7.1. Introduction

Architecture tells us about the history, culture, religion and economic status of various communities. Each region has its rich and unique architectural heritage. Buildings are historic artefacts that link the history and the present. Buildings in any given period of time may vary, but they almost always share certain common design elements and principles that can be easily recognised. Architectural styles classify architecture in terms of form, elements, techniques, embellishment, materials, time period and region, etc. Architectural style is a way of classifying architecture that gives emphasis on characteristic features of a design, leading to a terminology such as Sikh Architecture. Sikh Architecture is related primarily to the religious monuments of the Sikhs. The typical quality of Sikh architecture lies in the expression of spiritual contents through its Shrines. As per the findings of the present study, the author refers to the term Sikh Architecture to include only the Sikh Shrines (Gurudwaras). Detailed description of other structures apart from Gurudwaras is still open for future research.

Every architectural style reflects a clearly distinctive basic principle that represents a particular culture and era, and same is true in the case of Sikh architecture too. The Sikh Shrines are not only the places of worship, but also the centres of knowledge, art and architecture. These shrines have greatly influenced the socio-cultural life of the Sikhs and gave continuity to traditional Sikh values.

This study also highlights the fact that the present literature which explains ‘Sikh Architecture’ has questionable merits. There is hardly any literature available which uses an analytical approach to explain Sikh architecture. Sikhism allows variety in architectural language because of its principle religious tenets that are beyond racism. Almost all of the architectural styles are, in one way or another, derivative of outside influences and same is the case with the Sikh Architecture.

This dissertation, through primary building surveys and documentation of the forty five Gurudwaras selected across Punjab and through theoretical investigation of the Sikh architecture, has tried to bring out the concepts that have been adopted since Gurus’ times for the construction of the Sikh shrines. This study is important to pave the way for a more enlightened academic discussion towards a theoretical creation of the idea of ‘Sikh Architecture’.
7.2. Evolution of the Sikh Architecture

This study has attempted to trace the historic growth of Dharmsal and its evolution as a Gurudwara. In the initial phase of Sikhism, the abode of the Guru where sangat congregated was called Dharmsal. After the installation of Guru Granth Sahib in Dharmsals in 1604, it became a Gurudwara, the most sacred place for the Sikh community. A Gurudwara is a place of worship with basic requirements such as, congregation hall, sukhashan room, akand path area and parkash asthan as a core.

The Sikh religion and its philosophy have greatly influenced the Sikh architecture in its evolutionary process which continues till date. The evolution of the Sikh architecture is marked by its adherence to the original models that were derived from religious consideration by Gurus like Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar, Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran and Khadoor Sahib etc.

The decline of the Mughal Empire saw emergence of new seats of regional power like the Sikh Empire in north India. The Sikhs, persecuted for long by the Mughals, started the reconstruction of their Shrines, neglected for long because of the political situation in Punjab. Construction of the Sikh Shrines led to the emergence of the Sikh architectural style. The Sikhs were strong patrons of art and architecture. After 1765, the misls and later Maharaja Ranjit Singh generally enjoyed a prosperous period. Consequently, artists and artisans enjoyed a secure and comfortable environment within which they generated their artistic ideas and creativity.

In the early period the Sikh community was in conflict with the then rulers of the Punjab which affected the development of the Sikh Shrines. But when the Sikhs got political power in the late 18th century, the Gurudwaras were constructed on a larger scale. It is evident from the fact that, initially dharamsals were meant for the congregation only. Later on the institution of langar was added by the Gurus and gradually more such ancillary structures were added to the main shrine such as sarai, offices, museums and accommodation for employees etc.

The Sikh architecture has matured while facing certain factors such as climate, availability of materials, the religious purposes, and the dominant cultures (Mughals and Rajputs) of that time in the surrounding areas. These factors played a decisive role in the architectural development of the Sikh shrines. In contrast to the mainstream architecture, which was supported by the patronage of state power and authority, the initial examples of Sikh architecture like Harmandar Sahib, were supported and
sustained by the common man. Barring a few shrines, which have their own income from endowments made by the past rulers, the resources for new constructions or renovations were raised by voluntary contributions. Although masons and skilled craftsmen may be the paid workers, the unskilled labour and rations for the entire work force came from the system of kar sewa (voluntary free service by devotees).

An examination of the primary and secondary data shows the development of the Sikh architecture over the course of the Sikh history. It also shows how the social, economic, and political changes which transpired over this period in the Punjab has affected the development of the Sikh Shrines. When the Sikhs gained political power in Punjab, Sikh rulers and elite started giving heavy donations for the construction and renovation of Gurudwaras. They had the superior material resources and control over skilled and unskilled labour. Newly constructed Sikh Shrines were used as a symbol of Sikhs position as new rulers of north India. The decision to erect shrines on Sikh historical sites reflected their role as rightful spiritual and political leaders of north India.

