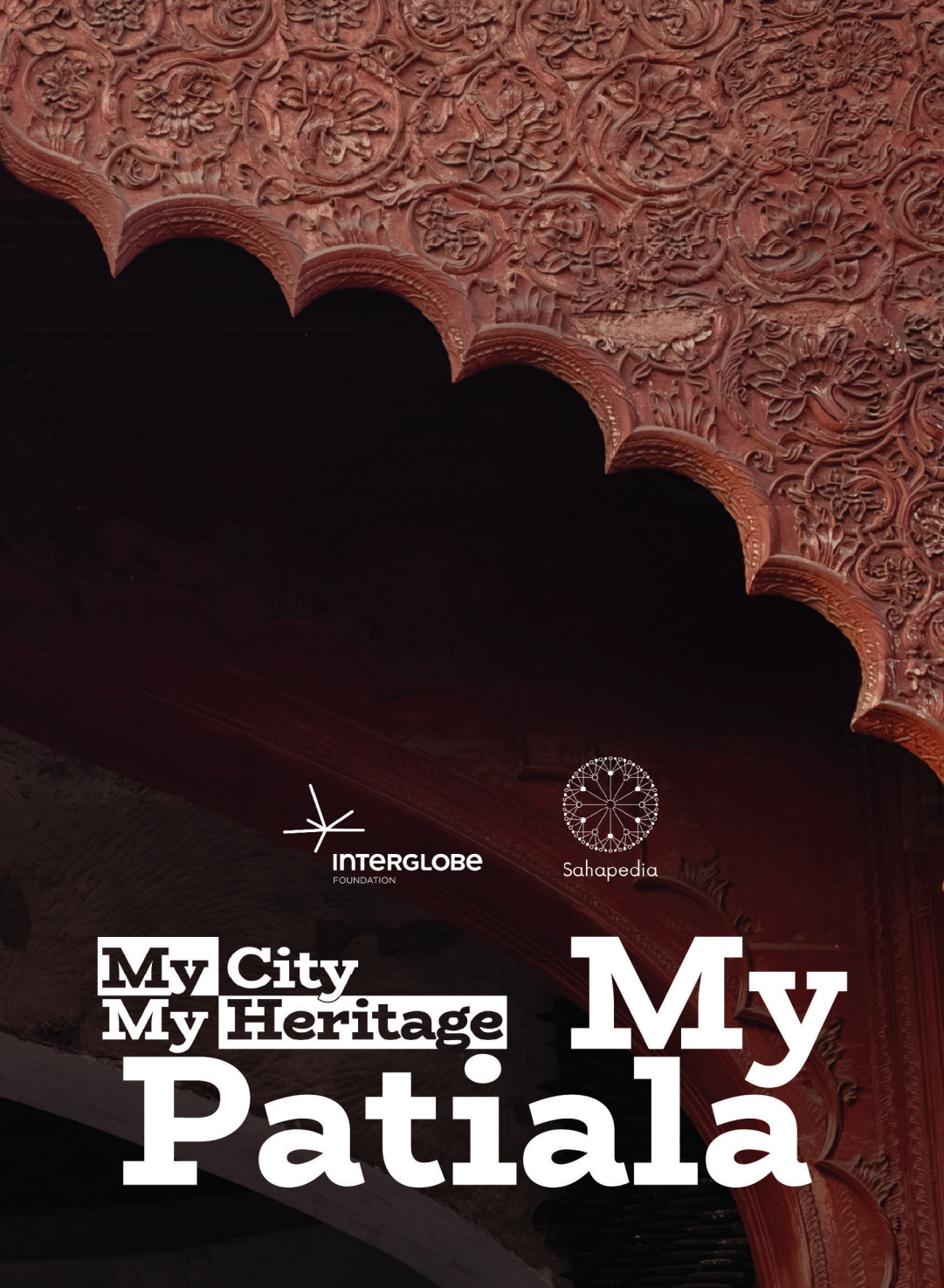

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Sahapedia

My City
My Heritage

My Patiala

Impressum

Title:
My City My Heritage My Patiala

Publisher:
Sahapedia

Supported by:
InterGlobe Foundation

We welcome suggestions and corrections for future editions and our website.

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Sahapedia

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that we present to you this compendium of booklets showcasing some of the lesser-known and overlooked treasures of select cities in our country. Over the past decade, the InterGlobe Foundation (IGF) has been steadfast in its commitment to preserving and restoring India's cultural and built heritage.

Launched in 2019 as a collaboration between the InterGlobe Foundation and Sahapedia, the My City My Heritage project is guided by a shared vision to promote India's vibrant intangible culture through the documentation and celebration of the cultural fabric of its cities. Each city has its own unique story to tell—stories rooted in its monuments, crafts, festivals, and the lived experiences of its people. By documenting these stories, this project not only preserves our cultural fabric but also inspires pride and awareness in local communities and visitors alike.

