Themes, Histories, Interpretations

INDIAN PAINTING

Essays in Honour of B. N. Goswamy

Edited by

Mahesh Sharma

Padma Kaimal

With contributions by

F. S. Aijazuddin • Amit Ambalal • Milo Cleveland Beach • Susan S. Bean • Usha Bhatia • Rosemary Crill
Anna L. Dallapiccola • Asok Kumar Das • Harsha V. Dehejia • Devangana Desai • Debra Diamond
Sanju Doshi • Eberhard Fischer • Salima Hashmi • Mary Beth Heston • Jutta Jain-Neubauer • Padma Kaimal
Kanwarjit Singh Kang • Geeta Kapur • Nadhra Shahbaz Khan • Kalyan Krishna • J. P. Losty • Tryna Lyons
Danielle Mason • Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker • Jagdish Mittal • Kirin Narayan • Aman Nath • Subhash Parihar
Ratan Parimoo • Dinanath Pathy • Sonya Rhie Quintanilla • Preeti Bahadur Ramaswami • Mahesh Sharma
Gulammohammed Sheikh • Kavita Singh • Walter M. Spink • Susan Stronge • Kay Talwar
Philippa Vaughan • Franz-Josef Vollmer • Francis Wacziarg • Virginia Whiles

MAPIN PUBLISHING

OSIANAMA.COM

The Secular Sikh Maharaja and his Muslim Wife

Rani Gul Bahar Begum*

Nadhra Shahbaz Khan

Maharaja Ranjit Singh (r. 1799–1839) was the Sikh ruler of the northern state of India known as the Punjab—the land of the five rivers. He consolidated the Sikh confederacies and clans, and successfully ruled a vast area lying between the Sutlej and Khyber.

The maharaja rose to power at the young age of eighteen and successfully ruled the Punjab for forty years leaving behind a legacy of religious tolerance. While most incidents of the maharaja's fairness are recorded as anecdotes, some can be corroborated by historical documents. One such example was a court order now preserved in the Lahore Museum collection (33/1468), issued to Khalifa Nuruddin, the governor of Lahore, on 31st of *Bhadon*, VS 1884/1827 CE. Originally in Persian and translated in Urdu by the museum officials, it states very clearly that no official should be allowed to deal with people maliciously or cruelly. Moreover, if the maharaja himself is caught up in such an act, he should be plainly asked to reconsider the matter and to forgive the offender. In an attempt to enforce law and order, the governor is directed to accord justice to each religious group according to its holy book, the *Sastras* or the Quran, and that any defiance and disobedience be punished.[1]

The maharaja's court chronicle in Persian, known as *Umdat-ut Tawarikh* by Sohan Lal Suri[2] spans his entire rule; and he commissioned a short history of his rule, *Zafarnama-i-Ranjit Singh*,[3] written by Diwan Amar Nath Akbari.[4] Also, accounts of Europeans visiting the court of Ranjit Singh praise him for his religious non-discrimination and magnanimity. True to his unprejudiced nature, Ranjit Singh's harem was composed of women of different religions: Sikh, Hindu and Muslim. The ones he married by circumambulation or formally, according to Hari Ram Gupta, were only twenty (Gupta 1991: 5: 537). John Login, appointed as British governor of the citadel, and in charge of Duleep Singh with additional charges of the pension paymaster to all state pensioners, wrote in a letter to his wife (on 10 June 1849) that there were twenty-two surviving widows of Ranjit Singh out of which seventeen were Hindu and five Muslim (Login 1890: 163). The maharaja is known to have wanted a European wife and requested the British authorities to help him get one, but never succeeded.

I am indebted to Rashid Mukhdum for his kind support and for sharing his expert opinion on architectural matters as well as the time he takes out to accompany me to the sites in spite of his extremely busy schedule. My special thanks to Dr. Moeen Nizami for helping me with Amar Nath and Chishti's Persian texts.

