THE *SAMĀDHI* OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH IN LAHORE

STUDIES IN ASIAN ART AND CULTURE | SAAC

VOLUME 5

SERIES EDITOR
JULIA A. B. HEGEWALD

NADHRA SHAHBAZ KHAN

THE *SAMĀDHI* OF MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH IN LAHORE

A Summation of Sikh Architectural and Decorative Practices

ebv BERLIN

EBVERLAG

Bibliographic information published
by Die Deutsche Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographical data is available on the internet at [http://dnb.ddb.de].

Coverdesign:	Ulf Hegewald. The four *bangla* ceilings on the ground floor of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's *samādhi* (Photo: Nadhra Shahbaz Khan)
Overall layout:	Rainer Kuhl
Copyright ©:	EB-Verlag Dr. Brandt Berlin 2018
ISBN:	978-3-86893-271-3
Internet: E-Mail:	www.ebverlag.de post@ebverlag.de
Printed and bound by:	Hubert & Co., Göttingen Printed in Germany

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY LATE FATHER,
SHAHBAZ AHMAD KHAN—MY LIGHT, MY ANCHOR!

Table of Contents

Foreword

by B. N. Goswamy

In a subcontinent crowded with mausoleums and tombs and commemorative monuments, why, one might wonder, would a young researcher pick to write on a now relatively little talked about structure like the *samādhi* of Maharaja Ranjit Singh? Especially when it happens to be located in Pakistan, where, today's realities being what they are, there could be only marginal interest in the structure, and no teeming crowds seem to come visiting it? The answer is in the study itself, for there is in it a sense of historical excitement, an engaging re-creation of a whole period of great turmoil and change. The *samādhi* remains at the centre of it all, but around it there is such richness, such texture of thought.

As she writes and recreates, Nadhra Khan succeeds in making us a witness to the times. One senses the looming presence of the great Maharaja at every step, now striding in as a conquering warrior, now assembling around him men of talent drawn from all faiths, now whispering into his priest's ears his dying wish to gift the Koh-i Noor to the Jagannath temple in distant Orissa. But not this alone: one can almost see him direct the programme of frescoes that would adorn his own *samādhi*: the great Gurus to be painted here, episodes from the epics there, the *nāyak*s and *nāyikā*s in that corner. And so on. He could not have been part of the politics that accompanied the plans to build a monument to his memory, or the manner in which the British, who conquered and annexed the Punjab within ten short years of the Maharaja's death, underplayed his role or his importance. But he would have approved of the discussions about the architectural plan of the Samadhi with Punjabi-ized technical terms like *dāsah*, *chuggas*, *bangrīs* and *goḍā*s floating about, and of the fact that the monument commemorating him would be referred to by the general populace as a *samādh*, and not, as in Sanskrit, a *samādhi*.

Nadhra Khan takes us to the *samādh* herself, this "last major state funded architectural project of independent Punjab before annexation by the British in 1849". In the process of writing about it, she turns it into a work of serious proportions. The focus of her study remains sharp, and the approach clear. At

every stage, one is struck by the honesty with which the subject is approached. There is utter lack of prejudice here, and a directness with which issues are addressed. The issue, for instance, about the view taken of Sikh architecture in general: that it is only “a pale imitation of Mughal architecture”, giving it “a banditry persona—its whole garb cut out of filched fabric, pasted with stolen ornaments”. The connection between Sikh and Mughal architecture is not hard to see, especially when one also casts a sideways glance at Rajput architecture from which Mughal architecture itself took a lot. But there are differences: of embellishment and emphasis, of expanse and shrinkage, of detail and refinement. One is reminded of what Abu’l Fazl, the great Akbari chronicler, says about *dakhal* poetry: some poets’ practice of taking a classical verse and introduce into it an element, simply a phrase or a word sometimes, which would alter, transform in fact, its meaning or mood.

Is Nadhra Khan’s study informed by these issues and these challenges? Of course it is.

B. N. G.

Preface

In 1947, at the age of ten or eleven, my mother migrated with her parents and an older sister from Ludhiana to Lahore during the Partition of India. She never forgot what she had witnessed, and as long as she lived she would occasionally recount those shocking incidents. I grew up listening to these traumatic stories and at some point I internalized Partition. My passive experience of migration and its horrors has haunted me ever since, as if I had physically suffered the pain.

