

# Holy Shrines of Sikhs in Kashmir

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Guru Nanak Sahib came to Jammu and Kashmir during his Third *Udasi* (itinerary) between 1515 A.D. to 1517 A.D. According to historians, Guruji probably traversed Talwandi, Lahore, Avandi, Khalrs, Patti, Sultanpur, Jalandhur, Hoshiarpur, Bilaspur, Kiratpur, Sukot (Mandi) Rawalsar, Jawalamukhi (Kangra), Nadhun Palm, Begnath (Kergram), Kalu, Lahul, Sipti, to Chander Kala (Hamtu) and Sapti Runte. From Mulana village he reached Sarpanch (Parang) Churate, Chaumurti, Thaling, Mansarower, Kailash, Rudoke, Pansang, Chasul reaching Ladakh and Kashmir. The following historic shrines are associated with Guru Nanak Sahib in J&K.

**Gurdwara Guru Nanak Sahib, Kishtwar:** Kishtwar is situated on the left side of river Chenab. Kishtwar was associated with **Nagas**. The other Muslim shrines like Sayeed Shah Mohumad, Fareed-u-din Baghdadi etc., Hindu shrines like 'Sri Neel Kanth Mandir' and 'Ashtbadi Temple' are very famous shrines, Guru Nanak Sahib stayed at the garden of sidhas known as '**Sidhian di Bagichi**' and had discourses with sidhas. Guru Sahib also visited earlier Bhaderwa and Jammu city. Bhaderwa and Kishtwar Gurdwaras were constructed later on by Bhai Sahib Sher Singh (M.Sc.) Kashmir.

**Gurdwara Pathar Sahib, Leh-Ladakh:** Guru Nanak Sahib along with disciples stayed in village Basgo, as the legend is familiar from generations of that village. In '**Gurdwara Pathar Sahib**', a sacred stone of 8x8 feet is still preserved in his memory. It seems that Guru Ji is sitting in a meditation posture. Up to 1965, local **Lamas** were managing the shrine. Now-a-days Gurdwara is managed by the Indian Army. This Gurdwara is 24 Kms away from Leh-Kargil route.

**Gurdwara Nanaksar Mattan Sahib:** This famous Gurdwara is 57 Kms from Srinagar and is situated in district Anantnag. **Juma Chopra**, a Muslim met Guru Nanak Sahib near Mattan forest. According to '**Janam Sakhi Bala**' his name was Kamal faquir. Guru Sahib stayed near the twin springs of Martand temple, familiarly known as **Machh-Bhawan**. In the middle of spring was a stone plate on which Guru Ji discussed religious discourses with one Pandit Braham Dass of Bej Behera, who adopted Guru's faith later.

During Afghan rule of Noor-din-Bamzi, S. Gurmukh Singh (member) constructed the Gurdwara in 1766 A.D. Later on, Kashmir Governor S. Hari Singh Nalwa constructed small seven Gurdwaras, along with 84 rooms around the twin springs. A Hindu temple was constructed in 1944 in the middle of the spring pond. This was confirmed by S. Sewa Ram Singh historian, who visited the place in 1908 A.D. According to **Mahan Kosh**, an annual *jagir* of Rs. 50/- was granted by the Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Now-a-days only one Gurdwara stands on the right side of the spring, near Souria Temple. One of the GGS volume has first two pages written in Golden ink, which is probably by S. Hari Singh Nalwa.

**Gurdwara Nanak Asthan, Anantnag:** Guru Nanak Sahib visited this place between 1915-17 during his third itinerary. Guruji stayed outside Anantnag near the spring of Nagbal. The foundation of this Gurdwara was laid before the Sikh rule. A large *jagir* is still associated with this shrine.

**Gurdwara Guru Nanak Sahib, Bej Behara:** Bej Behara is 6 Kms from Anantnag and 13 Kms from Awantipura. Guru Ji stayed for some time in the house of Braham Dass Pandit, as requested by Pandit Ji. Gurdwara is constructed on the left bank of Jehlum river. Gurdwara is managed by Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Anantnag.