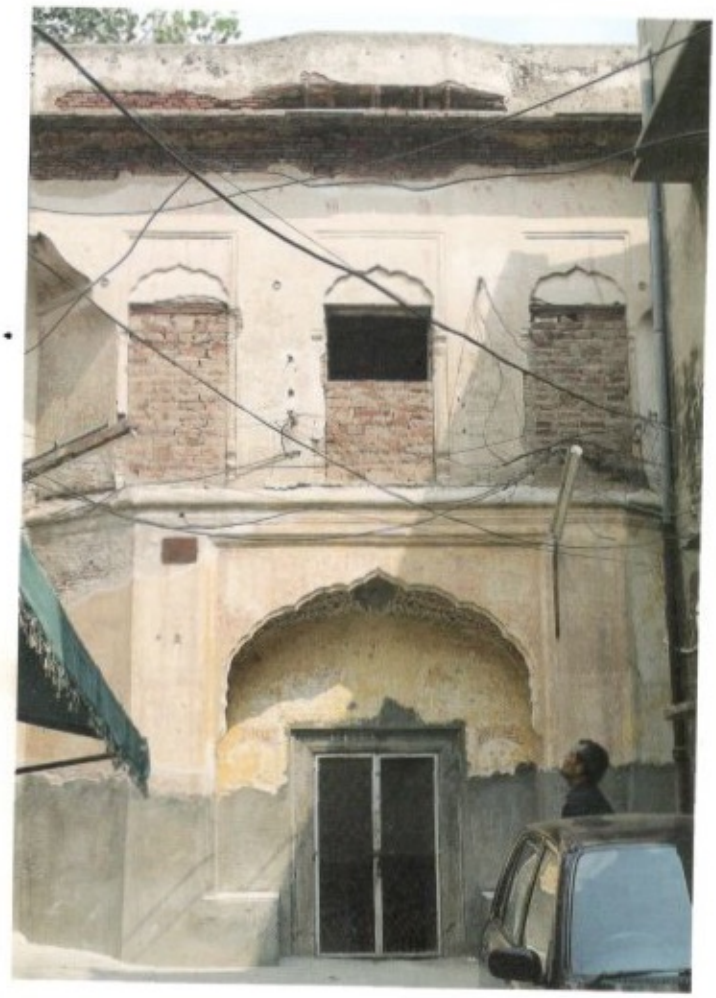


Fig. 21.1 The gateway to the tomb

The two well-known Muslim women he married, Moran in 1802 and Gul Begum in 1832, were both dancing girls. Both were elevated to the status of queens and never asked to convert. Both are known to have commissioned mosques: Moran's mosque still stands near the Papar-Mundi in Lahore, while Gul Begum's mosque cannot be identified with certainty. The maharaja struck coins in the name of his first Muslim wife and openly admitted his deep love for her to his courtiers after witnessing the affection displayed by Lord William Bentick and his wife during the Rupar Meeting (October 26–November 1, 1831). He married the second Muslim wife with great pomp and show. Moran, according to Princep, was "discarded" and sent to Pathankot in August 1811 while Gul Begum survived the maharaja (d. 1839) and received the highest amount of annual pension (Rs 12, 380) among his widows, from the British government after annexation in 1849 (Parliamentary Papers 1864: 12).

Eyewitness accounts of the maharaja and Gul Begum's wedding ceremony appear in at least three sources: *Umdat-ut Tawarikh*, *Zafarnama-i-Ranjit Singh*[5] and Martin Honigberger's *Thirty-Five Years in the East*. The first two give interesting and vivid details of the maharaja's eagerness to marry her. According to Amar Nath, the maharaja's eyes caught sight of a dancer named Gulbahar during celebrations where countless beautiful girls belonging to different areas were dancing.[6] Love-struck, the maharaja conveyed his feelings through Sattar, the in-charge of the dancing troupe. Gul Begum unaffected by the maharaja's special attention is reported to have cross-examined the messenger (Akbari: 216). To express the maharaja's lovesick state, Amar Nath quotes Faizi's verses from *Nal o Daman*.[7] According to the author, Gul Begum who initially paid no heed to the maharaja's feelings gradually fell in love with him and Ranjit Singh subsequently gave her the title of Gul Begum[8] and elevated her status above the rest of the women of the harem, appointing beautiful maids in her service (Akbari: 217).

Shortly before the wedding day (27 September, 1832), an order issued to the heir apparent Kharak Singh informed him of the maharaja's plans, inviting him to join the celebrations and sent *pashmina* worth Rs 10,000. His men were asked to leave for Lahore to "bring brocade tents without poles, expensive and well-wrought canopies and happy tents so that all the requisites of the happy gathering be well arranged at Amritsar" (Suri: III: i–iii: 189).

