

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Fall 2019
Seeking the Divine: The Lesser-Known Religious Traditions of Asia
Sponsored by the Society for Asian Art

Sikh Religion in the Language of Colors

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Sikh learner, seeker

Guru Nanak founder (1469-1539) first of the Ten Gurus of the Sikh religion
Message of the universal Divine: *Ikk Oan Kar* – There is one Being, Truth Its Name

Janamsakhis narratives (*sakhis*) about Guru Nanak's birth and life (*janam*) have been very popular in the collective Sikh imagination. The origins of Sikh art lie in their colorful illustrations. The *B-40* manuscript has extensive historical documentation: it is illustrated by Alam Chand, compiled by Daia Ram Baol at the request of patron Sangu Mal, and is dated 1733.

Guru Arjan fifth Sikh Guru (1563-1606)
compiled the Sikh sacred text, Guru Granth Sahib
constructed the Sikh sacred space, Harimandir Sahib

Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) compiled in 1604
Contains the voice of the Sikh Gurus along with Hindu and Muslim holy men
Its 1430 pages replay Guru Nanak's fundamental message of the One Divine Reality

Harimandir Sikh sacred shrine built by Guru Arjan, the Golden Temple of modern times

Guru Gobind Singh The tenth Guru 1666-1708
Gave birth to the family of the Khalsa with five *k-s* as the items of Sikh identity

Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) founder and maharaja of the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab
Great patron of the arts, Harimandir extended and plated with gold

Maharani Jindan (1817-1863) youngest wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, mother of Dalip Singh, and regent of the Sikh Empire from 1843 until 1846 was a powerful person.

Dalip Singh The last Sikh Maharaja (1838-93) exiled to England, befriended by Queen Victoria

1849 British annexation of the Punjab

Kohinoor diamond handed to Victoria during Winterhalter's painting of Dalip Singh (1854)

Sikh painters include Amrita Sher-Gil, Sobha Singh, Arpana Caur, SinghTwins, Devinder Singh, Arpita Kaur, Phoolan Rani

Kapany Gallery of Sikh Art at the AAM & **Khanuja Family Sikh Art Gallery** in Phoenix Art Museum are the only two permanent Sikh art galleries outside of India

Suggested Reading

Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur, "Corporeal Metaphysics: Guru Nanak in Early Sikh Art" in *History of Religions*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (August 2013), pp. 28-65.

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McLeod, W.H. *Popular Sikh Art*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Ananth, Deepak. *Amrita Sher-Gil: An Indian Art Family of the Twentieth Century*. Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2007.

Deol, Jeevan "Illustration and Illumination in Sikh Scriptural Manuscripts" in Kavita Singh (ed.) *New Insights into Sikh Art*. Mumbai: 2003.

Twin Perspectives: Paintings by Amrit and Rabindra KD Kaur Singh with contributions by Julian Spalding Raj Pal, and Dr. Deborah Swallow. London: Twin Studios, 1999.