**Gurdwara Guru Nanak Sahib, Awantipura:** Awantipura is 29 Kms from Srinagar situated

in Pulwama district. Some ruins of Hindu temples are also seen. Guru Nanak Ji stayed at this place for some time. The historic shrine is constructed in the memory of Guru Ji's stay. Before proceeding to Srinagar city, Guru Ji met some shivaists in the temple of 'Shankara-Charya' hill temple.

**Gurdwara Guru Nanak Sahib, Hari Parbat Srinagar:** After visiting some Muslim and Hindu temples, Guru Nanak Sahib stayed inside the Hari Parbat hill. According to '**Mahan Kosh**' this Gurdwara was located by some Gursikhs and constructed by S. Hari Singh Nalwa.

**Gurdwara Guru Nanak Charan Asthan, Berwa:** This historic shrine is situated 35 Kms from Srinagar in Berwa (Distt. Budgam). A small Gurdwara was constructed before 1947. In 1948, Gurdwara building was washed away by floods. In 1975, a new Gurdwara building was erected. Gurdwara is managed by Parbandhak Committee, Budgam.

After Guru Nanak Sahib, Guru Har Gobind Sahib visited the valley, after the release from the Gwalior Fort in 1619 A.D. Guru Ji visited the valley along with King Jahangir on the horse back in 1620 A.D. enroute to Sial Kot, Gulatian, Wazirabad, Mirpur, Bhimber and entered Kashmir through Shupian.

**Gurdwara 6<sup>th</sup> Patshahi, Nowshera:** Nowshera a tehsil of Rajouri in 40 Kms away from Bhimber. Guru Hargobind Sahib visited Nowshera in 1620 A.D. Biru Dutt (Birm Shah) met Guru Hargobind Sahib near the place of 'Glotian Khurd'. Birm Shah dedicatedly served Guru Sahib. Guru Ji bestowed a Seat to Birm in that area. Birm propagated Guru's mission in the hills of Mirpur. Guru Sahib gifted some belonging to Birm Shah as a token of love. Later Biru settled near **Kani** village.

**Gurdwara Bangla Sahib 6<sup>th</sup> Patshahi Rajouri:** This historic Gurdwara is associated with Guru Hargobind Sahib, on the road leading towards local market. Guru Ji and King Jahangir visited Kashmir together. Jahangir's camp was on the other side, where now-a-days park is situated and Govt. Hospital is adjacent to it. White marble splendor Gurdwara building is recently constructed on the site of old plinth. Later on, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur camped here to promote his activities. Banda Singh's historic weapons are also preserved in this Gurdwara.

**Gurdwara Shah Ji Marg, Pulwama:** Guru Ji entered in Shopian along with King Jahangir, near the site of Katu Shah a Muslim faqir, brought some apples and honey for Guru Ji. According to 'Suraj Parkash' a legend is also familiar with Katu Shah. Guru Ji proclaimed to the *sangat* "The Guru's treasure is the benevolent of the poor."

Now-a-days a new marble Gurdwara is under construction on the old plinth site. A historic chinar tree is still seen, where Guru Ji tied the rope of his horse. Later on, Katu Shah preached Guru Nanak's mission in that part. Shah Ji Marg (Shadmarg in Kashmiri language) is situated near Shopian, nearest to stream Kamblimpur, on Mughal road. In the revenue records village 'Kamblimpur' is associated with Katu Shah. Near the village an old '**Patkala vir temple**' was present. According to M.A. Macauliffe (*The Sikh Religion*) Katu Shah first met Guru Hargobind Sahib at Amritsar. About 3 Kms away from the historic shrine is '**Chishma Guru Hargobind Sahib**'. From this site, Guru Ji proceeded to 'Khanpur Sarie'.