Until recently I firmly believed that the Sikhs bore responsibility for this deep but mute pain. Then on a wintry morning in 2004, I visited the Lahore fort as a PhD candidate looking for material for my first research project. I stood clicking away with my camera in the Ath Dara—perched precariously on two broken stools and hoping to avoid the guard's eyes—when an old guide walked up to me. Seeing my enthusiasm, he asked if I had been to Ranjit Singh's *marhī* (Punjabi for funerary monument or *samādhi*). Unfamiliar with the term and with only a sketchy knowledge of the Sikh ruler (based on British and Pakistani historiography that blamed him for pillaging all Mughal monuments in Punjab), I asked him for directions and headed off right away. The Dera Sahib Complex that houses Ranjit Singh's and the fifth Sikh Guru Arjun Dev's *samādhis*, faces the fort's Hathi Pol (Elephant Gate). Admission to the complex is only granted to local or visiting Sikhs; others need special permission from the Evacuee Trust Property Board. The guards at the gateway asked for my entry pass, which I did not have, but after pleading my case they relented, though not without some hesitation. Only later did I learn how rare such exceptions were. When I crossed the threshold of the Dera Sahib Complex and entered the gateway of Ranjit Singh's *samādhi* that Friday afternoon, I had no idea what I was getting into. I stood spellbound next to the Maharaja's commemorative *chhatrī*, but all I could remember from my history books was that the entire monument was made out of pillaged material and that it would make an excellent PhD project that would involve investigating the Mughal origin of each section and architectural element. Little did I know that the project I was attracted to for all the wrong reasons was about to change my perceptions of the Sikhs forever and connect me to extremely kind, loving and supportive Sikh women and men. With this I also came to realize that the bleak memories that haunted me through my mother

and countless others on this side of the border tormented people on the other side, as well.

My research of Sikh art and architectural ornament has helped me shed misconceptions and ignorance and widen my worldview. It has given me reasons and occasions to celebrate and cherish commonalities among Punjabis in particular and connect with people across borders, ethnicities, races and religions in general. I hope this book inspires many others to build a few more bridges through art, culture and shared heritage to make this divided and alienating world a better place to live.

Naturally my very first thanks goes to the Lahore fort tour guide who urged me to visit the Maharaja's *marhī*. Had it not been for him, I would have left the Lahore fort without my serendipitous moments at the Maharaja's *samādhi* and my life would have taken an entirely different course. My special thanks goes to Dr Barbara Schmitz, my mentor and co-supervisor for guiding me through my research and writing process. She happened to be in Lahore exactly when I needed her the most as the Foreign Faculty Professor (appointed by Pakistan Higher Education Commission) at the Department of Fine Arts, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore. Her vast knowledge and methodological advice not only helped me organize my research material but to write a better dissertation. Without her help and encouragement, this work would not have taken its present shape and would never have been completed within the stipulated time. My gratitude also goes out to Dr Shahida Manzoor, Principal, University College of Art and Design, who agreed to become my supervisor at an advanced stage of my work. Her insightful comments and enthusiasm for my project and her support in difficult times kept me afloat. She reviewed my work on short notice, offered wise solutions and a sympathetic ear that I much appreciate. My thanks are also due to Dr Shahukat Mahmood, an architectural historian and Coordinator PhD Program, University College of Art and Design. He was always extremely generous with his time and advice whenever I needed it. I am also indebted to Mr Rashid Mukhdum, Consultant Architect for the Agha Khan Cultural Service, Pakistan, for his instructions on architectural forms and their meanings and for accompanying me to sites whenever I requested, despite his extremely busy schedule. I am also extremely grateful to my long-time teacher, and friend, Dr Musarrat Hasan who supported me at a very crucial stage of my academic life and helped me overcome a huge obstacle that had led me to a dead end.

Five great scholars of Sikh history and art have given me aid and important encouragement at crucial times during my research and I am grateful to each one of them. Dr W. H. McLeod, (late) Professor Emeritus at University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, appreciated the plans laid out in my synopsis and gave

me valuable advice on research material at the very beginning of my journey. Dr B. N. Goswamy, Professor Emeritus of Art History, Panjab University, Chandigarh, and an expert on Pahari Paintings, helped me identify the subject matter of the *samādhi* frescoes, a challenge several scholars had abandoned and had boggled me for almost a year. He has, in the meantime, answered a million questions I have asked, each with extreme kindness and utmost patience and has very graciously written the foreword for this book. Dr Jean-Marie Lafont's scholarship unlocked several Sikh history issues that appeared to block my way. The opportunity to benefit from the expertise of these scholars is my most memorable research experience. Dr Mohinder Singh, Director, National Institute of Panjab Studies, most kindly helped remove several hurdles in my research path by providing photographs and other material and importantly, introducing me to Dr B. N. Goswamy and other scholars. I cannot thank Dr Kanwarjit Singh Kang enough for his generosity and kindness that extended to even giving me his own copy of one of his out of print books. I keep bothering him and he most generously keeps sending me material hard to procure in Lahore. He personally sought permission on my behalf to publish the two Chandigarh Museum paintings included in this book and made sure they were delivered to me in time.