As custodians of a shared heritage, we at IGF believe that initiatives like this are crucial for exploring a deeper connection between the communities and the spaces they inhabit. We also hope that in each of the project cities, a group of concerned citizens, institutions and government will come together to carry forward this beautiful curation of their city's history. We hope these booklets will entice you to discover these cities and their treasures and share them with others. We welcome more organizations, individuals and researchers to build on the repository created here.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the team at Sahapedia, my colleagues at InterGlobe Foundation, as well as the researchers, photographers, and local communities who have contributed to this endeavor.

With best wishes,

Rohini Bhatia

Chairperson
InterGlobe Foundation

Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this collection of city booklets created under the 'My City My Heritage' initiative, a collaboration between Sahapedia and the InterGlobe Foundation (IGF). These booklets celebrate the rich and layered cultural heritage of Indian cities, bringing to light their stories, unique traditions, and enduring legacies.

At Sahapedia, our journey since 2011 has been defined by a vision—to document and share India's vast and diverse cultural knowledge. Over the past 15 years, Sahapedia has established itself as an open, digital resource dedicated to exploring the histories, arts, and traditions that define our shared heritage. The Sanskrit term 'Saha,' (together with), embodies the spirit of collaboration that fuels our efforts in documenting local contexts and pluralistic traditions, and creating meaningful engagement with India's cultural legacy.

'My City My Heritage,' launched in 2019, has become an extension of this vision. With the generous support of IGF, this project underscores the role of cities as living repositories of history and culture. Beyond research and documentation resulting into City Booklets, the project engages communities, scholars, and enthusiasts in celebrating their cities' unique identities. Initiatives like heritage walks and Anubhutis—Sahapedia's initiative for children with disabilities and marginalized groups—have redefined heritage engagement.

Each booklet reflects research, thoughtful curation, and a commitment to accessible heritage. This endeavor owes its success to the unwavering support of IGF and the contributions of researchers, photographers, local communities, and Sahapedia's team.

It is my hope that these booklets will not only serve as resources for exploration and education but also foster a sense of responsibility for our cultural legacy. I invite you to dive into the stories within and to share in the joy of our collective heritage.

