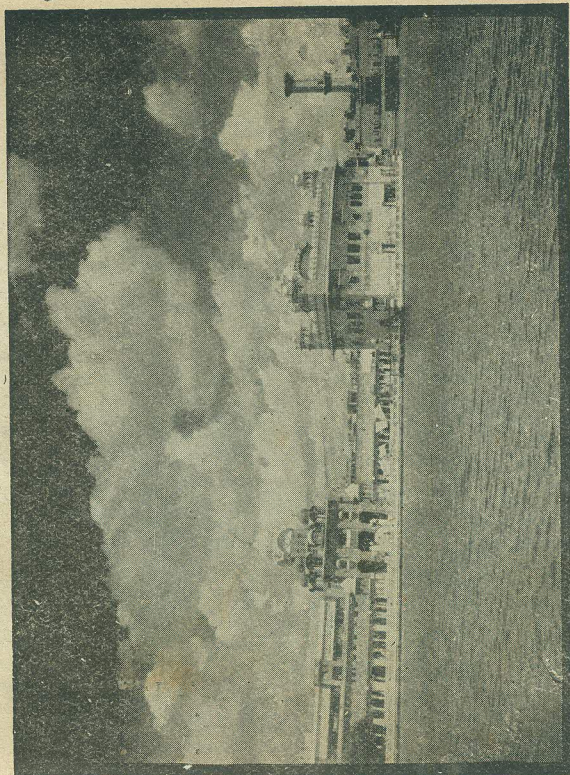


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THE GOLDEN TEMPLE



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Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee,
AMRITSAR.

Do Remember, Please

1. **Tobacco, narcotics, and intoxicants in any shape or form are not to be carried into the Temple Precincts.**
2. **Shoes, Used Socks, Sticks and Umbrellas of visitors are to be left outside the Holy Premises. They are taken care of by Temple employees free of charge.**
3. **A visitor may however use socks never used before.**
4. **Visitors without socks will please wash their feet at the taps by the entrance outside the Holy grounds.**
5. **Visitors will please keep their heads covered all the time they are inside the Golden Temple and on the Holy Premises.**

I. SIKHISM : FOUNDER OF THE FAITH.

Rev. Raymond Raynes observed in course of a recent sermon in Johannesburg, "It has often happened in history that some particular person has been raised in whom the aspirations and the dire needs of his generation seem to be crystallized and there is a sitrting of men's hearts."

Such a man was Guru Nanak (1469-1538 A. D.), the founder of Sikhism, Born of *Chhetri* parents, Guru Nannk was a monotheist. He did not believe in the caste system. Spiritual urged him to renounce the world in adolescence. His liberal outlook, born of intense spirituality of a very high order, was intolerant of all current conventions and meaningless formalities. He realised that truth cannot be the monopoly of any individual, sect or book, revealed or otherwise, that the Ultimate Truth is latent in every man. It has to be brought out by sincere, self-less and life-long "Sadhana" (endeavour). He said, "Man becomes man when the Ultimate Truth dawns on him, when he can love truth sincerely."

Guru Nanak was a widely travelled man. He travelled over the whole of India and Ceylon and even went to remote places like Arabia and Persia. After long wanderings extending over many lands and years

Nanak came back home and settled down as a householder. He declared, "God is to be found neither in the Quran nor in the 'Puranas'. The writers of holy books have flaunted their erudition in their works. The Shastras are full of errors. One need not renounce the world to attain God. He (God) reveals Himself and is immanent in our every day life. The anchorite in the cave and the prince in the Palace are equal in His eyes. God is concerned not with the caste, but with the doings of man." Nanak was against the superstitions and image-worship of the Hindus and the intolerance of the Muslims. He tried and tried hard to do away with all these.

The universalism of Baba Nanak's teachings achieved a fair measure of success in effecting a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. The unity of Godhood and the brotherhood of man are the burden of his message. The essential features of his system are its non-sectarian character and its harmony with secular life. True to his teachings, Guru Nanak counted Hindus as well as Muslims among his disciples.

Essentially a man of God, Guru Nanak was a friend of humanity as well. The institution of "Langar" (Free Kitchen) introduced by the Sikh Gurus bears testimony to this. None knew better than they that religious instruction sounds hollow and hypocritical to a hungry man. The institution of free kitchen has

another significance too. It induced those who came to the Guru to rise above casteism, an artificial barrier between man and man.

After Guru Nanak's death in 1538, his mantle fell on his successor Gurus—nine in all—regarded by the Sikhs as incarnations of the Master himself. Guru Govind Singh, the last of them (1666—1708), breathed a new life into the Sikhism and organised the Sikhs as thoroughly as a "Grecian law-giver" could think of. He was the friend, philosopher and guide of his folk during a most critical period in the history of the community.