My Sikh friends are the most precious reward of this journey. My research in Amritsar and Delhi would not have been possible without the mutual interest in Sikh studies and encouragement of Manveen Sandhu and her husband Shvinder Singh Sandhu (Willi *pāji*) who tragically lost their lives in an automobile accident in January 2009. Manveen helped me with visa formalities and offered a welcoming house where we had long fruitful discussions that had included countless future projects that will remain unrealized due to her untimely death. Amritsar is not the same without Manveen but her children Kirat and Sahil are admirably looking after everything she has left to them—her friends and her legacy of connecting people through education and cultural activities. My thanks to Tripat Bains and Bobby *Bhai* (Arvinder Singh Bains), their lovely daughters Noor and Mannat and their son Jai is more than I can state. Their affection and hospitality offered solace after long days of work during my data collection trips to Delhi and welcomed me into what is now my second home. We have become each other's adopted family members and wish we were exempted from visa restrictions.

My special thanks go to the Fulbright Postdoctoral Fellowship (2014–2015) and Professor Esther da Costa Meyer, Art & Archaeology Department, Princeton University, who relentlessly worked to iron out all hurdles in making it possible. I am particularly indebted to Esther and her husband Christopher Hailey for looking after me throughout the year in every possible way. The Fellowship gave

me access to Princeton libraries and time to revisit and edit my thesis. Availability of books and articles that I did not have access to in Pakistan enabled me to work on several issues I had left unresolved earlier. I am extremely grateful to Chris for reading some parts of this book and for helping me reframe and tighten many arguments. My deepest gratitude goes to my friends and anchors in New York, Susanna Hollnsteiner and her husband Tanveer Sadiq, for their love and spiritual support throughout my project.

This work is dedicated to my father, the late Shahbaz Ahmad Khan who gave me his love and unflinching support in even the tiniest projects I ever undertook. It is due to his confidence in me that I was able to pursue my goals at times when they seemed beyond my capacity. I am also grateful to my uncle Mumtaz Ali Khan (whom I call Chachajan), and his wife, who have always stood by me in difficult times. Our driver Faiz-ur-Rehman deserves my special thanks for patiently driving me around the narrow paths of the interior city and on long distances to other cities on my photography expeditions. His tireless assistance and dependability took me an extra mile closer to my goal. Last and importantly, I am grateful to Naeem, our children Mahrukh and Ali, and our grandson Muizz for allowing my long absences with love and understanding.

Last but not least, I gratefully acknowledge the Vice Chancellor, Dr. Syed Sohail Hussain Naqvi, Dr. Ali Khan, Department Chair, Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Proposals and Grants Committee (HSS), Lahore University of Management Sciences, for their generous financial support of this publication.

Introduction

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Mughal government at Delhi gradually lost control over the Punjab. Lahore, the Mughal provincial capital that once boasted grand monuments and famous gardens and was a centre for art and craft, declined precipitously as a result of misrule, plunder and chaos. By the end of the eighteenth century, Lahore was under the control of three Sikh *sardār*s belonging to the Bhangi *misl* who surpassed all earlier rulers in disorder and lawlessness. As a last desperate measure the dignitaries of Lahore invited Ranjit Singh, *sardār* of Sukherchakia *misl* who controlled Gujranwala and the area around it, to come to Lahore and secretly opened the gates of the city to him and his forces. Ranjit Singh entered the Lahore Fort on 7. July 1799 and ruled the Punjab for the next forty years (Singh 1965, vol. 1: 197).