With warm regards,

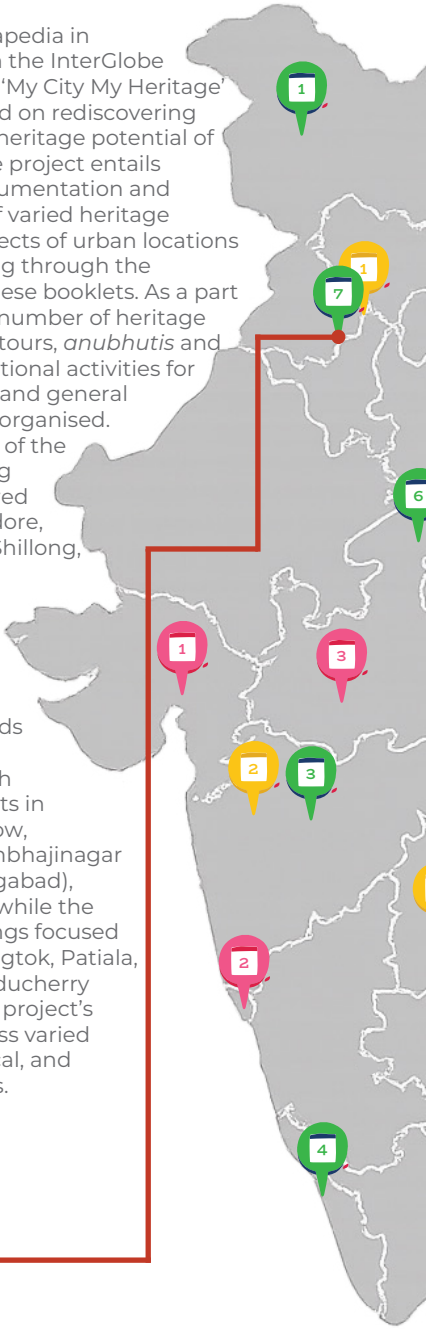
Sudha Gopalakrishnan

Executive Director
Sahapedia

My City My Heritage My Patiala

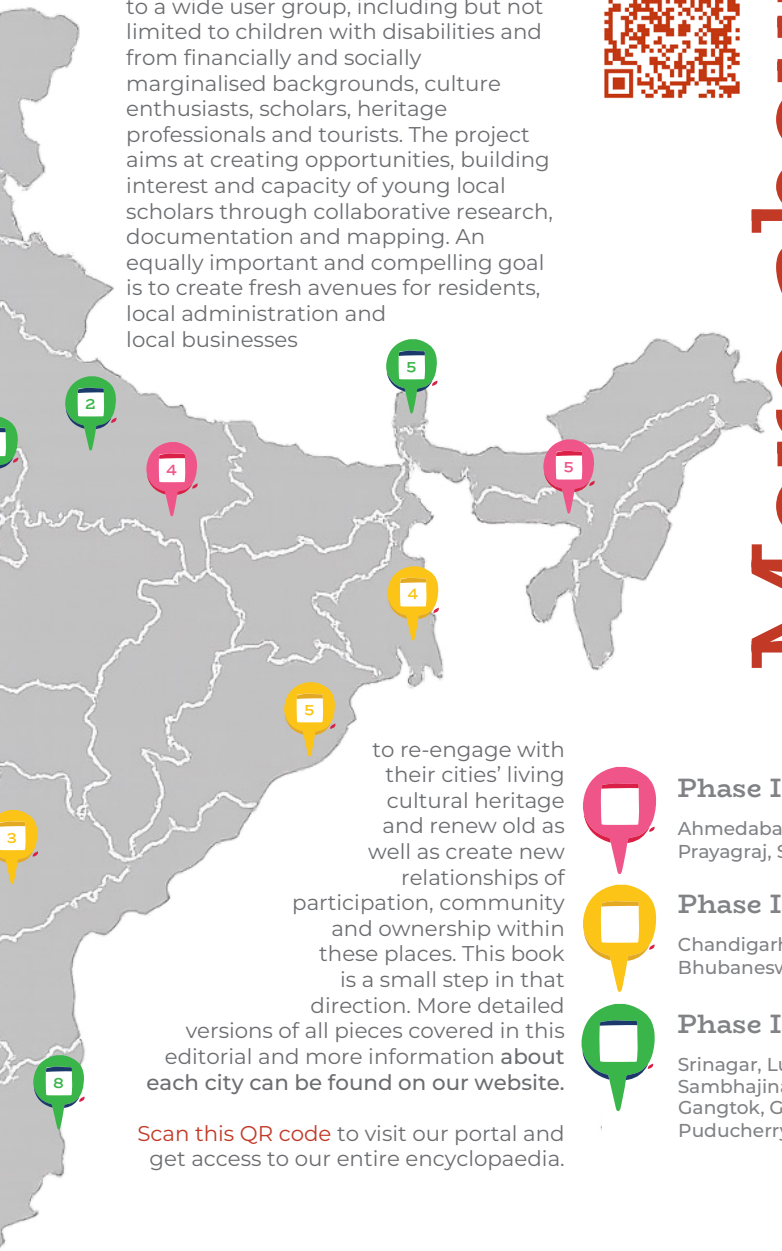
Initiated by Sahapedia in partnership with the InterGlobe Foundation, the 'My City My Heritage' project is focused on rediscovering the culture and heritage potential of Indian cities. The project entails exploration, documentation and dissemination of varied heritage and cultural aspects of urban locations in India, including through the publication of these booklets. As a part of the project, a number of heritage walks, museum tours, *anubhutis* and engaging educational activities for school students and general audiences were organised.

The initial phase of the project, spanning 2019–2022, covered Ahmedabad, Indore, Prayagraj, Goa, Shillong, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Nashik. The ongoing phase (2024–2025) builds on this legacy through in-depth city engagements in Srinagar, Lucknow, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (formerly Aurangabad), and Kozhikode, while the current year brings focused attention to Gangtok, Patiala, Gwalior, and Puducherry —extending the project's exploration across varied regional, historical, and cultural contexts.



More about the project

The ‘My City My Heritage’ project caters to a wide user group, including but not limited to children with disabilities and from financially and socially marginalised backgrounds, culture enthusiasts, scholars, heritage professionals and tourists. The project aims at creating opportunities, building interest and capacity of young local scholars through collaborative research, documentation and mapping. An equally important and compelling goal is to create fresh avenues for residents, local administration and local businesses



to re-engage with their cities’ living cultural heritage and renew old as well as create new relationships of participation, community and ownership within these places. This book is a small step in that direction. More detailed versions of all pieces covered in this editorial and more information **about each city can be found on our website.**

Scan this QR code to visit our portal and get access to our entire encyclopaedia.

