

The sign of gurus

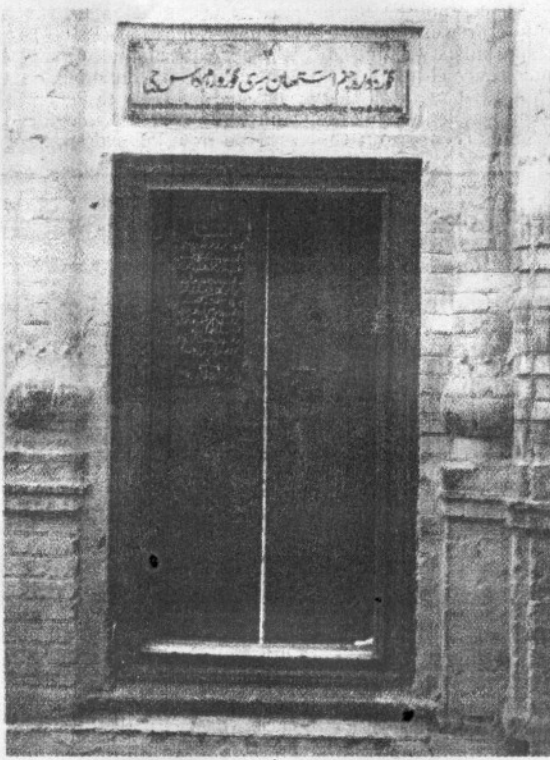
Here is an account of the holy places of Sikhs in Lahore. Some of them still exist while others have vanished

The Sikhs ruled over Lahore from 1767 to 1848. The first thirty years of this period was the misrule by the three Jathaidars (warlords) namely Gujjar Singh, Lehna Singh and Sobhha Singh. They had divided the city into three parts and ravished rather than built anything of historical value.

Ranjeet Singh's forty-years rule followed the Jatharidars'. Like his immediate predecessors, he was also not interested in building anything of architectural value like the ones which Jehangir, Shahjahan and Dara Shikoh had given to Lahore. Ranjeet Singh did lay the Hazoori Bagh between the Grand Mosque and the western wall of the Fort where he built a baradari in the Moghul style with marble removed from different royal Tombs in Lahore. His successors built a mausoleum over his and his ladies' crematorium along the fort wall, now considered a gurdwara where Sikhs pray. In Lahore there are other places as well to which Sikhs attach importance.

The Sikh religion was founded by Baba Guru Nanak who was born in a Hindu Khashatri family living in village Talwandi near Sharaapur only a few miles from Lahore. He was a saintly person — much respected both by the Hindu and Muslim communities of his times. He had traveled far and wide for twenty four years, visiting holy places of other faiths including Makkah-tul-Mukarama. Nine persons who were called the 'gurus' succeeded this holy person in his religious order. They are considered holy deities by their followers. Some of them were saintly persons and some had turned into holy warriors (militants), according to the Sikhs.

The fourth guru of the Sikhs, named Ram Das Ji, was born in Lahore. He spent his childhood



in the alleys of the inner city before his father moved to village Gobindwal, the site of present city of Amritsar, which was founded by the fourth guru.

The house where Ram Das Ji spent his childhood is in Bazaar Chuna Mandi, a locality situated inside Yakki gate and still visited by Sikh pilgrims from across the border and other places. (What a pity that the annual Sikh pilgrims visiting Pakistan have been banned by the current BJP government in India) Ranjeet Singh reconstructed it into a palace.

Guru Arjan Singh was the fifth guru of the Sikhs, a very learned and scholarly person, well-versed in Arabic and Persian

and an intellectual friend of Hazrat Mian Mir Sahib. He collected the sayings and teachings of the four gurus and compiled these in the form of Adgaranth (half garanth, the holy book of Sikhs). During his time, the Hindu governor of Lahore Diwan Chandu Shah, who was an appointee of Emperor Jehangir, developed an enmity with the guru over the matter of betrothal of his son to the guru's daughter.

On his refusal Diwan had the guru arrested on some flimsy ground. Perpetual refusal of the guru to marry off his daughter to Dewan's son further angered Chandu Shah Mul who had him sentenced to death for treason by

mis-reporting to the Emperor. Before being put to the sword, the guru requested for last *ashnan* (holy bath) at the Ravi, which at that time flowed by the wall of the Lahore Fort. He was taken to the riverbank where he got down into the water and never surfaced again. His body was never found.

A notional samadi (memorial) was built in the name of the guru in front of the Roshnai gate by his followers. This shrine was built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the memory of Guru Arjan Dev.

This shrine has a highly gilded attractive dome. The followers of Guru Arjan Singh assert that it is the same spot where Guru Arjan Dev miraculously disappeared in 1606 AD. in the waters of Ravi. This place also acquired the status of holy reverence for the Sikhs. Lahore's lores have it that both Hindus and Muslims would curse Chandu Shah for years to come when passing by his residence.

The residence of the sixth guru, Hargobind Singh Ji was situated in Mauza Mozang on the old Jail Road. It used to have five samadis, large courtyards and bowlies (water wells in the Hindu Temples and Sikh gurdwaras with stairs leading to the water surface - considered to be holy wells both by Hindus and Sikhs).

For its association with the guru, this place acquired the status of a gurdwara and was much-revered by the Sikh community. It does not exist in its previous glory today. Guru Hargobind Singh turned into a warrior and took up arms against Shahjahan. After many fights he disappeared in the mountains where he died.

Another place which Sikhs used to visit was the samadi of Baba Sri Chand, the son of the founder of Sikhism. Though not a guru, he had founded his own chapter known as 'Advaisi'. His followers were called Nanak Shahis. They wore long shirts, tied their long hair like a turban and carried black shawl on their shoulders. Due to paternal links with Guru Nanak, the Sikhs considered his samadi a holy place, which was situated in Naulakha area. But it is nowhere in sight now.

—By Captain S. Birjees
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