Maharaja Ranjit Singh resided in the Lahore Fort and governed from there. His rule of forty years saw Punjab grow into a Sikh kingdom of over 390,000 square kilometres with fifteen million inhabitants (Lafont 2003: 131). As a result of effective policies and expanding boundaries, the wealth of the state increased and with it the splendour and majesty of the Lahore Darbār became proverbial; the entertainments of British political guests became exceedingly grand. The arts and architecture in the Punjab were revived by many state funded and private projects: miniature paintings featuring religious and secular themes, novel objects, new gardens, *haveli*s, *gurdwara*s and *śivala*s (temples). Contemporary records show that gold, silver and precious stones were freely used by the *darbār* not only for jewellery and weapons but also for *howda*s, horse saddles, beds, chairs and other utensils. Fabrics woven with gold thread as well as the rare hand-woven woollens including pashmina and tūs, are frequently mentioned in the court chronicle, *Umdat-ut Tawarikh*. They were not only used as dress material but also for tents and canopies raised on gold and silver poles for the Maharaja's receptions. The apogee of the lavish architectural activity was the gold plating of the Temple at Amritsar, an act of devotion by the Maharaja that gave ample proof of the opulence of his rule.

The Maharaja died at the age of fifty-nine years on 27. July 1839. After a grand cremation ceremony and a stately farewell, his ashes were sent to Hardwar for immersion in the Ganges. Proposals were vetted for a grand funerary monument similar to Jahangir's mausoleum at nearby Shahdara across the River

Ravi. Construction of a more modest funerary monument (*samādhi*) began in August by the Maharaja's eldest son and successor Kharak Singh.

Strangely, the court chronicler Sohan Lal Suri and others give few details of the plan and money to be allotted for the new construction. However, the construction and embellishment of Ranjit Singh's *samādhi* continued in spite of the challenges and the rapidly changing political scene at the Lahore Darbār. By the time of the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849, the building was nearly complete. British records give a detailed account of the monument's unfinished work and the funds required for its completion. This serves as a valuable source to date the *samādhi*'s architecture and ornament.

British officials writing in the second half of the nineteenth century are extremely important to our understanding of the worth assigned to Sikh art and architectural heritage. The earliest and the most influential one was *History and Antiquities of Lahore,* by Thomas Henry Thornton, a handbook on Lahore, written at the request of Sir Robert Montgomery, the Governor-General of the Punjab (1859–1865) (Nagi 1994: 10).[1] Written as a guidebook for the increasing numbers of Europeans visiting Lahore, it also introduced a new genre of literature to the Punjab. Thomas Henry Thornton also held high official positions in Lahore for a considerable period where he served as Secretary to the Punjab Government (1864–1876), Judge of Chief Court of Punjab and member of Legislative Council of India (1878–1881). Later he also served as the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India (Elsmie 1908: 103).[2]

Written by an eminent British officer, the *History and Antiquities of Lahore* became the official voice and the standard text on Lahore's architectural heritage. The *Punjab Settlement Report 1865–69,* published by Leslie Saunders in 1873 shows the deference given to Thornton's publication in contemporary circles. Saunders candidly acknowledges that he quotes from Thornton's *History and Antiquities of Lahore* "published in 1861," and adds that to him it was the "the most reliable," source (Saunders 1873: 17). In view of its popularity, Thornton published a more detailed version of this book in 1876.[3] The new publication *Lahore* was co-authored by John Lockwood Kipling who had recently joined the newly established Mayo School of Art in Lahore as its first principal. Kipling contributed a new chapter, "Lahore As It Is," and Thornton repeated his earlier

[1] He was promoted in 1853 to become the Judicial Commissioner, Superintendent of Prisons and Director-General of Police for the entire province. In 1859, he was appointed Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, a position he held until his retirement in 1865 (Laurie 1888: 358).

[2] He played a key role in disarming the soldiers in Lahore at the time of Mutiny of 1857 and was duly praised for this by John Lawrence.

[3] This book was reprinted at least twice before 1876: in 1861 according to Saunders, and in 1868 according to Nagi, discussed below.

essay, "Lahore As It Was" with minor changes to its "Historical" and "Descriptive" sections.[4] The purpose of this second publication, like the first, was "to meet demands for information" by an increasing number of travellers (Thornton & Kipling 1876: ii).

Thornton's second book on Lahore became the official descriptive history of the city and sections of it appeared in different gazettes etc. For example, Denzil Ibbetson, the editor of the *Gazetteer of the Lahore District 1883–84* acknowledges in the preface that he has "utilised" Thornton and Kipling's handbook and reproduces entire sections of their book including paragraphs discussing the Sikh ruler and the architecture he commissioned (Ibbetson 1989: iii). The *Imperial Gazetteer* also borrowed heavily from Thornton's chapters, especially his comments on Ranjit Singh (1908: 36).