Describing the maharaja's excitement, Suri states that all traditional wedding practices were followed including the offering of *tambol* by the relatives and important courtiers.[9] The maharaja even painted his hand with henna, which was covered with a glove by the priests as a sign of censure when he visited the Golden Temple next day to offer his *ardas* or prayers. He also had to offer Rs 525 as *nazar* or offering to Bhai Gobind Ramji as a means of atonement and as a sign of their pardon of "his sins and mistakes," the *Bhai Sahibs* granted the maharaja some garments, including a *doshala* or shawl, a piece of brocade and a piece of red silk as a sacred token from the *Sadh Sangat* or the sacred community, similar to the tradition of granting a robe of honour (Suri III: i–iii: 190–91).

Suri further notes that at about the third quarter of the day the maharaja put on saffron garments and jewellery and ordered special carpets to be spread out in the silver bungalow and to set up tents and canopies all around it. All the dancing girls of Amritsar and Lahore were required to be present in the silver bungalow decorated with large and

small bunches of flowers. The ceremonies started with the drum-beaters and musicians playing music while the skies were lit up with a fantastic display of fireworks. The Prime Minister Raja Dhyan Singh was asked to restrict entry to the silver bungalow and not let any of the sardars or servants enter it. Gul Begum, wearing a yellow dress and bedecked with gold ornaments from head to toe, with her hands and feet decorated with henna, entered the bungalow and was shortly thereafter joined by the maharaja and both sat in chairs next to each other (Ibid: 192).

> Garlands of roses interwoven with pearls were tied around the forehead of the maharaja and a gold nose-ring with a pearl was fixed on the nose of Gul Begam and lovely words of congratulations filled the heart of the audience with pleasure. Fireworks began to play and the maharaja indulged in drinking wine. When the night had passed one quarter, they went to Ram Bagh, his summer palace, and Gul Begum was given the name of Gulbahar Begum.

The festivities continued for more than six hours and the dancing girls were granted Rs 7,000 at the maharaja's orders by Raja Dhyan Singh.

Mentioning Ranjit Singh consummating his marriage, Amar Nath states that the noblemen in the maharaja's court fully participated in the festivities and exceedingly indulged in drinking and merry making. According to him the gifts doled out to the bride included huge sums of money, elephants and horses and countless precious objects as well as almost all the jewels in the treasury except the Koh-i Noor (Akbari: 217–18). He also states that Gul Begum's two brothers received immense favours from the maharaja and their new positions could be equated to the *Mirzas* and *Nawabs*,[10] making them "Rani Khans" in the eyes of the public.[11] As a result of this matrimonial alliance, the Muslim[12] population in general felt a new surge of life run through them after almost a hundred years and even the most humble among them behaved as if they have surpassed Nawab Moeen-ul Mulk,[13] and started picking fights, making life difficult for everyone. Mirza remained under Dr Honigberger's treatment for lunatic behaviour after smoking too much *charas* (Indian hemp) and quarrelling with his brother Nawab and sister Gul Begum over the property Ranjit Singh gave them.[14] The doctor mentions that the Rani took him to live at the Lahore Fort to administer the medicine prescribed by him and after a while meeting him there when he had fully recovered (Honigberger 1852: I: 153).

Befitting the status of a *rani*, the maharaja appointed guards and attendants who, according to Amar Nath, walked in front of the Begum's conveyance carrying bare swords in their hands and angry expressions on their faces, clearing the way while announcing her arrival. The extent of her influence on the maharaja can be gathered from Suri's statement that due to her intervention, some prisoners were set free and he not only pardoned the crime of Munshi Sheo Dayal's sons but also fixed a huge amount of Rs 100,000 for them (Suri III (i–iii): 189).

After the wedding celebrations were over Ranjit Singh appears to have taken his new bride on a tour that lasted at

Fig. 21.2 The decorate soffit of the arch above the entrance to the tomb

LEFT **Fig. 21.3** A square enclosure with its small domed entranc the south wall

RIGHT **Fig. 21.4** Gul Begum's tomb

FACING PAGE **Fig. 21.5** The inlaid Persian inscription that menti Sardar Khan, Gul Begum's son, as the builder

least a few months and included a visit to his ancestral home. Suri reports that on 6 December 1832, he marched from Ramnagar[15] with Gul Begum by his side and reached Chhota Ram's garden three days later while it was raining. He stayed in the garden for three days and at about the third quarter of the day rode an elephant along with the *Begum Sahiba* and entered Lahore through Masiti Gate,[16] and "showered gold upon all residents, especially the needy and the poor," and reached the Hazuri Bagh[17] led by drumbeaters, and a discharge of *topkhana* or canons took place to announce their arrival (Suri III: (i–iii): 201).