During this period of Sikh supremacy in Punjab, the art and cultural atmosphere drew master craftsmen from different areas and from various religions. With the arrival of these artists, the art activity flourished in Lahore, Amritsar and other princely states like Kapurthala and Patiala etc. Various art forms which add to the ornamentation of Harmandar Sahib (Golden Temple) in particular and other Sikh Shrines in general includes Jaratkari (inlaid stone), Mohrakashi (frescos), Gach work, Naqqashi work, tukri work and Gold Embossing.

New architectural styles normally get inspired from the prevailing architectural styles. When new styles do not consider imported elements as alien, both existing and new architectural elements contribute equally to better aesthetics of structures. This phenomenon has been observed throughout the architectural history, in all parts of the world, particularly, in the case of India where many invading cultures brought in their unique influences and got assimilated into an indigenous character. History is a continuous process and it deals with progress, change, and identity. So, the Sikh architecture has also inherited some architectural elements from the previous styles and has added some of its own elements over the period of time.

7.3. Architectural analysis

This study attempts to outline the main elements and principles of Gurudwara design with a view to give an overall picture of an architectural style which can undoubtedly be
called the Sikh architecture. There are many questions related to the definition of the ‘Sikh Architecture’. The most popular view seems to be that the Sikh architecture possesses a set of architectural vocabulary that is unquestionable. The most consistent of Sikh architectural vocabulary is represented by the Gurudwaras across the Punjab.

Things have been referred to as observed during the course of the study and from references of historians and scholars of the Sikh religion. This study suggests that the Sikh architecture is a product of peculiar historical circumstances and deep rooted indigenous traditions. It appears that the brilliance of the Sikh shrines is reflected in various architectural elements used in the Sikh shrines. There are many varieties and types of the architectural elements, the literal description of which is insufficient to express properly the architectural ideas and forms they represent. These are devotedly exemplified in lavish splendour in the Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar and many other historical Gurudwaras.

Very little information is available about the original design of most of these shrines except Harmandar Sahib. So it is very difficult to comment on their original design. Most of the Gurudwaras, studied during the dissertation work, were reconstructed during the 20th century. Most of the Gurudwaras, in the early period, were small, but over a period of time as the size of the community increased the Gurudwaras were constructed on a larger scale. Early shrines were of lesser height and as the technology advanced and the financial power of the Sikhs improved they started creating bigger and taller structures. Number of floors of the studied shrines varies from one to nine. Majority of the original structures have been totally renovated or demolished by kar sewaks. Only three shrines, out of all the shrines included in this study, have original structure. The Sikhs, in due course of time, have lost their rich built heritage.

Gurudwaras are basically of three types, first connected with the Sikh Gurus, second with the Sikh martyrs and the third with the Sikh saints. But their basic typology irrespective of the background remains the same. For example Gurudwara Shaheedian Sahib is connected with Sikh martyr Baba Deep Singh Shaheed, Gurudwara Bir Baba Buddha is related with a Sikh saint and Gurudwara Manji Sahib at Alamgir is linked to a Sikh Guru, but all these Gurudwaras have same basic typology or design. Although scale and shape varies but all these Gurudwaras fulfil the basic requirements like provision of a parkash asthan, a congregation hall and a sukhashan room/area etc. irrespective of their background.
Domes in religious architecture have two aspects: aesthetic and functional. It fulfils the need to create a huge space for a large number of devotees. The functional aspect has to do with covering a huge space without placing columns in the middle of the congregation hall. It has now become possible with advanced materials such as steel and reinforced concrete, but it was not so in the days of masonry construction.

A well defined arcaded outer circumambulatory is provided in major historical shrines and in case of most of the other shrines, open space is provided around the shrine which can be used as an outer circumambulatory. The provision of a Darshani Deodi has been made in many shrines. Depending upon the number of entrances to a shrine, multiple Darshani Deodies have been provided in a few shrines. Location of the Darshani Deodi of a shrine is not standardised as it depends upon the direction/location of the entry points to the shrine.

Direction of main entrance is not standardised as it depends upon the direction/location of the entry points to the site. Majority of the shrines have entrances on all the four sides. In few cases, due to site constraint, there are entrances on three, two or one side only. The Sikh shrines do not follow any standard layout. Various forms have been used in these shrines. However, all the shrines fulfil the basic requirements like provision of a parkash asthan, a sukhshan room, and a room for akand path etc. Location of the parkash asthan is not standardised, normally it is center in case of square and octagonal shrines. In case of rectangular shrines, it is either towards front or back of the main hall. Shape of the parkash asthan as well is not standardised. It is either square, octagon or rectangular. The direction of parkash asthan depends upon the direction of the entrance to the shrine.