Propounded and propagated by men of saintly disposition, permeated through and through with a spirit of self-less service and patriotism, Sikhism has become a great religion through "sacrifice, turmoil and persecution," and the followers of the faith have covered themselves with glory in the process.

II. THE GOLDEN TEMPLE

Amritsar (Lit. The Tank of Nectar) is, first and foremost, the city of the Golden Temple (Swarna Mandir) or Darbar Sahib (the Court Divine), formerly known as the Hari Mandir (The Temple of God). It is the ardent desire of every devout Sikh to pay at least one visit to the Golden Temple.

Long, Long ago, the present city of Amritsar was a dense forest with a pool in it. Several villages fringed the forest. Lord Buddha is believed to have stopped here for a while and to have said, "The spot is best for the Bhikshus (Buddhist monks) to attain their Nirvana (Salvation) and is far superior in that respect to other places so far visited; but it must have time for its celebrity." The place acquired some prominence in the earlier days of Buddhism. But it did not last long and in the days of Guru Nanak Amritsar was again a dense, deserted forest owned by the adjoining villages of Tung, Sultanwind, Gumtala and Gulwali.

Guru Nanak lived here for a time in 1532. He was charmed by the secluded spot "far from the maddening crowd's ignoble strife."

The pool was enlarged and converted into a regular tank by Guru Arjan (1581—1606), the fifth Master. He named it Amritsar. The city that

grew around the tank also came to be known as Amritsar.

Bhai Jetha, the future Guru Ramdas (1474-81), the fourth Master, was sent here by the third Master Guru Amardas (1552-74) to found a common centre for commerce and worship. Guru Ramdas laid the foundation of a village, which has grown into the largest city of the post-partition Punjab. The village was called Guru Ka Chak. It is popularly believed that the village was built on a site donated by Emperor Akbar (1556-1605). Some historians, however hold that the site for the village was purchased by Guru Ramdas from its proprietors for Rs. 700/-.

The excavation of Amritsar was begun by Guru Ramdas in 1573. After the death of Guru Amardas next year the work was abandoned. It was resumed three years later in 1577. The small village founded by Guru Ramdas had by this time grown into a township. It came to be known as Chak Ramdas or Ramdaspur. The excavation of the tank was completed in 1589, during the pontificate of Guru Arjan, who, as noted above, gave it the name of Amritsar.

Guru Arjan built the Golden Temple in the centre of this tank (Amritsar). The Temple was at first known as Hari Mandir. The foundation of the Mandir was laid on Magh I, 1645 Samvat (January, 1589) by the Muslim Saint Mian Mir, a friend and admirer of Guru Arjan.

The Mandir was completed in 1601 and the Adi Grantha was installed therein on Bhadra I, 1661 Samvat (August-September, 1604). Baba Buddha, was appointed the first "Granthi", i.e. the reader of the Holy Scripture (Adi Grantha).

The Hari Mandir has a chequered history and changed hands a number of times. The Sikhs were turned out of their temple and the temple itself was destroyed and desecrated again and again by the Mughal rulers. Again and again did the Sikhs recover it and avenge the sacrilege at a tremendous sacrifice. Many are the stories of bravery and heroism displayed by the Sikhs for the recovery of the temple.

The Mughal Governor of Lahore drove the Sikhs out of the temple about the middle of the 18th century. Troops were posted to keep them away from Amritsar and Hari Mandir. A Sikh could have a dip in the sacred water of the tank and drink it only at the risk of his life. A police post and a civil court were established in the temple in 1740. The Mughal commandant Massa Ranghar used the holy of holies as a dancing hall. The temple precincts were used as stables. Two valiant Sikhs Mehtab Singh and Sukha Singh came all the way from Bikaner to punish the Ranghar. Disguised as cultivators, they got into the temple precincts on the plea of paying the land revenue. While Mehtab Singh entered the temple,

Sukha Singh stood guard outside. The former killed Massa Ranghar and escaped with his companion before the official guard had recovered from the shock. The murder of Massa Ranghar was followed by a severe persecution of the Sikhs. The Sikhs were compelled to go in hiding. The temple was locked. Sentries were posted at the entrance with strict orders not to let in any stranger.

The Sikhs, however, took advantage of the confusion and anarchy which followed Nadir Shah's invasion of India (1739), Jassa Singh Kalal, one of the important Sikh leaders of the time, openly declared that the 'Dal Khalsa', i.e. the Sikh Commonwealth, would be the new rulers of the land. But Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasion of India (1747) ushered in a new era of persecution for the Sikhs. Abdali was determined to wipe the Sikhs out of existence and to pull down the Golden Temple. The Temple was occupied and desecrated in 1757, the year of the Battle of Plassey, which made the English the defacto Masters of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The Sikhs, however, united under two of their leaders—both named Jassa Singh—and occupied Lahore and Amritsar in 1758.