Maharaja Ranjit Singh died on 27 June 1839 and in Suri's words, "All the surviving ladies and Gul Begum wept very bitterly and fell senseless on the ground on account of their mental worry" (Suri III: iv–v: 488). Four of the maharaja's Rajput wives including Raja Sansar Chand's daughter known as Rani Katochan and seven slave girls performed *sati*.[18] Among the surviving were Rani Jindan (Duleep Singh's mother),[19] Gul Begum, Rani Bhuri, Rani Deokal Khurd, Rani Jirmat Bibi, Rani Lachmee, Rani Maidun, Rani Mehtab Kaur and Rani Rup Kaur (Parliamentary Papers 1864: 12). These names except for the first one are listed in the *Parliamentary Papers* published in 1863, in a table titled: "Returns of the Native Princes of India, or their Families." Rani Gul Begum, mentioned here as the widow of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is granted Rs 12,380 for life, the highest amount of pension, on annexation of the Punjab (Ibid).

Contemporary sources do not say much about the Rani's estates or property or her residence. Honigberger does mention that she took her brother to live at the Fort to keep a vigil on him during his recovery from addiction for Indian hemp. That she lost her preeminent position after her husband's death and her estates were "forfeited" is evident from the news published in the *Punjab Akhbar* on 29 September 1839. It states that Maharaja Kharak Singh ordered Misr Ram Kishan[20] to give Rs. 15,000 per annum "Gool Beegum in lieu of her forfeited estates" (Singh 19 134). Her mansion in the city is mentioned in the last vo of *Umdat-ut Tawarikh* when the Sikh seraglio was asked shift out of their apartments in the Lahore Fort after annexation of the Punjab in 1849. Suri first notes that "Sardar Bodh Singh was ordered to establish the family Kanwar Sher Singh along with his son in the mansion of Kanwar Naunehal Singh and to give to every one of the kinds of assurances and words of encouragement" and shortly afterwards that Sahdev Singh and other membe the family of Sher Singh were put up in the mansion of Begum (Suri V: 289–90).

It is through the accounts of late nineteenth-century historians that we find reference of Gul Begum's garde and her tomb within, as well as the information that sh built it during her lifetime and had left it to her adopte son Sardar Khan. The first account is in *Tehqiqat-e Chi* by Noor Ahmad Chishti who visited the garden in 1864 year after the Rani's death. Kanhaya Lal's *Tarikh-e Laho* 1884 informs us that Gul Begum owned the largest *jagi* among Ranjit Singh's wives and gives important details about both the tomb and the garden.[21] Syed Muhamm Latif's *Lahore: Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities* in 1892 is silent on the matter, and *Naqush: Lahore Number* in 1962 relies heavily on Chishti's accou Henceforth this important and beautiful structure fad into neglect and to date is not included in the list of protected monuments of Lahore.

Rani Gul Begum's tomb once stood in her garden that, in Kanhaya Lal's words, "is grand and lush green and carries countless fruit trees and grape vines" (Kanhaya Lal 1884: 259). It has lost its garden-like appearance today and is situated next to a sizeable and ancient Muslim graveyard, Miani Sahib. Most of her land presently serves the same purpose, but only for burying descendents of the *rani*'s adopted son, who hold the rights to the property. The extent of the area is not known as only fragments of its "baked-brick boundary wall" seen by Chishti can be seen on the north side, with a double-storey building of the gateway on the west side. The *rani*'s tomb lies at the south end of the garden. Chishti mentions a large passage to the garden gateway that had a wooden fence lined by trees on the north side and a mud wall on the south that is now missing. Within this enclosure were a few structures including a baked-brick building with a veranda, a shelter for the cattle and horses as well as a covered area for the Rani's carriage. There was also a well with an inscription on a marble tablet stating that "the owner of this well is Rani Gul *Begum Sahiba* d/o Sheikh Muhammad Akbar, w/o Ranjit Singh *Bahadur Swargbashi*,"[22] an enclosed pool, a washroom, a drinking area for cattle and a platform holding several clay flower pots (Chishti 2006: 559).