In 1924, a British army officer, Henry Raynor Goulding, who had served as A. D. C. to the 'King-Emperor', published a book on Lahore entitled *Old Lahore: Reminiscences of a Resident.* In it he appended the entire "Historical and Descriptive Account" by T. H. Thornton, with the following note:

> To make the pamphlet something more than a mere record of gossip about old times, chapters have been added, containing concise historical and descriptive accounts of Lahore written by Mr. T. H. Thornton, B.C.S., a distinguished official of olden days, who was for many years Secretary to the Punjab Government. Printed in 1860 for private circulation, these excellent summaries of Lahore were embodied, in 1876, in a guide-book, the joint work of Mr. Thornton and Mr. J. Lockwood Kipling, principal of the Lahore School of Art. This useful little book, which was published by the Punjab Government Press, has been long out of print (Goulding & Thornton 1924: iii–iv).

As Goulding explains, this text gives valuable information about the endorsement of Thornton's views by official circles, and by extension, its impact on public perception.[5]

In 1994, Anis Nagi, a Pakistani academic, poet and novelist, published *Ancient Lahore: A Brief Account of the History and Antiquities of Lahore*—a reprint of an out of print guidebook by an unidentified author. He added a second preface, in

[4] Thornton acknowledged that the last two chapters were "a reprint, with alterations and additions, of a pamphlet printed […] for private circulation, in 1860" (Thornton & Kipling 1876: ii).

[5] Goulding's book has since been republished several times, recently by Sang-e Meel Publishers in Lahore, without a date of publication (ISBN 969-35-0439-9).

addition to the one by the anonymous author and compensated for the unknown author by using Montgomery's and his own name on the cover: "Written under the instructions of Sir Robert Montgomery in 1860," and "Preface: Dr. Anis Nagi" (Nagi 1994). According to the first preface the book was a "[…] brief account of the History and Antiquities of Lahore" and that it had been written at the request of Sir Robert Montgomery" (Nagi 1994: 13). Nagi in the second preface states that the book was written in 1860 but published eight years later for reasons unexplainable and that "the author hesitated to publish his name on the book […]." He admires the book as the first attempt at "writing the biography of a city" and also points out that authors like Kanhaya Lal and Syad Muhammad Latif copied this book's format without acknowledging it (Nagi 1994: 10–11).

A comparison of Nagi's *Ancient Lahore* with Thornton's 1876 *Lahore* reveals that what Nagi picked up for a reprint is actually section I of Thornton's first handbook published in 1860, all copies of which are now lost. Footnote 46 in Nagi's book states that Part II carries a translation of the Persian text etched on the Zamzamah gun on the Lahore Mall Road, but this book is neither divided into two parts nor is the translation found in it (Nagi 1994: 99–100). Except for some differences in the sequence of titles, addition of new topics and details added to earlier ones, Thornton's 1876 *Lahore* is a more detailed version of the 1860 text—*Ancient Lahore: A Brief Account of the History and Antiquities of Lahore*.

Thus having remained in circulation as the most authentic and informed text on Lahore, Thornton's discussion of the Sikhs and his description of their architecture played an important role in establishing the general opinion about the Sikhs and their art. His dismissive opinion about Ranjit Singh's *samādhi* should be noted:

> One of the latest specimens of Sikh architecture is the Mausoleum of Ranjit Singh himself, his son and grandson. The building is, as usual, in design substantially Hindu, overlaid with Muhammadan details, and does not bear close inspection; but the effect at a distance is not unpleasing (Thornton & Kipling 1876: 158).

Thornton also opines that the Sikh ruler was "unlettered and unpolished" and belonged to "a peasant race, of martial habits" and the architecture he commissioned was completely devoid of merit. He calls the Hazuri Bagh Bāradarī "an example of judicious spoliation and hybrid design" and rates the Maharaja's additions to the Lahore fort as "tasteless". Thornton also accuses Ranjit Singh of stripping the Mughal tombs of Lahore of their marble veneers to decorate the Golden Temple at Amritsar, an allegation that has survived to this day not

only in general perception but also in the official notices, visible on the large boards hoisted at the entrances of almost all Mughal monuments in and around Lahore. Thus the tombs of Jahangir, Asif Khan and Nur Jahan, have perpetrated Thornton's words for more than a hundred and fifty years.