Phase I

Ahmedabad, Goa, Indore, Prayagraj, Shillong

Phase II

Chandigarh, Nashik, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar, Kolkata

Phase III

Srinagar, Lucknow, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Kozhikode Gangtok, Gwalior, Patiala, Puducherry

Contents

Essays

Introductory Note

Patiala, often dubbed the Royal City of Punjab and the seat of the Phulkian Dynasty, was founded by Baba Ala Singh in 1763. He laid the foundation of what is today the Qila Mubarak in Patiala's Old City, the point from which the city expanded outwards. The many labyrinthine *bazaars* around the Qila came to be associated with communities who gradually settled in the city and the vocations they held. For instance, Sirhandi Bazaar is where the Hindus from Sirhind settled after the ransacking of Sirhind. Bartan Bazaar, as the name suggests, is renowned for the many handmade kitchen utensils it still sells. In this way, the rhythm of the city was very tangibly in its *bazaars* as much as it was in the opulence of the monuments that the successive Maharajas erected. Where the Sheesh Mahal's mirrored halls and ornate stucco work speaks to the grandeur of the rulers, the Lakshman Jhula in the grounds of the Mahal is an engineering feat accomplished by colonial India's pre-eminent engineering works from Calcutta ordered by Maharaja Rajinder Singh. In this way, Patiala presents to visitors more than just the reductive binaries that royal cities come to be associated with. Patiala's architecture, school of painting, musical traditions, indigenous and transmitted knowledge of the crafts, and building techniques — both historical and contemporary — lend to the layered landscape of the city.

Through this curation, emphasis has been laid on the polyphony of voices that have made the city what it is.

The Phulkian Narrative establishes the historical context for further explorations of socio-cultural aspects of the city. ***The King of the Arts*** hones in on Maharaja Karam Singh, drawing out how his patronage of arts, architecture, and music set a precedent for successive Maharajas; and ***Ballads Beyond Borders*** brings to the fore how Patiala's musical lineage and legacy took on a life of its own. Patiala's equally historic prowess in cricket, polo, wrestling, and hockey, and the Maharajas' negotiation of politics via sports is detailed in ***Playing Power in Patiala***.

Continuing the conversation on architecture is ***Restoring the Architectural Past***, which highlights

the arc of the city's historic marvels and contemporary challenges around their restoration. To extend this further, ***The Dawn of Art Deco*** traces the introduction of Art Deco to Patiala not only in architecture, but also in jewellery, through the design sensibilities and courtly patronage of the Maharajas. ***Patiala Outside Patiala*** continues by considering how geography and architecture became the playing field for Phulkian royals to quietly negotiate their sovereignty within the British Empire.

Crossing Borders with the Tille Wali Jutti centres the art of Punjabi *jutti*-making, with the author travelling from Fazilka to Patiala to highlight the variations in material, labour, and social structures that sustain this craft. ***Ghosts of Literature Past*** offers a window into the literary traditions that have sustained intellectualism on university and college campuses across Patiala by highlighting the role that the *Bhootwara* played. Patiala's influence was not confined to the geographic limits of the city but extended outwards, across colonial India and even abroad.

The city's culinary memories are poetically documented in ***Patiala on the Palate***. For a more urban approach to the city, ***Tales from Tripuri Town*** recounts our curator's highly sensorial experience of Tripuri Town, a neighbourhood that could be dubbed the 'Magic Lamp' of Patiala. Geographically, Patiala is situated in a region replete with wildlife parks and sanctuaries. To better understand the groups working to sustain these spaces, ***The Revival of Plants*** draws on conversations with Dr Rajneesh Kumar, Project Lead of RoundGlass Foundation's Billion Trees Project. In bringing these strands together, the curation seeks to position Patiala as a city best understood through its multiplicity of histories, practices, and lived experiences.

Bahadurgarh Gurdwara Sahib. Photo by Meenal Upreti.


05
Tripuri Town
04
Sirhind Rd
14
19
ਬਾਰਾਂਦਰੀ ਬਾਗ਼
13
20
10
Mall Rd
Chotti Baradari
11
15
17
Badungar Rd
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PATIALA
18
01
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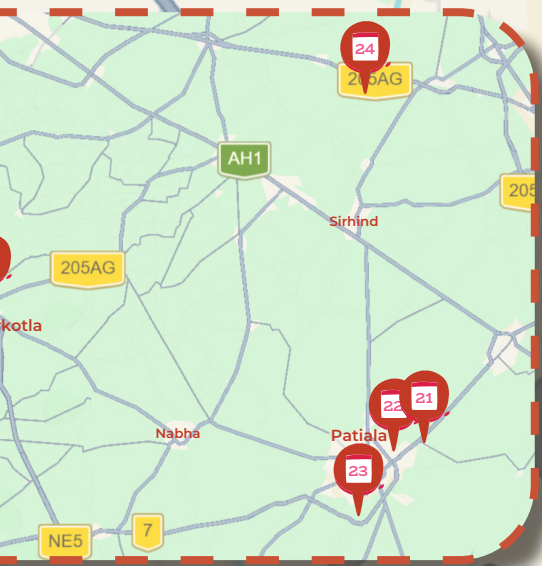
Old Moti Bagh
25
Sangrur