As joint property of several owners, the land lying right next to the western and southern boundary walls of Gul Begum's tomb has all been built upon, leaving only a narrow passage in between. Houses on the east end are adjacent to the tomb wall extending northward and the north side has the Miani Sahib graveyard stretched in front of it. Her tomb remains locked, and access to it by visitors and scholars is denied, as the key is said to be in possession of an absent relative.[23] On the northwestern corner of the garden was a three-bayed old mosque with brick pillars on its eastern side that was renovated and whitewashed by the *rani* during her last years (Chishti 2006: 561). This mosque has been rebuilt, leaving almost no traces of its original shape and appears to lie outside the northwestern boundary wall. At the time of Chishti's visit a platform on the eastern side of the mosque held seven graves. One was very old while the one next to it was of the *rani*'s physician, Hakim Karim Ullah who died in AH 1262/1845 CE, the rest were of her servants (Ibid: 559–62).

The gateway to the tomb is a free standing square structure, double-storey in height with chamfered corners (fig. 21.1). The gateway is on the west side of the garden. The portal flanked by low seats is emphasized by a large multi-cusped archway. The original wooden double doors of the portal

seen by Chishti have been replaced by open-work wrought iron doors. The seats that were covered with *chunam* plaster in "*hurmuchi*" or red, and painted with floral motifs (Ibid: 559–60) are now covered over with ordinary grey cement. The entire surface of the gateway was originally painted but the only areas of decoration remains are the soffit of the arch above the entrance (fig. 21.2) and the underside of the *chajja* or eave in the top section of the façade. The spandrels of this archway and the area above the door lintel show faded traces of paint.

Chishti records Persian verses painted in five arched panels above the door lintel that are now missing without a trace.[24] Each verse carries important information about persons attached to the garden, the date of laying out the garden and the reason behind it. The central panel had seven couplets painted in blue and reveal that Ali Bukhsh, "a kind and benevolent person", laid the foundations and Gul Begum's (adopted) son Sardar Khan is, "as famous as a Hatim" (a legendary character famous for his generosity). The last of these seven couplets mentions that the *rani* laid out this garden for her leisurely walks. The rest of the four couplets given by Chishti were probably painted in panels flanking the central large one. One of these mentions Ghulam Ali as the mason and artisan; one is a eulogy claiming the garden to be an abode of countless nightingales; another one mentions the calculation of the lunar date of construction of the newly laid-out garden as 1856; and the last one gives the name Faqir Jawahar Shah as the head of the labourers, and the date VS 1913/1856 CE (Chishti 2006: 560–61).

The upper storey of the gateway has three windows of equal size on each facet of the square structure, following the format of a *baradari*. Shutters of these windows were red and green painted with floral designs (Ibid: 561). A staircase on the northern side leads to the upper floors. On the western side above the portal, the parapet projects slightly to indicate the presence of a *shahnashin* or seat on the rooftop. Years of neglect has resulted in its dilapidated state but the interior ground floor and first-floor room still has a few traces of paintings showing fruit dishes and flowers but most of the walls are now covered with layers of whitewash.

Fig. 21.6 Designs in *khat-kashi*, or outline, on a white background

Coming through the gateway into the garden one comes to a square enclosure with its small domed entrance in the south wall (fig. 21.3). It contains several graves; none have plaques giving names and dates. On the south end of the enclosure is a rectangular domed pavilion built on a platform that serves as Gul Begum's tomb (fig. 21.4). The façade has five arch shaped openings: two doorways at the ends have wooden double-doors and the central three are now blocked with part open brick work and part solid.[25] Placed in the cornice atop the central arch, probably a later addition, is a small marble plaque with black inlaid Persian inscription that mentions Sardar Khan, Gul Begum's son, as the builder, and the date AH 1272/1855–56 CE (fig. 21.5).