Nishan Sahib has been provided in all the shrines irrespective of their size, although its location varies. In majority of the shrines, inner circumambulatory (Parikarma) have been provided for movement around the parkash asthan. Most of the shrines with more than one floor have double height area, so that people sitting on upper floor can also have a view of the prayer space (parkash asthan). These shrines have followed the model of Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar. Majority of the shrines have low or medium plinth level, but few shrines have high or very high plinth. Only Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar has plinth which is lower than the surroundings.

Water as a design element has been commonly used in Mughal and Hindu architecture. It also becomes an integral part of Sikh architecture, as in the case of Harmandar Sahib
at Amritsar and Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran. Apart from these shrines almost all the
major historical Gurudwaras have a sarovar near the main shrine. A sarovar is provided
in majority of the shrines. In some cases, a sarovar may not be there, either due to the
reason that the size of the site does not permit or shrine is part of a complex already
having a sarovar.

Provision of a langar building has also been made in majority of the shrines. Non
availability of a langar building in a shrine may be due to its proximity to some
prominent shrine or it being part of a complex with provision of the langar building. A
Sarai has also been provided in majority of the shrines to accommodate the pilgrims.
With the better transport facilities, available people have become more mobile and
hence need for accommodation in shrines.

The study of the architectural characteristics of various Sikh shrines suggests that the
basic origin of the architectural features and elements as noticed in the famous
Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar has served many a time as model or at least as the
inspiration for many other subsequent Gurudwaras. The conclusion that can be drawn
from the study is undoubtedly the fact that the Harmandar Sahib holds a unique and
inspiring position as a Gurudwara and Sikh Architecture seem to be best represented
through this shrine. In fact, the Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar is the sheet anchor of the
Sikh architecture.

The Sikh architecture also seems to be a lively blend of the prominent prevailing
architectural styles (Mughal and Rajput) of that time. Influence of Rajput architecture,
especially of the historical buildings of Amber, Bikaner, Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur, and
Jaisalmer etc. could be seen on the Sikh architecture in the form of use of chhatris,
balconied windows in the Sikh Shrines. The Sikh Architecture can be summed by the
use of the following architectural elements of Rajputana architecture by the Sikhs in
their shrines.

- The chhatris
- Balconied windows
- Richly ornamented friezes, etc

Influence of Mughal architecture, especially of Shah Jahan's period on the Sikh
Architecture can be summed by the use of the following architectural elements by the
Sikhs in their shrines:

- Onion shaped domes
• Cusped arches
• Pilasters,
• Inlay work,
• Frescoes, etc.

It may be concluded that the Sikh architecture owes some of its features to the Rajasthan and Mughal monuments. The Sikh architecture expresses the characteristics of the Sikh spirit, with its interesting skylines, facade treatment by interesting combination of recesses and projections. Among its typical features are the chattris, kiosks or pavilions which embellish the parapets, corners, and every prominence and projection. In the early shrines, like Harmandar Sahib (Amritsar) and Darbar Sahib (Tarn Taran) a chhatri was not used. It seems that this architectural element was added in the later Gurudwaras like Katalgarh Sahib and Keshgarh Sahib etc. Majority of the Gurudwaras have similar elevation features like cusped arches, cupolas, chhatris, kiosks, domes etc. Crown of Sikh Shrines is embellished by dome, kiosks, cupolas and chhatris. Domes and arches are omnipresent with variation of size and shape. Use of other elements varies from shrine to shrine. Balconied windows have been used in Gurudwara Baba Atal, Harmandar Sahib, Akal Takht etc. and chhatris have also been used in Thara Sahib (Amritsar), Keshgarh Sahib etc.

Most of the square or octagonal shrines have symmetrical elevation on all the sides. The rectangular shrines, generally, have front and rear side symmetrical and other two sides asymmetrical with main dome placed either towards front or back of the shrine. Entrances to the shrines have varied detailing. It may be a simple trabeated opening in blind cusped arch through verandah/entrance portico without any special treatment. In some cases, it is simple trabeated in blind arch without any verandah/entrance portico and any special treatment around the opening. In few cases, there is chhatri on the top of the main entrance. There may be an entrance with portico and chhatri on top.