Admiration for Thornton's book continues to this day. It was recently republished by the National College of Arts, with a new title *Lahore As It Was, A Travelogue, 1860* (Kipling & Thornton 2002), as part of its "Historical Reprints" series.[6] Although John Lockwood Kipling's contribution was limited, to honour him as the college's first principal, his name precedes Thornton's. Another important point overlooked is the difference between the texts of 1860 and 1876. The title mentions the earlier date while the text is a verbatim reprint of the 1876 version. Its selection for a reprint once again bestowed on it legitimacy and validity it enjoyed at the height of its author's and his patron's careers. An eminent Pakistani historian Dr Mubarak Ali, in his foreword to the 2002 reprint criticizes and questions Thornton's hegemonic and condescending remarks, however, its publication under the aegis of a leading art school silenced these concerns.

Keeping in view the extent of circulation of Thornton's book and the authenticity ascribed to it as well as the lack of any alternate narrative, it is not difficult to understand its impact at all levels of society—the official and academic ambits and the public at large. One person's opinion is giving the effect of multiple publications by slight changes in titles. What must be considered today is that Thornton's unschooled assessments of Sikh architecture have reigned for over a hundred and fifty years, nurturing biases. The apathy it has fostered has been damaging the reputation of Sikh architecture until today.

On the other hand, historians writing in Urdu during the nineteenth century on Lahore and its monuments such as Nur Ahmad Chishti and Kanhaya Lal dedicated special attention to the *samādhi* and have described its salient features in great detail. Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Qureshi Lahori covered the entire Punjab in his *Tarikh-e Makhzan-e Punjab: Punjab ka Qadeem Encyclopaedia* (Treasures of the History of the Punjab: Ancient Encyclopaedia of the Punjab),[7] and briefly mentions this important Sikh memorial. Syad Muhammad Latif's book on Lahore was published in English in 1892. His account of Ranjit Singh's *samādhi* echoes earlier descriptions of the monument and does not give new information.

Chishti's account (first published in 1867) reveals that the east entrance of the *samādhi* was affixed with a white marble sculpture of the Hindu god

[6] The National College of Arts was formerly known as the Mayo School of Art. John Lockwood Kipling joined the school as its first principal in 1875 and served until 1893.

[7] Title translation by the author.

Gaṇeśa, a feature not mentioned by any other historian. Describing the interior, Chishti notes that the niches inside the *samādhi* contain marble sculptures of the Hindu goddess with silk curtains on them, elements that no longer exist. Another significant piece of information is that two copies of the *Granth Sahib* (both *Adi* and *Dasam*) were placed on the south side of the central *chhatrī* and that two *granthī*s were appointed for recital. He even elaborates on the significance of an idol of the Hindu goddess placed in a *samādhi* chamber, donated by one of the Maharaja's surviving wives, Rani Jindan (Chishti 2006 [1867]: 679–680).

Lahori's *Tarikh-e Makhzan-e Punjab,* first published in 1877 at Lucknow by Nawal Kishore, gives a brief but informative account of the *samādhi*'s construction. Lahori mentions that the *samādhi* was completed at the beginning of British rule, and that the eight columns in the interior were not strong enough to carry the load of the dome. Since they were on the verge of collapse, the government asked Kanhaya Lal, the Executive Engineer, for a solution. He added eight more columns next to the original ones to share the load of the dome and essentially saved the building (Lahori 1996 [1877]: 230). Kanhaya Lal himself describes the building in detail in his 1884 publication and also mentions that he restored cracked marble columns by putting iron clamps around them (Lal 2006 [1884]: 193). The organization of Syad Muhammad Latif's book on Lahore (first published in 1892) reflects Thornton's format. His description of the *granthī*s reciting *Granth Sahib* in the *samādhi* informs us of the continuation of rituals first mentioned by Nur Ahmad Chishti, and of the upkeep of the memorial by the British (Latif 1892: 129–130).

The most notable historian of the second half of the twentieth century writing on Lahore was Khan Muhammad Waliullah Khan. Discussing Ranjit Singh's *samādhi* in his 1961 publication, *Lahore and Its Important Monuments,*[8] which largely follows the British discourse, erroneously gives 1848 as the date of the *samādhi*'s completion. Echoing Thornton's assessment of the *samādhi*'s architectural style, he states that it is:

> […] an unhappy mixture of Hindu and Muslim architecture, composed and constructed in conformity with Hindu tastes, with the result that it has no dignity of the Muslim architecture, it has all crowdedness of the Hindu style (Khan 1973 [1961]: 82–83).

