

Press Release



August 5, 2008

THE  
SIKH FOUNDATION  
*I n t e r n a t i o n a l*

**PRESERVATION & RENOVATION OF SIKH MEMORABILIA**  
*Sikh Arts, Monuments and Manuscripts in deep jeopardy:*

On 18th July 2008, Gurinder Chadha interviewed Dr. Narinder Kapany at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London on the preservation & restoration of our Sikh heritage. The following is the extract of the interview conducted before an audience of over 150 attendees.



Gurinder Chadha in conversation  
with Dr N.S Kapany

“We live in a time when it is easy to forget the value of the past. We are surrounded by the lure of modernity and bombarded by incessant messages about the value of almost anything new. As a result, the works of our cultural and artistic heritage often languish due to the benign neglect or simple lack of attention. In more extreme cases, great monuments have been willfully destroyed, most memorably when the TALIBAN dynamited the 1500 year old Buddha statues in 2001 - a UNESCO World Heritage Site – on the grounds that they were idols, which are forbidden under Sharia law. The world’s outrage at this atrocity was a clear reminder that we do in fact understand the price we collectively pay – no matter what our religion – when any cultural asset is lost or destroyed, for whatever reasons.”



The Sikh court of Lahore - August Schoefft 1850

**Sikh Arts:**

Sikh Art, as a term, evolved in the early 1970’s. It could be defined as “Art about, for and by the Sikhs” and encompasses in its purview paintings, monuments, manuscripts, textiles, armory, jewellery, and sculptures as well as the relics of the Sikh Guru’s.

Worldwide major collections of Sikh Arts are with museums in San Francisco, St. Petersburg, London, Paris and Toronto.

Although major collections of Sikh Art are in India and Pakistan in various museums and private collections, the quality of museums in India & Pakistan are a grave deterrent to the maintenance and high profile of the arts. The valuable artwork needs to be well preserved with controlled lighting, temperature, humidity and UV exposure. The lack and awareness of these requirements have resulted in permanent damage to the artwork.

## Sikh Relics:

Various Relics of the Sikh Gurus are in the possession of gurudwaras and private families and damage is done to these priceless articles through mishandling. Many gurudwaras hold armor that was used in the times of the Gurus. When this armor is shown to the congregation, the priests hold these articles with bare hands and the oils and sweat from their skin is transferred to the artifact, thereby speeding up the process of corrosion and rusting. Though this problem can be easily solved just by the handler wearing cotton gloves, there is a lack of awareness and appreciation of the damage. Also of deep concern is the state of the turban of Guru Gobind Singh, clothes of Sikh Gurus and their other possessions and articles of use.



1. Dastar of Guru Gobind Singh 2. Kharawan of Guru Hargobind  
3-4. Shield and Sword of Guru Gobind Singh

## Manuscripts:



Later this year as Sikh all over the world commemorate the 300th anniversary of the installation of the Guru Granth Sahib as Guru, we hope attention will also be drawn to the numerous hand written manuscripts of the Guru Granth Sahib which are been neglected. Lately the 1st draft of the Adi Granth by Guru Arjan Dev ji was fully restored. But these are only exceptional cases and there is a pressing need for a consolidated effort for the collection and restoration of the huge quantities of manuscripts of the Sikhs which are available all over the world. Prof. Jeevan Deol and others have reviewed various manuscripts and outlined these problems.

1. Restored first draft of the Adi Granth 2. A folio from a 19th century illuminated Guru Granth Sahib manuscript

## Monuments:

The preservation of historical gurudwaras is a delicate issue which needs to balance the modern needs and aspirations of ever increasing number of devotees thronging to the gurudwaras with the efforts to preserve the old. A good example of this is the modernization of the 9 storied Gurudwara Baba Atal Rai. It is one of Amritsar's finest architectural marvels standing 40m high. The interior walls were covered with murals, done in the late the 19th century. Though today some of these have painted or tiled over to give "a modern look".



1. Gurudwara Baba Atal : Bourne & Shephard, Albumin print 1866 3. A 19th century fresco depicting Guru Nanak 4. Ceramic tiles covering some of the fresco's of Gurudwara Baba Atal today.

In 1985 PS Arshi wrote a book on the architectural features of various Gurudwaras and added a new dimension in the understanding and appreciation of the Golden Temple, the Akal Takhat, Baba Atal and the innumerable gurudwaras from the elevated Anandpur Sahib to the plains of Majha, Malwa and Doaba .Apart from these, there are important gurudwaras in Pakistan e.g. Nankana Sahib, Dera Sahib, Panja Sahib etc.



In Sri Hargobindpur, the 17th century "Guru ki masjid" was built by Guru Hargobind for the Muslim population. The first phase of the renovation was undertaken in 1999 by the Sikh Foundation in partnership with UNESCO under the supervision of Ar. Gurmeet Rai. More work is necessary to complete the restoration & the transfer to the muslim community.

"Guru ki masjid" Sri Hargobindpur.

Also of great historical interest are the buildings, palaces and forts associated with the Sikh kingdoms of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Patiala, Nabha, Faridkot and Kapurthala dynasties.

The neglected state of the Qila Mubarak, whose foundation was laid in 1763, is a case in point. It is a 10 acre complex containing the Main Palace (Qila Androon), the guesthouse and the Darbar Hall. The Qila Androon is a series of interconnected mini palaces comprising of the Sheesh Mahal, Toshakana, Jalau Khana, Chand Mahal, Rang Mahal, Florence Mahal etc.

The maintenance and management of all of these valuable Sikh monuments is fraught with numerous problems of budgets, availability of expertise in restoration and preservation, local politics and ownership issues.

While some problems are complex there are other which are easily solved e.g. the damage the pigeons are causing to the outer art work of the monuments can easily be avoided by using simple anti pest devices.



1. Qila Mubarak, Patiala - outer walls 2. Qila Androon, Patiala - damaged fresco 3. Qila Androon, Patiala - pigeon damage on walls

“While we are not experts on this subject, we are without doubt passionate amateurs, intimate observers and collectors of Sikh Arts, and we share a commitment to bringing the deteriorating condition of Sikh Arts, relics, manuscripts and monuments today to the attention of Sikhs as well as non Sikhs. If this trend is allowed to continue, our important arts and monuments could be totally destroyed within as little as a generation – thus destroying the ability of our children, our grand children and the world at large to view the beauty and grandeur of our heritage. And we won’t have the Taliban to blame, only ourselves. By acting now, we can prevent this tragedy from happening.”