

# Homage to Amritsar

**LATE DR. MULK RAJ ANAND\***

*\* Dr. Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) Founder-father of the Indian English novel, was a graduate of Khalsa College, Amritsar (1924) and a lover of the Sikh lore and art. Under his direction the art Magazine, MARG uncovered a wealth of Indian art and architecture. This article is taken from Marg special issue on Amritsar. [xxx-3].*

SHINING IN THE MORNING LIGHT, the gilded splendor of its panellings and big dome and small minarets, this temple is a fairy world palace to the devotees of the Sikh faith. Certainly, the first look brings onto the innocent eye the image of a transcendent fact.

The 'loving sight' peering into heaven from the legends of the miraculous cures by the touch of the water in the pool of nectar, in which the shrine stands, makes for ecstatic awareness. The vision has been received by millions of pilgrims who have come here for centuries from near and far.

The actual construction had modest beginnings: A mud-house was constructed by Guru Amar Das, who is said to have found on the edge of the pool the magical herb which cured a skin ailment of his master Guru Angad.

The *Amrit Sarovar* remained a village tank, until the fourth Guru Ram Das began to carry out the plans of his mentor for a more permanent structure in brick.

Chak/Chak Guru/Guru-ka-chak/Chak Guru Ram Das/Ram Das Pur were the names of Amritsar in those times.

And the temple on the banks of the pool of nectar was surrounded by the houses of the craftsmen from the towns of Patti, Kasur and Kalanur, who came to build the holy place. The only market was then called Guru-ka-bazar, still known by that name, though more populous.

Guru Ram Das composed a hymn in praise of Amrit Sarovar.

Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth Master, who came to the spiritual throne in 1581, felt from the growing popularity of the shrine as a pilgrim centre the need to have the tank paved on the four sides and the steps of Hari Mandir bricked. The devotees joined to construct the temple, which would be lived in during the everyday life, where the infinite mystery would be revealed to those who may want to see.

Already, however, the demand to create a paradise on earth became urgent, from the vision of Guru Arjan Dev, of many simple hearts coming, with dipped eyes over joined hands, to pray and touch the holy water on their foreheads.

So this Guru had the structure of Hari Mandir planned in such a way that the oversight might afford the insight. The present causeway leading to the Hari Mandir was then designed, with the rectangular shape of the circumambulatory walk ending at the gateway, from which the path to Reality began. And to combine, symbolically, the noblest truth of Islam about One God with the faith in the Hindu God Hari and his many incarnations, the Muslim divine, Mian Mir of Lahore, is said to have been invited by Guru Arjun Dev to lay the foundation stone of the temple in A.D. 1588.

The structure of the shrine also mixed the rectangular form of the Hindu temple with dome and minarets of the Muslims.

Hallowed by the meditations of holymen, the blood of martyrs defending the Sikh faith against imperial oppression, a refuge to the sick and weary, the faithful held on to the centre against many onslaughts and the rhythms of the universal life seemed to secure the pilgrims in the belief that the essential self exists in and through and behind the flow of the obvious states.

And as the universe of calm survived in the midst of all of the inclemencies of change, the first Sikh Emperor, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, made the pool of nectar the spiritual capital, while Lahore was the temporal seat of his newly founded kingdom.

The gilding of the embossed plate, above the marble skirt of the Hari Mandir, the renewal of the pietre dure, the embellishment of the interior, with lovely ceilings, adorned with floral reliefs and little mirrors, were all renovated, finished and perfected under the patronage of the great general, so that men and women may brood upon the inner splendour, after gazing at the beauty and wonder of the outer house and body of God.

The Sikhs have always retained, in spite of the militancy they were forced to adopt to defend their order against the enemies of their reformation, the injunction of Guru Nanak that you can range from yourself to the stars and the moral law, if you contemplate the Naam in the quiet of your heart.

As an eclectic monument, which has grown from the devotion of the folk, as much as through the skill of the craftsmen of the guilds, the Golden Temple achieves the kind of romantic glory which flouts convention, answers to the mood of astonishment, and compels humility before the inner sight.

