habits and peculiarities of

²² Susan Stronge, ed., *Painting in the Punjab*, by B. N. Goswamy, p.93.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁴ W. G. Archer, *Paintings of the Sikhs* (London: HMSO, 1966), p. 31.

²⁵ Susan Stronge, ed., *Painting in the Punjab*, by B. N. Goswamy, p.99.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.101.

a wandering faker. The figures are almost all about one-third the size of life, but with proportions as ludicrous and absurd as they can well be. In some the eye occupies nearly the whole side of the face, and in others the head appears as massive as the body. Here fakers may be seen with their hands clasped above their heads, and with finger nails two or three inches long.....in one compartment [Krishna] is portrayed with a milkmaid shampooing his great toe, in another, he is perched up in a tree, from the branches of which depend on various articles of dress he has stolen from some fair damsels . . . having satisfied our curiosity at these wonderful embellishments, we passed beneath the archway and came to the inner gate of the palace which we remarked as enriched with paintings of a similar character to those on the first, and though no doubt considered to be in good taste by the Pujabees to Englishmen they have a most ridiculous appearance".²⁷

Maharaja Ranjit Singh is habitually presented unjustly while looking at his approach towards arts.²⁸ But suppose we only put an eye on different occasions related to him. In that case, we come to know that he personally took an interest in choosing marble for *Parikrama* of Golden Temple and in the selection of doors for the shrine of the goddess at Kangra. On one occasion, he chose *Pashmina* (high-quality fabric) shawls to be sent in favor of *Pandits* (caretaker of Hindu temples) of Banaras and Gaya. Many Royal painters at the court of Lahore and Maharaja granted them land in payment of their services and quarters for residence. They were assigned to paint walls of different parts of the palace and decorate chambers (assembly room) suitably with paintings. In March 1834, Maharaja appointed a painter to design figures, pictures, and inscriptions on the pavilion (*Baradari*) at Adinanagar (summer rest house of Maharaja), and the daily wages of the painter were fixed as one Rupee per day.

During Maharaja's period, besides Royal patronage, some other families and figures took much interest in promoting the art of painting. Some are very famous as Sandhiawalia Sardars, Sher Singh (Maharaja's son), Majithias family, Dogra brothers of Jammu Royal family (Gulab Singh, Dhian Singh, and Suchet Singh), and European officers of Maharaja.

Different traditions and religions overshadowed the Sikh themes of the paintings. In those paintings, the most recognizable and absolute were the idealized pictures of ten Sikh Gurus.²⁹ Furthermore, widespread paintings or illustrations were based on *Janam Sakhies*, which was the conventional and greatly valued description of life and activities of Guru Nanak. Besides it, "Durbar setting" scenes were also portrayed.³⁰

Hindu themes were also worked upon in this era in which pictures were derived from *Prem Sagar* (the vernacular translation of the Bhagavata Purana) and images of Satsai of Bihari. The prominent work in this regard was done in *Sheesh Mahal* of Patiala. The incarnation made on its walls illustrates many deeds of Vishnu and Krishna. Radha and Krishna were featured in the Rasikapriya series. Gita Govinda was inscribed with its text in Sanskrit along with its Gurmukhi characters and Punjabi translation.³¹

So in this way, classical Hindi and Sanskrit texts were also subjects of Punjab's painters in this era. However, during the later period of Maharaja, the availability of European models changed the trend into the realistic mode, and painters such as Kehar Singh, Kapur Singh, Kishan Singh, and Bishan Singh responded to this new influence.

²⁷ Lieut. William Barr, *Journal of a march from Delhi to Peshawur, and from thence to Cabul, with the mission of Lieut.-Colonel Sir C. M. Wade...including travels in the Punjab, a visit to the city of Lahore and a narrative of operations in the Khyber Pass, undertaken in 1839* (London: James Madden & Co., Leadenhall-Street, 1844), pp.39-40.

²⁸ It is difficult to imagine that all this could have happened without the encouragement or the approval of the maharaja himself. Far too much has been written about Ranjit Singh's alleged personal indifferences to painting, or his holding the art in the poor esteem.