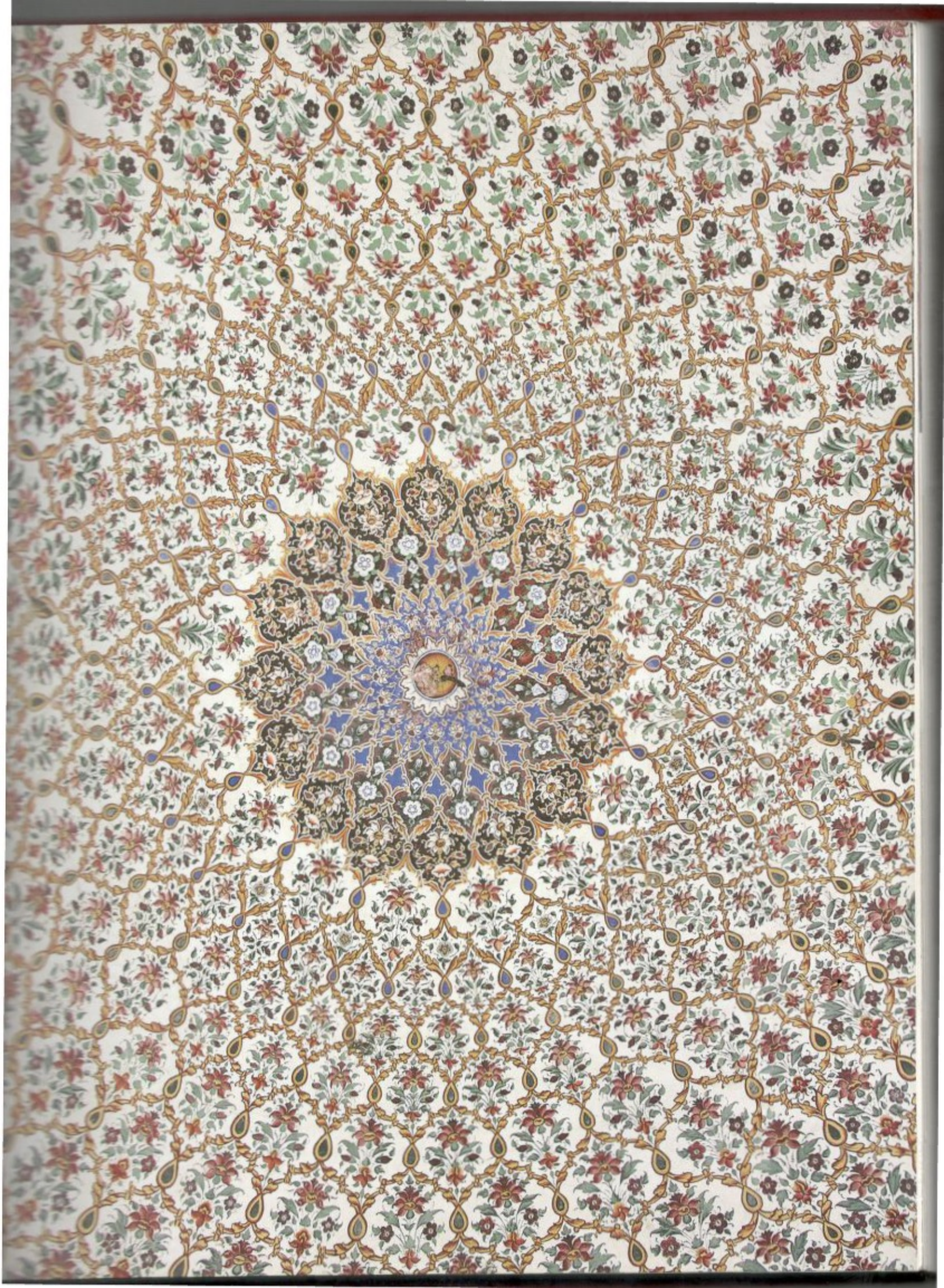
The plastered and painted façade has an engaged column at each end decorated with different designs in stucco relief. The shaft has a trefoil pattern laid out as *mahi-pusht* or fish-scale design capped with overhanging leaves; they are crowned with a capital composed of upturned large leaves painted golden-brown with deep red highlights. The cornice of the façade is divided into panels of different widths, decorated with fruit dishes and flowers. Running along the underside of the projecting eave or *chajja* is a continuous band of cartouches formed with strap work that contains vases and fruit dishes alternatively in their central fields. The parapet has the *mudakhil* pattern repeated in convex and concave and a segmented *burji* in each of the four corners of the building. The central raised section of the pavilion is crowned by a large segmented *chaukhandi* dome, with only one *kalasa* of its finial surviving.

The interior of the pavilion or tomb is divided into three distinct sections. A small square room at each end is not accessible from outside but opens in the interior of the main hall. These two rooms are sparsely painted as compared to the profusely decorated main hall but nevertheless have designs mostly in *khat-kashi* or outline on a white background (fig. 21.6). The main hall is divided into three sections: the central rectangular room separated from smaller side ones by archways on piers (fig. 21.7). The side sections have coved ceilings with an all-over decoration of octagonal stars connected by smaller sunflower medallions that have mirrors in their centre (fig. 21.8). The central vaulted room one has a large central medallion with radiating cartouches enclosing flowers (fig. 21.9).