**Gurdwara 6<sup>th</sup> Patshahi, Kathi Darwaza, Srinagar:** This famous historic shrine is located at the foot hills of Hariparbat hill. Guru Hargobind Sahib, according to some source also visited Mattan Sahib. Guru Ji stayed permanently near Hariparbat fort but often stayed for some time at 'Shalimar Bagh'. Jahangir's camp was at 'Nishat Bagh'. In Shalimar, Queen Noor Jahan met Guru Ji. Guru Ji stayed outside the walled city known as '**Nagar Nagris**'. Bhai Sewa Dass's old mother 'Mata Bhag Bhari' presented a '**woolen chola**' to Guru Ji. It is

believed that Guru Ji stayed in Srinagar for a month. Arrangements for daily diwans were made, large diwans were held on historic days. An inn for the residence of the pilgrims was also constructed. Large number of people embraced Sikhism during Guru Ji's stay. Near Kathi Darwaza Guru Ji stayed for 13 days. Last funerals of Mata Bhag Bhari were performed by Guru Ji himself. This shrine was later on built by Governor S. Hari Singh Nalwa. On the implementation of Gurdwara Act in 1976 A.D., this main Gurdwara also came in the hands of Khalsa panth. 'Guru Ka Bagh' (Patshahi) is located on one side of the shrine. Recently white marble Gurdwara building is erected under the supervision of Baba Harbans Singh of New Delhi.

A small site is no more now-a-days, where Guru Har Rai Sahib stayed in 1660 A.D., where later on '**chahie (well) Guru Har Rai Sahib**' Gurdwara was constructed. Due to the dust of times, this historic shrine is no more. Guru Har Rai Sahib visited Srinagar in the carwan of Bhai Makhan Shah Lubana, along with Makhu Chand etc. Guru Ji came via Jalapur Jatian, Duburgy, Ghultian Khurd and Sial Kote. Guru Ji also visited Mattan Sahib. Kathi darwaza was earlier the hub of Sikh scholars, where Bhai Sewa Dass, Bhai Madho Sodhi, Bhai Ramgarhia settled permanently. Guru Har Rai Sahib spent 4 months in Kashmir and then proceeded to Akhnoor, Jammu, Ramgarh, Kherrari, Samba, Pathan Kote. Bhai Kana, Masand of Jammu met Guru Ji in Jammu along with other Sikhs.

**Gurdwara 6<sup>th</sup> Patshahi, Baramulla:** This historic Gurdwara is located on the right side of river Jehlum, at the place known as 'Kot Tirath' during Sikh rule. Guru Ji preached Guru Nanak's mission at this place. It is here that stone cutters of Baramulla presented a beautiful '**Stone-cot**' to King Jahangir, who further presented to Guru Hargobind Sahib. At the request of people, Guru Ji planted a chinara tree with his own hands, as a sign of memory. Baba Harbans Singh Ji uprooted that historic chinara and constructed a white marble Gurdwara building, having silver plated domes. This shrine is very impressive and is being maintained well by the Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Baramulla.

A **thara** was constructed later on by one Bhai Daya Ram near the chinara tree. Bhai Lal Chand, Bhai Jassa Singh etc also helped in the constructions. S. Hari Singh Nalwa affiliated three villages (viz. Jahanbazzpura, Nadhihal and Vadhra) and granted Rs. 3000/- annually to this shrine. This Gurdwara is 45 x 45 feet. Pilgrimage quarters, Langar hall and a large car park are near the shrine.

**Gurdwara Thara Sahib, Kalampura:** This historic shrine is 8 Kms away from Baramulla town and 01 Kms on Baramulla – Srinagar National highway.

According to history, one faqir Balol and his disciples met Guru Sahib near Kalampura village. They discussed religious discourses with Guru Ji. At the request of people, Guru Ji dug out a fresh water **chisma**. In the last years of 19<sup>th</sup> century, a plate form (**Thara**) 20 x 25 ft. was constructed by S. Matwal Singh Sahni and other Gur Sikhs. Chief Khalsa Dewan Amritsar intellectuals like Bhai Vir Singh, S. Damodar Singh engineer, S. Narinder Singh, etc. visited this place and constructed Gurdwara building in 1928-1931 A.D. Gurdwara was managed by Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Baramulla. Guru Ji often came from Baramulla to Singhpura for hunting expeditions.

**Gurdwara Parimpillian, Uri:** Guru Ji proceeded to Uri via village Khatnayar, Peernian and stayed near Sultan Dhaki. A plate of stone is still preserved in Gurdwara, on which five Muslim faqirs (viz: peer Gulsher, per Bhur Sultan, Peer Rangi Iman, Peer Noor Nihal and Peer Abdul Gaffoor) had religious discourses with Guru Ji. At the end, Guru Ji proceeded towards '**Dolanga**' village. The foot prints of Guru Ji's horse is still preserved near 'Dolanga' site.