²⁹ Susan Stronge, ed., *Painting in the Punjab*, by B. N. Goswamy, p. 107.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³¹ This is the series, by painters. Published by M. S. Randhawa in 1963.

*“Then came the man of destiny, Ranjit Singh, to establish a military monarchy on the ruins of feudalism. His environment shaped his handiwork-the country-on the line of invasion, the people-a race matured in storm”.*³²

In the words of Cunningham:

*“Ranjit Singh labored with more or less of intelligent design to give unity and coherence to diverse atoms and scattered elements, to mould the increasing Sikh nation into a well ordered State or Commonwealth, as Guru Gobind Singh had developed a sect into a people, and had given application and purpose to the general institution of Guru Nanak”.*³³

After a long period of wars and destruction, Punjab finally got calmness during Ranjit Singh’s era, and due to it, a great learning environment was produced. Although Maharaja took up Persian as the court language but Punjabi also got an opportunity to develop on the mainstream. Maharaja’s era might be called Hashim Shah’s era, who was a court poet of Maharaja. Hashim Shah’s major work was in the Punjabi language. Moreover, in this period, there was free and frank correspondence in Punjabi at the official level.

Many new trends were adopted in this age in poetry in which prominent were:

In romantic poetry of that era, Abdul Hakim, Mian Latif Ali, Ahmad Yar, Muhammad Bakhsh, Qadir Yar, Fazal Shah, Imam Bakhsh, Shah Muhammad, and Hashim Shah are prominent poets. The romantic ballads written by them attracted the attention of a lot of people. Mian M. Bakhsh has commented on Hashim Shah’s poetry in these words:

*“Couplet full of beauty and aesthetic sense are such as the flowers in a garland.”*³⁴

Hashim Shah also had a *Sufi* touch in his poetry. He considered worldly love as the initial step of Divine love. Sachal and Khuldi were also *Sufi* poets of that particular era. Their writings were marked by spiritualism. Baba Bulleh Shah much inspired Sachal, and he wrote about him.

Concerning the Heroic Poetry form of poetry, Qadir Yar and Shah Muhammad are notable names. Jangnama Sardar Hari Singh (Bhai Dial Singh), Var Hari Singh (Kavi Sahai Singh), Var Hari Singh Nalwa (Qadar Yar), Jangnama Singhan te Frangian (Shah Muhammad) and Jangnama Singhan te Frangian (Kavi Matak) are much famous. But Shah Muhammad’s work is considered genuine and of much historical worth, and he stands highest among poets of that time.³⁵

In religious poetry of that era, these are prominent; Barah Mah, Lord Krishna (Kavi Mool Singh), Barah Mah Lord Shiva (Kavi Mansa Ram), Barah Mah Lord Rama (Kavi Gurdas Singh), Barah Mah Goddess (Kavi Gian Singh). Moreover, Ram Singh, Sukha Singh, Budh Singh, Mansif Mehni, Sahib Singh Margind, Gulam Hussain, Keso, Mool Singh, M.Musa, and Bhaya Ram have written Barah Mah.

Mohan Singh commented on the prose of that era in these words;

*“The staple literature of this age is the prose of these painstaking, studious men who with all their mannerisms are never dull in original composition or in translations of the classics”.*³⁶

Kishor Dass, Noor Hussain, Partap Singh, and Santokh Singh are prominent in this regard. Urdu and Persian vocabulary was mingled up with the Punjabi language.

³² Narendra Krishna Sinha, *Ranjit Singh* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1933), p. 9.

³³ Joseph Davey Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs from origin of the nation to the battles of Sutlej*. H.L.O. Garrett, ed. (Delhi: S. Chand & Co, 1955), p. 156.

³⁴ Dr. C. L. Narang, *History of Punjabi Literature 850-1850 A.D.* (Delhi: National book shop, 1987), p. 181.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 183-4.

³⁶ Mohan Singh, *A History of Punjabi literature 1100-1932* (Lahore: Punjabi Adabi Laihr, 1982), pp. 72-4.