Fig. 21.7 The central rectangular room separated from the smaller side ones by archways on piers

ABOVE **Fig. 21.8** Decorated ceiling with octagonal stars and sunflower medallions that have mirrors in their centre

FACING PAGE **Fig. 21.9** A large central medallion with radiating cartouches enclosing flowers in the central vaulted room



ABOVE **Fig. 21.10** A sunken niche in the centre of the south wall

FACING PAGE **Fig. 21.11** The arched blind niche painted with a mango tree laden with fruit

Directly underneath the medallion is a white marble cenotaph placed on a platform faced with black marble. The orientation of this cenotaph is north–south, as is usual for a Muslim grave, but two other features of this room are unusual. The entrance to a tomb is usually in the south wall and a sunken niche in the west wall indicates the *qibla* direction, but here the entrance is through the north side and a sunken niche is in the centre of the south wall. Elaborately painted in bright blue and red, this niche has a slightly projecting platform at its base, again making it different from the usual *qibla* niche (see Figure 21.7). Not deep enough to hold a chair, it may have been used for placing an object of importance (fig. 21.10). Keeping this in view as well as the overall orientation of the tomb and the blocking-up of the three central arches in the north wall, it appears probable that initially this structure was used as a pleasure pavilion and was turned into a tomb at a later date. The selection of motifs for the exterior and interior also shows that the *rani* planned it to serve both purposes.

One interesting feature of the fruit and flower designs painted all over the interior of this tomb is the frequent use of the mango fruit. It starts on the exterior wall, shown in oversized chinaware pots placed on tables, with smaller mangoes scattered around them, on either side of the marble plaque. Upon entering the tomb through its westward door, the first painted panel on the south wall opposite the entrance is the panel a visitor encounters. The entire length and breadth of the arched blind niche of this rectangular section is painted with a mango tree laden with fruit (fig. 21.11). The lower section has lost its plaster as well as the paint but the upper area is extant. Most of the smaller panels in the rest of the tomb, including cartouches on the soffits of squat arches dividing the main hall into three sections, have the mango fruit placed in dishes flanking a vase or heaped in bowls.

Wall paintings in Rani Gul Begum's tomb are among the best examples of the very few surviving Sikh period frescoes. Commissioned by the *rani*, they are specimens of excellent draughtsmanship and appear to have been executed by the best available artists. Their fineness is comparable to other royal commissioned works in Lahore like the main hall of the

Sheesh Mahal, Naunehal Singh's *haveli* and Maharaja Ranjit Singh's *samadhi* or funerary monument opposite the fort. Gul Begum's tomb paintings are also significant because they are dateable, present a well laid-out ornamental programme and were in their original form without retouching when photographed in 2007. In their state of neglect, they call out for immediate preservation, as termite and moisture have already damaged quite a few areas resulting in loss of large sections of painted plaster, especially the lower section of the walls in the main hall and the two rooms at both ends.

A predilection for mango decoration connects this tomb to a large pavilion built on top of the Sheesh Mahal of the Lahore Fort that was used as residence by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his seraglio. Here the most eye-catching motif is on the wall opposite the entrance. The central large arched blind niche covering the entire height of the wall is painted with a mango tree laden with fruit. A few parrots are shown in flight and some perched on its branches pecking at the mangoes while four squirrels appear to be jumping on the trunk. Although by a mediocre hand and different in quality from the mango tree painted in the tomb, the similarity of subject matter and composition is striking. According to Honigberger's account Rani Gul Begum resided in the fort and the presence of this wall painting suggests that this pavilion belonged to her. The rest of the walls are divided into smaller niches that have flowers and birds painted in them on a white background, similar to the two small side rooms of the tomb.

It appears that she had the mango tree painted in her garden pavilion as a reminder of her days with the maharaja in the fort but here she deliberately restricted the repertory to floral and fruit designs with the future of the building in mind. The absence of parrots or any other animate imagery in the tomb is not difficult to comprehend as Islam prohibits representation of living creatures.[26] As a pleasure pavilion, the interior space decorated with vegetal motifs connected it to the lush green landscape in front of it and when it was turned into a tomb, the same repertory became an attempt of imagining *jannat* or heaven for the deceased—the verdant land of abundance and bliss promised to every devout Muslim.

In the secular sense, mangoes are a fertility symbol used for thousands of years in the subcontinent. They were held

sacred by the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains (Gupta 1996: 93). Five leaves of the mango tree besmeared with *sindoor* or vermillion is called *amer pallava* and is placed in a pot called a *Laksmi-ghata*, and is a common sight in Hindu ceremonies (Chatterjee 1996: 106). The mango tree is the tree of *Kamadeva* (the God of Love) who shot his arrow tipped with flowers at the meditating Siva who, upon opening his eyes, instantly fell in love with Parvati (Gupta 1996: 97). Associated with fertility and good luck, mango leaves were festooned on doorways to announce the birth of a son and are still used in Hindu marriage *pandals* or venues (Malla 2000: 71).