He notes that the marble doorframe of its entrance with the exquisitely inlaid work, originally belonged to the Sheesh Mahal and that another twenty-one

[8] Republished in 1964 and 1973.

marble doorframes used in the building were pillaged from several Mughal monuments, especially the fort. In his opinion most of the frescoes in the interior of the *samādhi* depict life stories of the Sikh Gurus and terms the lotus petals carved on the dome "Naga hood designs, generally misunderstood as acanthus leaves" (Khan 1973 [1961]: 84). Khan Muhammad Waliullah Khan's second publication *Sikh Shrines in West Pakistan,* of 1962 is a first attempt at documenting and publishing on a topic heretofore deemed unworthy of aesthetic attention. He repeats his description of the *samādhi* in this publication and adds that the four commemorative marble urns are "distinguished by a carved representation of pigeons" (Khan 1962: 54).

Among the few other twentieth-century publications offering some information on Maharaja Ranjit Singh's funerary monument is *Lahore: A Glorious Heritage* by Ihsan H. Nadiem. He again echoes Thornton's views that the building is an "admixture of Hindu and Muslim architecture" (1996: 169). According to him the building "boasting of no architectural grandeur" is built in stone. The three ornamental elements he very briefly mentions are the red sandstone plaques on the gateway exterior, mirror mosaic of the ceilings that are "set in white marble," and the marble knobs that "cover" the ashes of the Maharaja and his household. Another twentieth century scholar Nazir Ahmed Chaudhry writing in 1998 believes that "Sikhs hardly contributed anything to Lahore and instead deprived the monuments of stone. They disfigured the buildings and the gardens and palaces" (Chaudhry 1998: 144).

Kamil Khan Mumtaz, a modern architectural historian dismisses Sikh architecture by observing that "The vulgarization of Mughal forms appear to have been carried to fantastic extremes in the half century or so of Sikh rule." On the other hand, he states that "Even so, the religious architecture of the Sikhs represent an interesting development of the indigenous mainstream" but he does not elaborate on this idea (1989: 88).

F. S. Aijazuddin, another eminent living historian, gives by far the most objective account of the *samādhi*'s construction but only briefly mentions the interior decoration: "[…] small reflecting mirrors set in white cement, and its walls and pillars painted with scenes from the Hindu and Sikh legends" (2004: 90). He also mentions a "marble canopied structure" that marks the spot of the Maharaja's cremation and holds commemorative carved lotus flowers (2004: 92).

Although informative and useful, none of the nineteenth or twentieth century accounts consider the significance of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's *samādhi* as having characteristic Sikh features that show a development of previous styles or as a monument that represents the epitome of Sikh architectural ornament and art.

No research has so far been carried out to determine how the *samādhi* represents Sikh innovations and contributes to indigenous architecture. No attention has ever been paid to the murals of remarkable quality in the interior of the *samādhi* that reflect an amalgamation of Pahari and Punjabi styles and follows a notable program of design. No historian ever tried to read the symbolism of these images or questioned the reason for their presence and the coexistence of Hindu and Sikh religious themes.

This monograph for the first time attempts to address such problems. Chapter one seeks to recreate the ambience of the magnificent Lahore Darbār—the Maharaja's court, drawing as much as possible from contemporary sources, followed by a detailed account of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death and cremation. Chapter two discusses the ancient Indian funerary practices as they impacted the construction of the *samādhi*, possible reasons for the selection of the site for the monument, and the significance of its square plan.

The ornamental art of the *samādhi* is presented in two major segments in chapters three and four—architectural decoration and murals. The first includes carvings, inlay, fenestration and dome formation and the second encompasses the forty-eight frescoes in the *samādhi* interior. Both chapters mark and emphasize features that are distinctly Sikh, offering comparisons with contemporary as well as prototypes and underpin the significance of the *samādhi* as an example of indigenous art.

Chapter three describes, discusses and analyses each structural and surface decorative motif found in the *samādhi* separately. First, the motif is discussed in relation to similar motifs found in other buildings commissioned during the Sikh rule—to the variations, if any, found in the motif's shape and style in contemporary use. Their prototypes can be traced to earlier Mughal architectural ornament, in most cases, used in the Lahore area. In the light of the hereditary craft tradition of this region, this exercise highlights the dynamics of acculturation and assimilation in the life of each motif from the Mughal to the Sikh periods. The analysis starts with the *samādhi* gateway, moves on to the exterior of the main building and then focuses on the architectural ornament in the interior. Salient features of the gateway include carving on red sandstone panels and intricate designs in wood carving on the doors. The exterior of the *samādhi* displays a superb example of *pietra dura* on the main doorway and once had frescoes flanking entrances on three sides. The significant style and structure of the dome and its surrounding elements are also discussed. The interior of the *samādhi* has marble archways in a *bāradarī* form with fine carving and a marble *chhatrī* in the centre that was meant for displaying symbolic marble knobs representing the Maharaja and women of his household who immolated

themselves on the imperial pyre. The glass and mirror mosaic embellishment on the ceilings of the circumambulatory around the *bāradarī* as well as the dome that crowns the central double-height hall is then studied. The conclusion presents a detailed analysis of each decorative motif.