There were a lot of leading literary figures of that age, which are listed below along with the list of their well-known works:³⁷ Yusuf Zulaikha 'Hindi' by Abdul Hakim, Hatim Nama, Hir, Kamrup-Kamlata, Sassi-Punnu, Rajbibi, Ranjit Nma, Zulaikha, etc. by Ahmad Yar, Sassi-Punnu by Alaksh Shah, Vishva Vinod by Balmukand, Dohras, Var, Sassi, Sohni, Account of Mahan Singh, etc. by Hashim Shah, Mahabharat Bhasha by Krishan Laal, Chhathian Di Var by Pir Muhammad, Si Harfis Puran Bhagat, Mihraj Nama, Sohni Mahinval, Hari Singh Nalva, Raja Rasalu by Qadir Yar, Nanak Parkash, Sar Suraj Prakash by Partap Singh, and a lot more.

Ranjit Singh was much desirous of building the monuments, especially gardens. Natural sceneries, flowers, and gardens attracted him a lot. He ordered that not even a single piece of land of old Royal way from Delhi gate to Shalimar garden would be empty of greenery or flowers. Maharaja himself ordered to build many gardens in Lahore and a rest house named 'Makaan Dil Kusha' and every garden so that Maharaja may go over there in his leisure time and enjoy. Not only Maharaja but his wives and ministers also had much interest in building gardens and Palaces. Maharaja constructed new buildings and gardens and repaired those that were already existed and needed to fix. He even restored many Muslim mosques and Shrines, and other holy places of all religions. The most noted thing is that he constructed the Shrine of Data Sahib's boundary wall in Lahore. Details of some important gardens and *Havailies* during Maharaja's era are;

Badami Bagh (garden) existed before Maharaja Ranjit Singh but was in worse condition. Maharaja took notice of it and ordered its re-gardening; hence hundreds of trees of Oranges, Mangoes, Grapes, Guava, Red Grapes, and many others were seeded there. Maharaja also built a lot of fountains and pathways in that garden. He often held his Durbar in that garden on many special occasions, as on Lord Auckland's visit.³⁸

The garden of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was adjacent to the Northern Door of *Hazuri Bagh*. The funeral ceremony of Maharaja was also held over there, and later on, his Samadhi (tomb) was built in the same place.³⁹

There was a large ground between the Badshahi Mosque and Shahi Qila Lahore during Ranjit Singh's era. When Maharaja got 'Koh-I-Noor' and celebrated this success by holding a great '*Jashan*' (festival) on this ground, he ordered to build a *Baradari* inside there and a garden around it fountains walkways, and sitting places (*Sheh Nasheen*).⁴⁰ Hence, these were built under Fakir Aziz ud Din's supervision in the time frame of two years and named Hazuri Bagh.

Raja Dhian Singh was the Prime Minister of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He constructed a great garden on the river Ravi bank, in which trees of Mangoes and Jamun (a local fruit) were in a large quantity, known as Bagh Raja Dhian Singh. Raja Sochet Singh, Raja Hira Singh, Mian Udham Singh, Raja Jawaher Singh, and many other Dogra sardars were buried in that garden.⁴¹

Misir Diwan Chand was the *Nazim* of Kashmir during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's era. As the other courtiers of Maharaja had built their *Havelies* in Lahore, he also constructed a *Haveli* and garden in the west of the Shrine of Data Ganj Bakhsh. When he died, he was buried in that garden known as Bagh Misr Diwan Chand Zafar Jang Bahadur.

General Ventura constructed the Garden of General Ventura along with a *Haveli* where he and General Allard resided. It is said that General Allard and his daughter Marie Charlotte were buried in that garden near the Southern boundary wall. This garden is also known as '*Kuri Bagh*'.⁴²

Sardar Jawala Singh was the son of Sardar Mat Singh Bhatania, the powerful courtier of Maharaja. After the death of his father, Jawala Singh got his place in Maharaja's court. As Maharaja was much gluttonous towards building gardens and he even ordered and encouraged his nobles and courtiers in this respect. Almost all nobles and ministers of his court constructed big *Havailies* in Lahore and gardens along with their *Havelies*. Similarly, Jawala Singh also constructed a big and marvelous garden near Shalimar garden named Bagh Sardar Jawala Singh.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 70-1.