In 1936-37 A.D., a small Gurdwara was constructed by the devotees of Slamabad Dardkot

etc. S. Narian Singh of Slamabad, S. Gurmukh Singh. S. Damodar Singh engineer and other Gursikhs helped in the construction. Sahajdhari Sikhs, Brahmans and Muslim sayeeds visited regularly to Gurdwara for blessings, Gopal Singh Granthi of Chandanwari traveled 20 Kms daily to perform duties of Granthi Singh regularly. Baisakhi and Guru Hargobind Sahib's birthday are celebrated with great enthusiasm. A small bridge constructed on the river Jehlum in 1970-71, connects the Gurdwara.

Guru Gobind Singh Sahib also visited Jammu city in 1692 A.D. on the invitation of his Rajput friend Raja Gaje Singh. It is a fact that being the Chief Guest of Gaje Singh, Guru Ji stayed near the fort of Jammu. Once Guru Ji also visited Basohli, as mentioned in the '**Mahankosh**'.

Other historic shrines in the state are Dera Nangali Sahib, Poonch, Gurdwara Thapiana Sahib, Shalkot, Dera Baba Banda Singh Bahadur (Reasi), Gurdwara Thali Sahib, Jammu, Gurdwara Singh Sabha Bhai Vir Singh, Gulmarg, Bunga Akali Phula Singh, Shaheed Gunj Srinagar, Gurdwara Shaheed Gunj Barzala Baghat, Srinagar and Gurdwara Amira Kadal Srinagar.

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## The Incredible Saga of Saragarhi

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The 12th of September is a day to remember because on this day 110 years ago in 1891, a saga of courage and unmatched valour was performed by a handful of Sikh soldiers of the 36th Sikh Regiment in the faraway North Western Frontier Province, now in Pakistan. They were all 21 in number, holding the Saragarhi Fort on behalf of their Commanding Officer, Lt-Colonel J. Haughton, who had his headquarters at Fort Lockhart on the Somana Ridge with a wing at Gulistan. The year 1891 had seen a lot of bloodshed and a fury directed at the British. The Orakzai tribesmen had raised a banner of revolt perpetrating violence in the name of Jihad against the Englishmen.

The genesis of the insurgency lay in the animosity between the Sultan of Turkey and the Amir of Afghanistan on the one hand and the British forces in India on the other. The Sultan was harbouring ill-will against the British in his belief that they had acted against his interests when he clashed with Greece. The Amir was simmering with rage over the ramifications of the Durand Line

Both these sulking figures, with a view to making the life of the British miserable in that volatile area, abetted and aided violent terrorism of the Orakzais and fanned religious fervour against the 'infidel', Angrez. There was militancy in the air and madness in the hearts. Murder and mayhem were the main methods employed. The frenzy generated by the 'mad' Mullah of Swat had engulfed the whole region of Malakand in flames.

The revolt spread like a wild fire up to the Peshawar valley and even down to the Kurram area, catching the British unawares. They were trying to resist the onslaught with every ounce of their energy. The tribesmen on the other hand were on the lookout for soft spots, where they could strike hard to achieve quick results. They set their eyes on the unpretentious Fort of Saragarhi which was no more than a large mud-brick house straddling the Somana Ridge. It was a sort of signal post between the two main posts of Fort Lockhart and Gulistan, that housed a small garrison that easily caught the hawk-eyes of the determined tribesmen.

On the morning of September 12, 1897 the Orakzais under the command of the

swash-buckling Gul Badshah led a thunderous attack on the Fort with full-throated battle cries. The attackers were over six thousand in number and the defenders were just 21 Other Ranks, the senior-most being Havildar Isher Singh. The tribals attacked in wave after wave with full intent to storm the rickety defences. But the steel-nerved Sikhs stood like a rock only a few miles away from them. The Orakzais encircled the Fort to prevent any reinforcement getting in. The defenders could communicate with their headquarters at Fort Lockhart only through a heliograph. It was indeed a nerve-racking battle, one facing three hundred attackers.