The architectural structure of the *samādhi* seems to derive from two architectural activities in two parts of northern Punjab: one that flourished prior to its conquest by Ranjit Singh in the Kangra Valley, commissioned by the Katoch ruler Sansar Chand (r. 1775–1823), and the second in Jammu, Kashmir, under the Dogra Rajas, especially Gulab Singh (r. 1846–1857) who outlived his two brothers, Dhyan Singh and Suchet Singh, all of whom had served under Ranjit Singh. Stylistically, there is a close connection between these two and the Sikh style in the Punjab plains, but examples of the Kangra and the Jammu architectural ornament in the "Parallels" or "Prototypes" sections are not included and must be the focus of later researchers. Features that need to be incorporated in such a future study are briefly summarised here.

Lahore's position as the Mughal *dar-us sultanat*, and the presence of hereditary craftsmen who had settled in and around Lahore since at least Akbar's time played an important role in fashioning the city's nineteenth century architecture. Moreover, the aesthetic synthesis that took place here and the impetus it received during the forty years of Sikh supremacy in the region are much more vital than similar developments in the Kangra Valley. The earlier buildings of Sikh patrons in the Punjab Hills also need to be surveyed. For example, after the Katoch Raja sought Ranjit Singh's assistance to expel the Gurkha army from his territory, Ranjit Singh appointed Desa Singh Majithia as the first Sikh governor of the Kangra Hills in 1809 (Hutchison & Vogel 1994, vol. 1: 80–81 and Lyall 1874: 113). Since Desa Singh was an avid patron of art and architecture, a constant flow of artists and artisans between Lahore and Kangra must have been a natural consequence of his presence in the Valley. The presence of two of Sansar Chand's daughters (Anirudh Chand's half-sisters), residing in the Lahore Fort as Ranjit Singh's wives, who married them in 1829, is also of great significance. There are strong possibilities that at least one of them commissioned some form of art and architecture. The migration of the Kangra aesthetic vocabulary to the Punjab plains is known but further research is needed to trace the flow of influences in the other direction. Given the insufficiency of present research on this subject, it is difficult to establish the extent of Sikh influence on architecture in the Hill States and to ascertain the patterns of acculturation, assimilation and development of its architectural ornament. Although publications by Karuna Goswamy (1971), Mira Seth (2006 and 1976), and P. S. Sriraman (2013) carry excellent information and images that are extremely useful, they do not cover all

aspects that were required. The Sikh occupation of Kashmir in 1811 when Jammu became Kharak Singh's *jagīr,* presents similar conditions as the Hill States for the development of art and architectural styles. Major architectural monuments thereafter, mostly commissioned by the three Dogra brothers, especially Gulab Singh after 1846, carry very strong similarities with contemporary architecture in the plains (Seth 1987). Since none of these architectural structures or their ornament display the fineness found in the ones commissioned by the Lahore Darbār, the former can only be termed as the very last and dwindling phase of the Sikh style.

Easier to research are the forty-eight frescoes remaining on two levels in the *samādhi* interior (Chapter Four). A set of twenty-four are painted in the zone of transition, at the base of the dome that crowns the double-height central hall (Level I). The second set of twenty-four panels is painted on the intrados of the archways of the gallery around the central void of the double-height hall (Level II). Based on my complete photographic survey, the theme of each panel is identified and comparisons of similar subject matter given as available. This chapter ends with an examination of the program of these frescoes.

As a summary of my research, I consider three prominent architectural features that demonstrate that there was indeed a distinct Sikh architectural style. A similar analysis is given for the transitory phase of the style of murals by examining the Pahari and European influences. Finally, with all the new information we have at hand, the patronage of the *samādhi* is debated and a conclusion reached in the light of contemporary records.

Index

D

E

F

G

H

I

J

K

L

M

N

O

P

R

S

T

V

W

Y

Z