The presence of mango trees in Gul Begum's tomb and possibly her residential apartment speak volumes about contemporary cultural and religious practices. On the one hand it can be seen as the following of "popular religion" as studied by Harjot Oberoi, where religious practices of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the nineteenth century "covered a wide spectrum of beliefs and ritual practices" before they were divided for political reasons by movements like the Arya Samaj, Singh Sabha and Aligarh Movement (Oberoi 1994: 424). With no intentions of conversion, adoption and practice of several rituals belonging to the "other" religion or the involvement in miracle-saints by the masses was just to heal illness, procure a son, cure cattle of disease, fulfil a vow or make a wish (Ibid: 198). The Sikh maharaja's secular policies were not only for the public and not his alone—his favourite queen shared his life remaining a Muslim, and possibly expressed her silent wish to hang mango leaf festoons on her doorway but settled with having mango trees painted in the privacy of her worldly and eternal abodes.

Notes

1. English translation by the author.
2. The chronicle consists of five volumes that were translated into English by his grea-grandson Vidya Sagar Suri during his position as a Research Assistant in the History Department, Punjab University, Lahore, in 1939. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, published the last four volumes in 2002.
3. By the editor Sita Ram Kohli.
4. Suri's account is factual while Amar Nath's is flowery and replete with poetry.
5. Translation of the Persian text into Urdu by Dr Moeen Nizami and into English by the author.
6. According to Hari Ram Gupta, he noticed her during her dance performance held to entertain Lord William Bentick and his entourage at the Ropar meeting in 1831.
7. An Indian love poem the court laureate translated at the wish of Emperor Akbar from Sanskrit into Persian in the meter of *Laila-Majnu* and contained 4200 verses (Ali 2008: 232-33).
8. Suri's account differs here, as according to him, her name was Gul Begum and the maharaja gave her the title of Gul Bahar Begum.
9. Traditional Indian cash present offered to the bride or groom's parents.
10. Titles of respect.
11. A term of contempt in Punjabi according to Kohli (fn: 218).
12. The author uses "Mughal" here.
13. Nick-named Mir Munnoo, notorious for persecuting the Sikhs.
14. he two titles for the brothers mentioned by Akbari seemed symbolic but appear to have become their identity since Honigberegr also refers to them by the same.
15. A village on the left bank of the river Chenab northwest of Gujranwala, Ranjit Singh's ancestral home. It was renamed Ramnagar from Rasulnagar after Ranjit Singh captured it from Chatha Pathans in 1795 (Gupta 79).
16. Eastern Gate of the Lahore Fort in front of the Begum Shahi Mosque built by Maryam Zamani in 1611-12, hence known as the *Masiti* or *Masjidi* Gate.
17. A garden laid out by the maharaja in the open area between the Badshahi Mosque and Lahore Fort's Alamgiri Gate.
18. Discussed in detail in "Posthumous Homage Paid to Maharaja Ranjit Singh" in *JAMAL* vol. 1 (in print), by the author.
19. Not mentioned in the list as by that time she had been sent into exile by the British.
20. Ram Kishan was Ranjit Singh's *toshakhania* and Misr Beli Ram's brother who had succeeded his father Basti Ram. Hired by the maharaja's father Mahan Singh, Basti Ram continued his services under Ranjit Singh until his death in 1816-17. Due to Beli Ram's influence, Ram Kishan was raised to the rank of the Maharaja's Chamberlain exciting jealousy of the Dogra brothers. For more information see, Kohli (1927: 2: 304-05).
21. Both texts are in Urdu and translated here by the author.
22. According to Chishti, Sardar Khan insisted that the tablet also had his name but was not readable anymore.
23. Photographs of the interior included in this article were taken in June 2007 when access was graciously granted by an elderly member of their family, now dead. All recent requests were turned down.
24. Translation from Persian into Urdu by Moeen Nizami and into English by the author.
25. In Rashid Maukhdoom's opinion, the open-brick work is a later addition to the arched openings. Mukhdoom is a Conservation Architect and Urban Designer presently working with Aga Khan Cultural Service, Pakistan, on Urban Rehabilitation of Lahore's Walled City.
26. A decree more strictly observed for tombs than for living quarters.