On hearing about the desecration, a body of Sikhs under the leadership of Baba Dip Singh started at once to avenge the insult. A bloody encounter took place about eight miles away from Amritsar. Yet the avengers went on cutting their way through the

Muslim hordes. When about four miles from the city Baba Dip Singh was mortally wounded. As he staggered and was about to fall, a comrade-in-arms reminded him of his vow to reach the sacred precincts. He at once recovered himself. With his left hand he gripped and supported his almost chopped off head and with the right he went on mowing the enemies. Thus fighting this unique warrior reached the holy precincts. His vow fulfilled, he let drop his head and went to the eternal abode of martyrs. Near the spot stands the mausoleum later erected in memory of him and his great deed. It is called **Gurdwara Shahid Bunga Baba Dip Singh**.

The Abdali, however, was not the man to let a challenge go unaccepted. He invaded India in 1762 and inflicted a deadly blow on the Sikhs in the battle of Kup Rahira in Ludhiana. This event is still remembered as "Ghallughara". The victor raided Amritsar on his way back to Kabul. The Golden Temple was blown up with gun powder by him and the holy tank was also desecrated. Countless Sikhs laid down their lives in the defence of their shrine.

After the final departure of Ahmed Shah Abdali from India in 1767, the Sikhs re-conquered the Punjab and re-occupied the Golden Temple. The Temple was re-constructed. The holy tank was cleared of the debris. Both have remained in their possession ever since without interruption. Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), the Lion of the Punjab beautified the

Temple with gold-work, gilding the upper half with gilded sheets and the lower half with inlaid marble mosaics and precious stones. The temple was managed in his days by a Council of the Sikhs of which the Maharaja was the head. The Council functioned till the end of the Punjab as a sovereign State.

The Golden Temple passed under the control of one man, the 'Sarbrah' (Manager), during the British period. The 'Sarbrah', a nominee of the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, mismanaged the affairs of the Temple. Immoralities were practised within the Temple precincts. Practices repugnant to the tenets of Sikhism were openly indulged in. The Sikhs resented the objectionable practices. The resentment grew and grew till at last it took shape in the Sikh Gurdwara Reform Movement of the early twenties of the present century. The Akali Dal became the spearhead of the struggle for the reform of the places of worship. The struggle was directed against the control of the Sikh shrines by the 'Mohants' and against foreign imperialism. The Dal made great sacrifice for the cause. Their activities awakened the Punjab and the Punjabees. The members of the Dal took the vows of 'Swadeshi' and non-violence. 'Satyagraha' was the only weapon used by them. Public opinion in the Punjab was behind them. Nationalist India looked on with admiration.

The curtain was finally rung down upon the Gurdwara Reform Movement when the Sikh Gurdwara

Act, 1925, vested the control and management of the Golden Temple in the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, a representative body of the Sikhs, elected by adult franchise.

The Golden Temple, a two-storied marble structure, is built on a 67 ft. square platform in the centre of the sacred tank Amritsar. The Central dome of the Temple and the upper half of the walls were covered with gold-plated copper sheets by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Hence the name Golden Temple. The Temple under the blue sky dazzling in the Sunlight presents a splendid feast to the eye. The Temple itself is 40.5 ft. square. It has a door each on the east, west, north and south. The four doors of the Golden Temple are symbolic. They seem to point out that the Temple is open to all, that people can come here irrespective of caste, creed or sex. A 24 ft. x 21 ft. marble causeway on the western shore of the tank leads to the western portal of the temple. A fine arch called the "Darshani Darwaza" stands at the shore end of the causeway. The door-frame of the arch is about 10 ft. in height and 8 ft. 6 inches in breadth. The door panes are decorated with artistic ivory work. A 60 ft. wide promenade called the "Paikrama" (path of circumambulation) runs round the tank.

On a platform under a gorgeous canopy studded with jewels on the ground floor of the Golden Temple

lies the Adi Grantha (The Sikh Bible). It is carried in a golden palanquin from the "Akal Takht" (The Throne Divine) in the Temple precincts to the Golden Temple at 5 in the morning in winter and at 4 in summer. The Adi Grantha is carried back to the "Akal Takht" in the same palanquin at 10 p.m. in winter and at 11 p.m. in summer. Songs from the Holy Book are sung without a break all the time it is in the Temple. The 'Ragis' (the musicians) are paid employees of the Temple Committee. There is no formal or ritualistic worship. All visitors are welcome. They place offerings in the shape of money and flowers before the Holy Book. There is no compulsion, no extortion. Guides employed by the Temple authorities show the visitors round free of charge.