In many cases, kiosks with dome on top are provided on each of the four corners at terrace level. In some cases, chhatris are provided in the middle of the facade at terrace level. The length of the parapet is provided with an odd number of cupolas with drooping arcuated eaves. Normally the fluted pilasters decorated the corners of the shrine. A projected eave runs around the top on all sides of the ground floor and separates the ground floor from the first and in some cases eave is provided at the first floor level.
The ribbed dome is crowning feature, generally painted white or covered with brass or copper gilt. Sikh shrines use the inverted lotus on the dome on top of the building. This looks similar to the Muslim architecture, which is also decorated in several places with an inverted lotus. This is in contrast to the shikhara, which is seen on top of the Hindu temple. Use of balconyed windows with small elliptical eave and supported on carved brackets, slanting over-hanging eaves emphasises the string course to decorate the lower structure and the parapet, elliptical eaves with cusped soffits, a lavish enrichment of all arches by means of numerous foliations and other structural ornamentation of a similar order. The Sikh Architecture style is easily distinguished from others due to its liberal use of these elements which are omnipresent in the Sikh architecture.

The influence of the individuals who patronised the construction or decoration of the shrines is also visible in their architecture. For example Maharaja Ranjit Singh got the Harmandar Sahib gilded. Similarly the Gurudwara Ber Sahib (Sultanpur Lodhi) and State Gurudwara (Kapurthala) were got constructed by the Maharaja of Kapurthala, he was influenced by the French architecture and this is reflected in the embellishment work of these shrines.

Architectural pretentions are more true in case of historical Gurudwaras, as these are constructed using more or less same architectural elements which were used in the original structures. In 19th century migration of the Sikhs started and a number of Gurudwaras came up in many parts of the world wherever the Sikhs got settled. Most of the recently constructed non historic Gurudwaras have used architectural elements in abstract form. This is evident from the many Sikh shrines constructed in India and abroad. Most of the Gurudwaras constructed in neighbourhoods do not represent the true architectural character of the Sikh shrines.

7.4. Sikhism and its Relevance to Architecture

Religion plays a benign, but incredibly strong and important role in our daily life. Sikh architecture is an integral and valued part of rich, colourful, and cultural heritage of the Sikhs. There way of thinking is reflected in the architecture of their religious structures. Influence of religion on architecture can be traced from the primitive times starting from the Hindus. Religious architecture starts from a diverse concept of ‘Space’ dictated by the unique requirements of different religions, and is community specific. The basic worship pattern is different in different religions hence the building requirements are also different.
The main activity in a Gurudwara is a congregational prayer, in which people sit together irrespective of class and creed, thus, the principle of equality which is an essential part of the Guru’s teachings, is put into action. In Sikhism, devotees sit together for prayers, therefore a Gurudwara has a hall to accommodate the devotees for collective gathering. Gurudwaras are spacious and have, more often than not, entrance from all four sides. They are not oriented to any set direction as the Muslim mosques or Hindu Temples. Religious structures, impressive in architectural design and rich in ornamentation, apparently fulfil a very basic human need when one considers the presence of an invisible being. The religious shrines provide a tangible link with the Almighty, a place where one might feel a little closer to Almighty.

The Sikh architecture, in the form of various Sikh shrines, is the representation of its religious beliefs and religious perception of the Sikhs in a tangible form. Idea of equality propagated by the Sikh Gurus is put into practical shape in the Sikh shrines. Gurudwaras generally have four doors which symbolically mean that it is open to everyone irrespective of caste and creed. This is a place for everyone without any discrimination of caste, sex, faith or status. Everyone can go there with full liberty and sit in a sangat (a holy congregation of the Khalsa) a persona of ‘humanity & Guru’. Another institution attached to the Gurudwara is langar or community kitchen through which the principle of equality and universal brotherhood is emphasised as devotees sit in pangat (sitting together on the ground in a row). Golak refers to a systematic and formal financial system of the Gurudwaras where the Sikhs put their donations as per the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.

The shrine of Harmandar Sahib is positioned in a low-lying area. This gives architectural expression of humility and is in conformity with Sikh Guru’s teachings of keeping company with the lowest of the low. This is in contrast to the other contemporary religious architecture which was constructed on an elevated platform. Generally there are four doors for entry and exit in most of the Sikh shrines. In contrast, the sanctum sanctorum of a Hindu temple (garbh griha) has only one passage for entry and exit. As a rule, there is only one opening, that of the entrance. Gurudwaras, unlike Hindu temples, are devoid of any sculptured images in or around them.