Old City of Patiala

1. Qila Mubarak
2. Shahi Samadhan
3. Adalat Bazaar

Outside the Old City

4. Tripuri Town
5. Gol Gappa Chowk
6. Moti Bagh Palace/NSNIS Museum
7. Moti Bagh Gurdwara
8. Sheesh Mahal
9. Yadavindra Public School
10. Gurdwara Shri Dukhniwaran Sahib

Mall Road/Baradari

11. Phul Cinema
12. Malwa Cinema
13. Baradari Bagh
14. Rajindra Kothi/Neemrana
15. MM Central State Library
16. Mohindra College
17. State Archives Patiala
18. Freemasons Hall
19. Kali Mata Mandir
20. Peer Baba Rode Shah Ji Dargah

Outside Patiala

21. Bahadurgarh Qila & Gurdwara Sahib
22. Punjabi University
23. Bir Moti Bagh
24. Sanghol
25. Malerkotla

The Phulkian Narrative

Meenakshi Vashisth

One of six manuscript letters in Persian and dated between 1860 and 1868. Five of these were from Mahendra Singh of Patiala (r. 1862-76) and Bhagwan Singh of Nabha (r. 1864 -71), addressed to the British Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief, and presenting envoys to them. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

To understand Patiala is to recognise it as a city born of tactical necessity and refined through cultural ambition. Unlike the Mughal metropolises of the north or the planned colonial cantonments, it emerged within the 'Malwa' region of Punjab, part of the cis-Sutlej tract, in the eighteenth-century. Prior to this, the region was characterised by dispersed agrarian settlements and shifting local authority. Areas such as present-day Sangrur and Sunam, located within the same Malwa tract to the west of Patiala, reflect this pattern of lack of consolidation into major urban centres. Its relative absence in early historical and travel accounts, which tend to focus on established centres such as Lahore or Sirhind, underscores its position as a hinterland. Even during the Mughal period, the cis-Sutlej tract functioned primarily as a revenue-generating zone administered through local intermediaries.

These conditions, combined with the weakening of Mughal authority, created the context for the rise of regional polities, particularly Sikh chiefs who began consolidating territorial control. As one of the principal Phulkian states, Patiala occupied a strategically significant position between competing forces: the expanding Sikh kingdom under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the residual influence of Afghan power under Ahmad Shah Abdali, and, increasingly, the British East India Company.

The origins of Patiala lie in the consolidation of authority by the Phulkian lineage, descendants of Chaudhary Phul, whose successors established the states of Patiala, Nabha, and Jind. Among them, Baba Ala Singh (r. 1714–1765) laid the foundations of Patiala state in 1763, at a moment when political authority in north India was increasingly negotiated through regional assertion rather than imperial control.

Dated 2 August 1696, this letter was signed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji and written to Bhai Triloka and Bhai Rama from the family of Phul. Also known as the *Patiala Hukumnama*, it includes the sentence, *'tera ghar mera assey'* which translates to '*your house is my refuge*'. This was later used as the motto on the crest of the Patiala Maharajas. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

The name 'Patiala' itself reflects this formation, derived from *patti* (meaning a strip of land, a residential sector, or a territorial division) and the name of its founder 'Ala'.

'Patti-Ala' thus translates to the territory of Ala Singh, a naming convention typical of eighteenth-century regional polities where authority was closely tied to the person of the chieftain.

The Qila-Bazaar Symbiosis

At the centre of this early settlement stood Qila Mubarak, initially constructed as a *kachigarhi* (mud fortification) in 1763, a fragile structure reflecting the uncertainties of the time, particularly the repeated incursions of Ahmad Shah Abdali into Punjab. This fort erected by Baba Ala Singh functioned not only as a defensive structure but also as the nucleus of an emerging urban form. The city developed around it in a concentric pattern, where the palace complex and the *bazaar* (market) were closely intertwined — linking political authority with economic life. Such proximity was not incidental. This spatial link allowed the state to draw directly from and regulate urban economic activity. Markets like Adalat Bazaar and Dharampura Bazaar functioned as the city's economic engine, under the security of the Qila.

While the Majha *misls* (north of the Sutlej) practiced uncompromising resistance, Ala Singh's Phulkian *misl* adopted a sedentary, diplomatic form of state-building. Securing recognition from both Ahmad Shah Durrani and the declining Mughal court, he maintained a degree of autonomy in a region of overlapping sovereignties.

By accepting the title of "Raja" and a *Sanad* (grant) from Abdali in 1761, Ala Singh secured the *Chaudhari* (revenue collection) rights that provided the fiscal foundation for a formalised monarchy.

Though this "dual diplomacy" occasionally caused friction with the Dal Khalsa (the military force of the *misls*), it allowed Patiala to function as a pragmatic buffer — retaining Mughal-trained administrative staff and bureaucratic continuity even as the empire crumbled.