A 13ft. wide "Pradakshina" (procession path) encircles the holy of holies. Steps on the east of the "Pradakshina" lead to the waters of the sacred tank. The steps are called Hari-Ki-Pauri (Steps of God).

The walls of the ground floor of the Golden Temple are "faced with marble slabs inlaid with arabesques of conventional flower sprays" in precious stones of various colours. The walls of the upper storey, the cornices, the roof, columns, cupolas, in a word, almost every inch of available space with the exception of the floor, are a glittering mass of gilded copper. The eastern loggia of the temple is covered with copper plates gilded by Rani Sada Kaur, mother-in-law of

Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The remaining three sides were similarly beautified by the Maharaja himself. The decoration work in gold goes to the credit of the Maharaja, his son Kharak Singh and grandson Nau Nihal Singh.

The floor of the upper storey of the Golden Temple is 40 ft. each way. It is paved with marble. The interior of the walls is ornamented with rich floral designs. There is a small "Shish Mahal" (Hall of Mirrors) on the upper storey. It was originally a pavilion where the Gurus used to sit. Beautified by Ranjit Singh, it is now used for "Akhand Path" (Non-stop recitation of the Adi Grantha from cover to cover). Hymns are inscribed on its walls in letters of gold. On the third storey stands the gorgeous gold dome. Smaller domes decorate the parapet.

The architecture of the Golden Temple represents a happy blending of the Hindu and Muslim artistic traditions. It is however more than a mere combination of the two. It marks the beginning of a new school of temple architecture in India.

III AROUND THE GOLDEN TEMPLE

A visit to the Golden Temple is incomplete without a visit to the following, among others :—

1. AKAL TAKHT :—

It faces the Golden Temple proper. Built by the Sixth Master Guru Hargovind (1606-45) in 1609, it has been the nerve-centre of the Sikhdom ever since. All orders affecting the community as a whole were and are issued from here. The Akal Takht was used for holding court and Sikh congregations in the days of its builder.

The Akal Takht was pulled down several times by the Muslim raiders. The ground floor of the present building was constructed in 1774. Three storeys were subsequently added by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. A number of weapons used by Guru Har Govind, Guru Govind Singh and other Sikh heroes are preserved in the Akal Takht.

2. BABA ATAL :—

A nine-storeyed tower, built in memory of Atal Rai (d. 1628), a son of Guru Har Govind, is called Baba Atal. Atal Rai died at nine. He was called 'Baba' (an old man) because he carried an old head over young shoulders. The tower was built between 1778 and 1784.

3. GURU KA LANGAR :—

A Sikh temple without a free kitchen is inconceivable. Cooked food is distributed in the free kitchen of the Golden Temple twice a day to all comers irrespective of caste, creed and nationality. The kitchen is run at a cost of about 1½ lacs of rupees a year. The expenses are met out of the Temple funds.

4. SHRI GURU RAM DAS NIVAS :—

The Nivas is a free hostel for the pilgrims maintained by the Temple authorities. Built by the Gurdwara Committee, it has 153 rooms and 8 big halls. Unlike the ordinary "Dharamsalas", the Nivas supplies free beddings, cots, lights etc. to the lodgers. A lodger is not generally allowed to stay here for more than four days at a time. The doors of the hostel are open to all. The lodgers however must not do anything repugnant to the teachings of Sikhism.

5. THE S. G. P. C. OFFICE :—

The headquarters of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee are located in the Teja Singh Samundri Hall very near the Golden Temple. The Gurdwara Act, 1925, transferred the control of the historical Sikh shrines in the Punjab to the S. G. P. C. It is a representative body of the Sikhs elected by adult franchise.

6. Among the other objects of interest around the

Golden Temple mention may be made of :—

- (a) Dukh Bhanjani Ber (Ber- jujube tree)
- (b) Thara Sahib
- (c) Baba-di-Ber
- (d) Gurdwara Ilachi Ber
- (e) Ath Sathh Tirth (Sixty eight holy places) and
- (f) Gurdwara Shahid Bunga Baba Dip Singh.

The Golden Temple possesses a fine collection of jewellerys and valuable articles of considerable artistic and historical importance. The following deserve a special mention—

(a) GOLD-PLATED DOOR PANELS—

There are four pair of them.

(b) GOLDEN UMBRELLA—

The umbrella, studded with precious jewels, is an object of exquisite workmanship and great artistic value.

(c) BEJEWELLED HEAD-BAND—

It is a gift from Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It was prepared for the use of Kunwar Nau Nihal Singh, grand son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, at the time of his marriage. The Maharaja presented it to the Golden Temple.

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