³⁸ *Khalsa Akhbar* (Lahore), 18 May 1918.

³⁹ Sohn Laal Suri, *Umdat-u-Tawarikh*, V. S. Suri, tr. vol. V (Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1961), p. 152.

⁴⁰ Suri, Daftar II, p. 139.

⁴¹ Suri, Daftar V, p. 29.

⁴² Muhammad Tufail, ed., *Naqoosh Lahore No.* (Lahore: Idara Farogh-e-Urdu, 1962), p.387.

Maharaja personally visited that garden and gave some suggestions in its interior. He also held his Durbar there many times.⁴³

Ratan Chand was the '*Hazur Nawees*' of Maharaja's court. He got the title of *Diwan*, but later on, Maharaja called him Dhariwala due to his long beard. He was fond of constructing buildings, so he built a *haveli*, a *saray*, a pool, a garden, and *shawala*, outside the Shah Aalmi Door and Bagh Diwan Chand Ratan Dhariwala.

Raja Dina Nath came to Lahore in 1815 and joined Maharaja's services as a high-ranked officer. He built *Havali* with Dehli Darwaza and a magnificent garden on the old way to Shalimar garden near Ghooiry Shah's Shrine. The beauty of Bagh Raja Dina Nath mesmerized the visitors.⁴⁴

Bhai Mahan Singh was the son of Bhai Gur Bakhsh Singh, who was much close to Maharaja. He constructed a garden near '*Chobara Chaju Bhagat*.' Bagh Bhai Mahan Singh was the very first garden built in Lahore during Maharaja's reign. It was stunning. Hundreds of people visited it daily.

Lehna Singh, who became Prime Minister of Punjab during Duleep Singh's era, also constructed a vast and beautiful garden Bagh Sardar Lehna Singh Sandianwala, in Lahore.⁴⁵

Jamadar Khushkhal Singh furnished a garden where Maharaja himself went many times.⁴⁶ His son Ram Singh and brother Teja Singh were buried in that particular garden. Khushkhal Singh also used his *Haveli* and garden as the fortress during the rebellion of the Sikh army under Maharaja Sher Singh. And after his death, he was also buried in Bagh Jamadar Khushkhal Singh. Hari Singh Nalwa, the great general of Ranjit Singh, prepared a garden and dug a big well for water supply. Bagh Hari Singh Nalwa was located in the same place where nowadays Mayo Hospital is situated. Mooran was the gorgeous dancing girl of Amritsar and was very close to Maharaja; he married her. Like the other nobles, Mooran built a wonderful garden, "Bagh Mooran wala," near Mori Darwaza with high boundary walls. The main gate of that garden was a good piece of art.⁴⁷ She also built a mosque in 1809 and a Hindu temple in Ichhra.

The wife of Maharaja, Rani Gul Begum, constructed a Haveli Gul Begum as her residency and a garden in Miani near Mazang. She also built a tomb for herself in that Bagh Rani Gul Begum in her life with black marble. Some other Gardens in Lahore were memorial of Ranjit Singh's era as Bagh Himmt Kahar, Bagh Thakurdawara Bhuri Sarkar, Bagh Chajju Bhagat, and Faiz Bagh are renowned.⁴⁸ Along with Gardens, *Havailies* and Palaces, Maharaja also paid attention to the religious places. He served highly to the Golden temple, donated many types of marbles in huge quantities, expanded its area, and constructed many residential buildings for *Yatries* (visitors). He made many additions to the structures of the Golden Temple and beautified them. For this purpose, he used ornamentation, marble, mirror, and inlay work and boosted the Temple's splendor.