The leadership of Patiala was characterised by long reigns that allowed for the consolidation of this "Patiala Shahi" identity. Following Ala Singh, Maharaja Amar Singh (r. 1765 –1781), his grandson, expanded the territories and received the title 'Raja-e-Rajgan'. The approach of balancing allegiance and independence would continue to define Patiala's political culture in the decades that followed.

The Colonial Pivot

By the early nineteenth-century, the political landscape had shifted. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Lahore kingdom introduced a new form of

centralised Sikh power in the region, while the British East India Company expanded its influence northwards. The cis-Sutlej states, including Patiala, found themselves positioned between these two forces.

In 1809, Maharaja Sahib Singh (r. 1781–1813) entered a treaty with the British, placing Patiala under their protection while retaining internal autonomy. While it ensured the survival of Patiala as a political entity, it also integrated the state into the structures of colonial governance. This relationship with the Colonial power deepened under Maharaja Karam Singh (r. 1813–1845) and Maharaja Narinder Singh (r. 1845–1862); the latter's support during the 1857 Uprising resulted in Patiala's recognition as a 17-gun salute state. This alignment strengthened its position within the imperial order.

Urban Transformation: From Defence to Representation

As political conditions stabilised under the British protection, the city expanded beyond its original fortified core. Where earlier forms of architecture prioritised defence, the buildings of the nineteenth-century emphasised scale, visibility, and display. Structures such as the Sheesh Mahal, constructed under Maharaja Narinder Singh, exemplify this: with reflective surfaces, ornamental detailing, and the incorporation of both Mughal and European elements, the building represents a visual language of princely sophistication. The later expansion of Moti Bagh Palace under Maharaja Bhupinder Singh (r. 1900–1938) extended this trajectory. Conceived as an expansive residential

Painting depicting a meeting between Maharaja Sahib Singh of Patiala state, Sardar Jodh Singh of Kalsia state, Bhai Lal Singh of Kaithal state, Mehak Singh, and Raja Jaswant Rao Holkar, c. 1850. Picture Credits: British Museum/Wikimedia Commons.

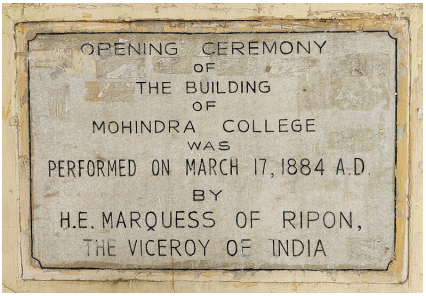
and ceremonial complex, it drew on the spatial logic of Mughal garden-palaces while incorporating modern technologies and materials.
This period also saw the introduction of new institutions that reflected changing priorities.

Mohindra College, established in the 1870s, stands as one of the earliest examples of Western-style higher education in a princely state. Notably, Patiala had previously been plugged into the intellectual networks of the Bengal Residency via affiliation with the University of Calcutta.

Maharaja Rajinder Singh (r. 1876–1900) furthered this cosmopolitan trajectory. Known for his secular outlook and patronage of the arts, he was an early pioneer of cricket and polo in India, bridging the gap between traditional courtly pastimes and modern imperial sports.

Cultural Synthesis

Patiala also emerged as an important centre of cultural production in the field of Hindustani classical music. The Patiala *gharana* developed in the late nineteenth-century under court patronage, particularly during the reigns of Rajinder Singh and Bhupinder Singh. Associated with the musicians Ustad Ali Baksh and Ustad Fateh Ali Khan, the Patiala *gharana* evolved a distinctive yet composite musical style. While it shared a foundational relationship with the Gwalior *gharana*, its development



Plaque commemorating the opening of Mohindra College. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

was shaped through interactions across musical lineages. As the Mughal court in Delhi declined, musicians migrated to regional centres such as Patiala, where new forms of experimentation became possible. The later prominence of Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, perhaps the most celebrated

A group photograph of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh with the cricketer Ranjitsinhji Vibhaji Jadeja, known as Ranji, and other guests and servants. Patiala, c. 1910. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

exponent of the gharana in the twentieth-century and an experimental artist who even sang for films, underscores how the Patiala *gharana* gave rise to styles that were responsive to changing cultural contexts.

Court culture in Patiala extended to domains beyond music. Under Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, Patiala engaged with the Chamber of Princes and participated in international networks of sports, emerging as a national and international presence. From elaborate *durbars* to ceremonial processions, Bhupinder Singh used spectacle as a form of political communication within the empire. This emphasis on display extended into material and sartorial cultures. The famed "Patiala Necklace," commissioned from Cartier, exemplifies a synthesis of European craftsmanship and princely opulence. Such objects articulated a carefully constructed identity, signalling a Phulkian aristocracy at ease within imperial circuits and regional traditions.