A large number of the Sikh Gurudwaras have been constructed throughout the Punjab with variation in scale, form, and architectural elements. A Gurudwara can be found all over the world wherever the Sikhs are settled. Especially in Punjab, the Gurudwaras can
be found everywhere from small villages to large cities. Gurudwaras have distinct architectural character and they enrich the local architectural scene. The common characteristics of all the Gurudwaras have been discussed here to provide a better understanding of the architectural style and the factors which influence this style.

As a style, the Sikh architecture is essentially diverse and flexible in nature, which is an appropriate expression of the diverse content of the Sikh faith itself. The style of the Sikh Gurudwaras was established after the construction of Harmandar Sahib at Amritsar. The architecture of Gurudwaras across Punjab has the same basic elements, though the form and scale varies. There is limited information available about the early Gurudwaras and their builders. The information which survived explains that the Gurudwaras were constructed with the support of common people and later as a result of royal patronage during the period of Sikh supremacy in Punjab. Other than royal patrons, Sikh nobility, wealthy merchants, groups, and individuals played an important role in the construction of Gurudwaras.

The main purpose of this research is to set up a framework of architectural description of Sikh architecture in Punjab within the context of the architectural concern of ‘style’. During documentation of the historic Gurudwaras in Punjab, it has become clear that the construction of Gurudwaras was not an end in itself for the Gurus but these buildings had a very special purpose. What is most striking is that the structures are very modest and have a unique sense of aesthetics and design. Unfortunately, we lost most of the old shrines in the course of reconstruction drive by the kar sewaks.

7.4. The Uniqueness of the Sikh architecture

As a style, Sikh architecture is essentially universal in nature, which is an appropriate expression of the universal content of the Sikh faith itself. The need to distinguish Sikh architecture from other styles is essential for it to be seen as a unique architectural style. The architectural features of Mughal and Rajput architecture were adopted, adapted, and ultimately assimilated by the Sikhs and combination of these elements generated a new architectural style known as the Sikh architecture. The Sikh architecture represented an image of humility that has been taught by the Sikh Gurus to their followers.

Many of the features of Sikh architecture are used in original ways and there are also several aspects of the shrines that link it directly to the pre Sikh architectural style prevailing in north India. Not only has the Sikh architecture thrived this but also flourished to the extent of working out its own style. What is important here is that even
though many elements of Sikh architecture may be traced to either Mughal or Rajput architecture monuments but in Sikh Gurudwaras their appearance is without precedent. For example symmetrical plans and double domes on high drums are typical of Mughal or Rajput architecture, these features were normally constructed in brick faced with glazed tiles or stone by them but in Sikh architecture they were constructed in brickwork and finished with plaster and painted invariably in white colour and gold plated in most of the historically important shrines. The white marble and bricks were the materials commonly used by the elite. Another aspect of the Sikh architecture’s formal qualities that is worth to be mentioned is its use of decoration, from inlaid patterns of stone, carved brickwork and stucco panels. The shrines are adorned with a variety of designs and motifs. The white marble designs are used in many shrines for façade treatment.

The Sikhs developed certain prominent characteristics, such as the repeated use of Chhatris, cusped arches, domes, kiosks, balconied windows, pilaster, embellishment of parapets, corners, angles and other permanent projections, symmetry of the building plan and elevation, to create a new type of architecture. This type of architecture is called Sikh Architecture which is related to yet distinct from the other existing or past architectural styles of India.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the study is undoubtedly the fact that the Harmandar Sahib holds a unique and inspiring position as a Gurudwara and Sikh Architecture seem to be best represented through this shrine.

It would be fitting to end on the note that people should be aware of the magnificence of Sikh architecture in order to properly understand Sikhism in its true form. The final conclusion that can be drawn from the study is that the Sikh Architecture is unique and Sikhism seems to be best represented through the Sikh shrines.

7.5. Future Scope of work

There is a lot of scope of work in the field of Sikh architecture as there are hundreds of historical Sikh shrines spread all over India and abroad. This dissertation has partly covered the Indian Punjab. A comparative study of shrines in Punjab and other states or abroad can be taken up. A study of the Gurudwaras in foreign countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan will be more interesting as these Gurudwara buildings are untouched and authentic, whereas, Gurudwara buildings in East Punjab (Indian Punjab) are renovated to a large extent by the Kar Sewaks. Other dimensions of future studies
could be to analyse the impact of local architecture and climatic conditions on architecture of the Sikh shrines constructed outside Punjab. All the historically and architecturally significant Gurudwaras should be listed in order to preserve and protect them from being demolished. Unfortunately, most of the historical Sikh shrines have been demolished in the name of renovations and constructing the so called modern structures. It is important to conserve these shrines, so that the rich architectural heritage is preserved for our future generations.