The Indian soldiers are known for their courage, bravery and steadfastness. They shine in combat and like to fight till their last breath. These particular warriors were from Ferozepore, the heart of Punjab. The disparity in numbers did not deter them. They were prepared to fight the enemy without worrying about the consequences including death. They used their musketry to good effect- causing confusion in the enemy ranks. The feet of the over-confident Orakzais started lurching before the tempest of the Saragarhi fire. Volley after volley of the firing brought the demons of death swooping on the impatient tribesmen, who had anticipated an easy victory. Their dead bodies, hundreds in number, were strewn over a vast area making their comrades growl with increased rage and resentment.

The enemy stood stunned and stupefied for a while. After reorganising themselves they made a renewed attempt to invest the tiny fort. But in return they received piercing bullets in their chests. They had sprawled all over as the muskets of the Sikhs rained instantaneous death on them. The enemy went into disarray. The tribals ran helter-skelter in despair without finding a cover to save themselves from decimation. Gul Badshah got into a huddle with his commanders and ordered them to lunge forward once again. They obeyed but heaps of them fell dead. This, however, did not deter them from making another onslaught, because they were determined to get hold of the fort, which was under the control of the Britishers, the non-believers and enemies of Islam branded as Kafirs. The Sikh soldiers at Saragarhi were a part of their army. Since they were resisting, they too had to be decapitated. They had to be overpowered without any qualm of their being so few in number against the teeming tribesmen.

Now fully realising the determination and defiance of the Sikh soldiers, Gul Badshah changed his tactics and offered temptations of money and safe passage in return for surrender. Naturally, the overtures were spurned with the contempt those deserved. The souls of the Sikhs were not for sale. No allurements were good enough to distract them from their duty. A soldier cannot be a traitor to his salt. He can gladly embrace death to fulfill his vows. Honour of his regiment and his army is more valuable than all allurements. He cannot deviate from his set path.

Finding all his guiles having gone to winds, Gul Badshah filled the air with smoke and commanded his men to fling themselves into the Fort through a breach in the wall. But the Sikhs were ready with their muskets and they despatched the intruders to winds in large numbers. Even this did not deter the attackers and they set all bushes surrounding the Fort ablaze, sending stifling smoke into the garrison to choke its occupants. It had an infernal effect; some defenders had already attained martyrdom. A few were still left, who carried on relentlessly and continued to mow down the adversary. The zeal of the survivors was intact and their morale was high. They went on fighting, and dying. The death was in itself a reward for them. It was a glory when the death came in the discharge of duty. It was fulfillment.

These men held the Saragarhi Fort for over six hours until only one signaller was left. His name was Gurmukh Singh, who had witnessed the death of all his comrades. He sought

permission of his Commanding Officer, Lt. Col. Haughton to lay down the signalling flag and die fighting. The permission was granted. The lone signaller pounced upon the enemy like a lion and finished over a dozen of them, when he was overpowered by the hordes of screaming tribesmen. He remained defiant till the end and joined his comrades in martyrdom in the highest tradition of the army. He remained true to his salt till his last breath.

The news of this heroic feat was received with a standing ovation in the British House of Commons. Queen Victoria ordered the Viceroy to lay a wreath at the place where the gallant soldiers had fallen. The entire contingent of 21 gallant soldiers was awarded the Indian Order of Merit. It was unprecedented in the British military history that so many honours were bestowed on a whole group of 21 Indian other Ranks.

Memorials came up near Fort Lockhart; near the Golden Temple at Amritsar and at Ferozepore to commemorate the demonstration of such matchless bravery and spirit of sacrifice of the Sikh soldiers. The Sikh Regimental Centre, Meerut in western Uttar Pradesh did not lag behind in putting up befitting memorial. The day of the saga of Saragarhi, September 12 is celebrated as a Regimental Day by all Battalions of the Sikh Regiment.

UNESCO has recorded in its publications the Saragarhi Battle as one of the eight famous events of collective courage in the world. It was an epic battle prided by all armies of all ages. It was an immortal saga of courage and determination.

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