Integration and Afterlives

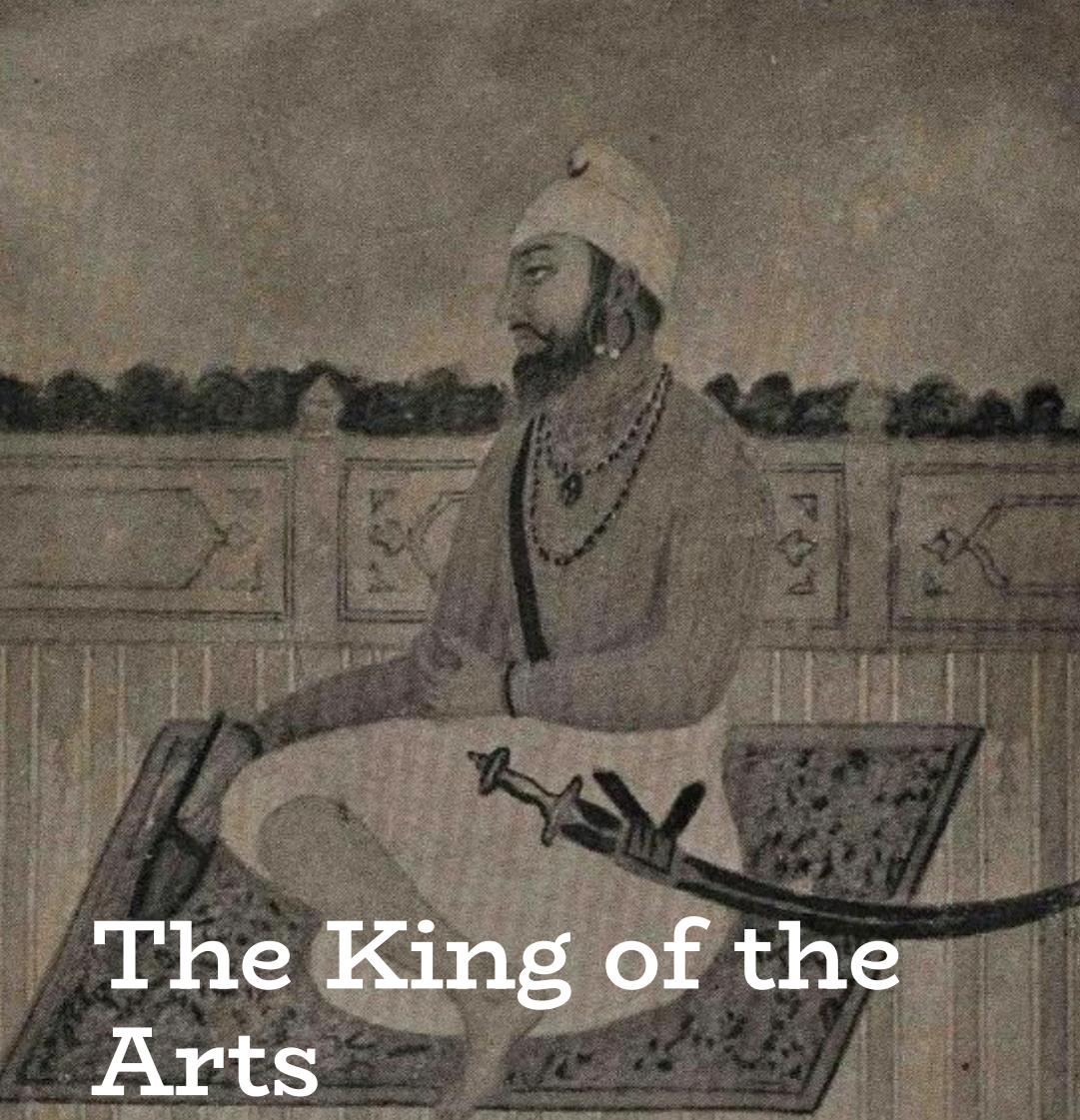
With the end of British rule in 1947, Patiala acceded to India, marking the end of its formal sovereignty under Maharaja Yadavindra Singh. In 1948, Patiala became the capital of the Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU), a federation of several princely states in the region. Former rulers assumed new constitutional roles, while administrative structures were reorganised to align with modern governance. The merger of

A portrait of the last ruling king of Patiala, Maharaja Yadavindra Singh, wearing the famous Patiala necklace, 1930. He signed the treaty to merge Patiala into independent India. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

PEPSU into Punjab in 1956 marked the completion of this process. Although Patiala's political centrality diminished thereafter, the city continued to function as an important regional centre, shaped by its institutional legacy and historical depth. From Mughal decline and Sikh consolidation to colonial alliance and postcolonial integration, Patiala's story is not one of linear progression, but of continuous negotiation — between power and patronage, tradition and modernity, the local and the global.