He brought the finest artists and artisans for this purpose and generously used the wealth for its glorification. Marble was used on the main '*parikarma*' (around the pool) and face walls of the lower story with extraordinary designs, motifs, and patrons, including the human being, flowers, animals, fish, and many more.⁴⁹ Maharaja also constructed the 'Gurdwara Janam Asthan Nanakana Sahib in 1819-1820. And in the very next year, in 1820-1821, he appointed Baba Gurbakhsh Singh to construct Gurdawara Balila Sahib. Gurdwara Patti Sahib was also built during Maharaja's reign. Narayan Singh recorded:

"When Baba Gurbukhsh was commanded by the Sher-e-Punjab to live here and to construct new buildings for the gurdwaras, he built a double storey house for his residence between Janamasthan and Balila. It was called Atari or Atari

⁴³ Suri, Daftar III, p. 201.

⁴⁴ M. Tufail, p. 390.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 392.

⁴⁶ Suri, Daftar II, p. 291.

⁴⁷ M. Tufail, pp. 396-7.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 400-3.

⁴⁹ Susan Stronge, ed., *The Golden Temple*, by Patwant Singh, pp. 53-7.

*Sahib and later with the passage of time it became popular as Gurdwara Patti Sahib”.*⁵⁰

Gurdwara Kiara Sahib’s building is another memoir of Ranjit Singh’s reign. He also ordered to build a Gurdwara where Guru Nanak Sat Dev-Ji fed the mystics, known as Gurdwara Sacha Soda. It is a vast and beautiful Gurdwara, and its structure resembles Janam Asthan. 250 Bighas land is given to the Gurdwara by Sher-i-Punjab.⁵¹ Gurdwara Rori Sahib at Eimanabad was also built with Maharaja’s orders; he also endowed agricultural land to the Gurdwara.

General of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Hari Singh Nalwa, constructed Gurdawara Panja Sahib’s gorgeous building⁵² at Hassan Abdal and a water tank per the Royal orders. Hari Singh also attached an estate to Gurdwara. Gurdwara Chowa Sahib’s building was built on the command of Maharaja in 1834 on the bank of River Ghan near Rohtas Fort, and 27 Ghumaon land was given to this Gurdwara. Sher-i-Punjab also built the Gurdwara Kair Sahib at Jai Sukhwala (Mandi Bahauddin).⁵³ Its building had three stories, two tanks of water (one for males, the other for females), and an inn for Sangat’s residence. An estate and forty squares of agricultural land were granted to it by the Maharaja of Punjab. When Kharrak Singh was born, Maharani Nakain constructed a shrine where Sat Guru Ram Das Ji was born. It is known as Janam Asthan Guru Ram Das, Chuna Mandi, Lahore. Moreover, the building of Gurdwara Diwan Khana at Chuna Mandi, the Samadh and Gurdwara of saint Baba Thaan Singh, Gurdwara Bhai Bannu at Mangat Mandi Bahauddin, Samadh of Sardar Charrat Singh (grandfather of Ranjit Singh) with a Baradari (summerhouse with twelve entrances) and the building of Samadh Sardar Mahan Singh (father of Ranjit Singh) were constructed on Maharaja’s orders.

The marks of the past were much prominent on the Art of Maharaja’s court and other cultural aspects of his reign, e.g., Iranian tradition was followed strongly in paintings of the court of Lahore, even the titles used for Maharaja and his courtiers were much inspired by the Mughal era. Moreover, the books were written at Maharaja’s court also got influence from past and various religions. There are many popular folk-lore about Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Many ‘*Akhan*’ & ‘*Bolian*’ associated with him, which proves his popularity among the masses.⁵⁴

To conclude, tolerance, understanding, respect for others, and their creeds were the shining marks of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s court. Matched with a yearning for the past glories of Hindustan and the deep commitment to its personate legacy interwoven with the Sikh message itself, it could only have encouraged the Sikhs’ natural inclination to safeguard the great works of art from the golden age they so much wanted to revive.

⁵⁰ Iqbal Qaiser, *Historical Sikh shrines in Pakistan* (Lahore: Punjabi history board, 1998), p. 42.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵⁴ Snawar Chadhar, *Akhana Rahin Tvareekh* (Kasur: Punjabi Khoj Garh, 2003), pp.110-2.