MODREN
JEWELLERS
MODERN JEWELLERS
Ornaments On Orders
Takhat Singh
Deep Singh
SARAF
M: 95019-44033
JAIN
JEWELLERS
SHOP NO: 3, Quila Chowk, Patiala
MIMA MAL HARBANS LAL
SARAF
PB02
5745

Vibrant streets around Qila Chowk near Qila Mubarak, Patiala, lined with shops selling traditional *phulkari* embroidery, jewellery, and colourful *parandis*, reflecting the city's rich cultural heritage. Photo by Meenal Upreti.



The King of the Arts

Harmilan Singh

Kavi Santokh Singh seated on a terrace, in a miniature painting preserved by his descendants, c. nineteenth-century. One of the most influential Sikh literary figures of the nineteenth-century, he resided in Patiala from 1823 to 1829 and is best known for authoring *Nanak Prakash* (1824) and the monumental *Sri Guru Pratap Suraj Granth* (1843). Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

In popular imagery, Punjab royalty brings to mind the stalwart personality of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the founder of the Sikh Empire, under whose patronage Punjabi identity and culture saw a renaissance. Forgotten in common culture are other equally important individuals, chief among them Maharaja Karam Singh, who ruled Patiala, the second largest Sikh state of Punjab, which stretches across present-day Southern Punjab and Northern Haryana. It was under Karam Singh that a crucial and distinct form of Sikh cultural renaissance, often dubbed the Phulkian Renaissance, developed.

The Rise of Karam Singh

During the eighteenth-century, Maharaja Sahib Singh signed a protection treaty with the British East India Company due to the increasing influence of the Lahore Durbar and its annexation of neighbouring territories. Karam Singh, born in 1797, ascended the throne in 1813 within this larger political context — becoming the first ruler of Patiala to govern within the framework of British suzerainty.

In his formative years, Karam Singh supported the British with repelling Gurkha advances in the hills of Shimla. This in turn earned him territories across what is today recognised as Shimla and Chail, in Himachal Pradesh.

Patiala's status as a protectorate of the British bolstered its power, especially as it was providing loans to the British war efforts against various kingdoms. This brought peace to Patiala, permitting Karam Singh to rearrange its political systems. By 1823, he streamlined his administration and brought in various socioeconomic reforms. He centralised the state by resolving petty disputes with other local chiefs and established a strong treasury department by reducing dependency on influential moneylenders. He also organised land revenue more effectively, creating a centralised office devoted to documenting state revenue in Persian. Interestingly, records of Perisan are only found in the Landa Punjabi script until 1829.

Painting of Sardar Ala Singh of Patiala in tondo, Pahari School, c. 1880. Picture Credits: Himachal State Museum, Shimla (Goswamy, 2000)/Wikimedia Commons.

Under Karam Singh's rule, Patiala emerged from chaotic instability — and under his patronage of art and architecture, the state turned into a culturally vibrant center in Punjab.

Literature and Poetry

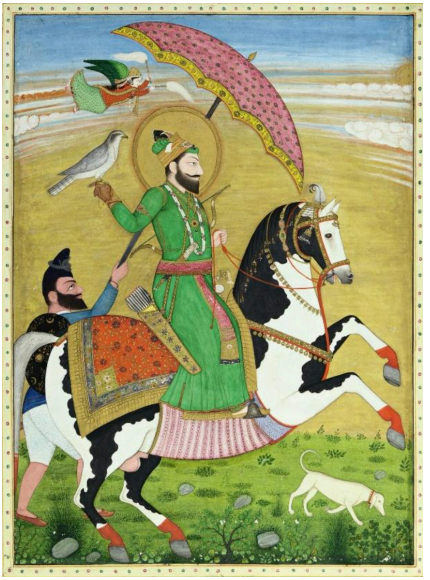
Karam Singh's appreciation and support of literature made the Patiala Durbar the home of various poets and the foremost Sikh scholars in the nineteenth-century.

Of the many poets in court was Vir Singh Bal, who contributed significantly to Sikh culture and religion. He authored a history of the life of the tenth Guru in his voluminous *Singh Sagar Granth* (1827). He also penned his own version of *Heer-Ranjha*, the famous epic of the tragic end of two lovers.

Renaming it *Heer of Jhang Sial and Ranjha of Takhta Hazara* and transforming it into a spiritual tale, Vir Singh portrayed himself as Heer seeking guidance from her spiritual master Ranjha (in this metaphysical love story, a reference to Guru Gobind Singh).

The *manglacharan* (benedictory verse in the beginning of the text) eulogised Guru Gobind Singh, rather than containing the traditional ode to Hindu deities Ganesha and Saraswati. This marked the unique emergence of a Sikh-based poetry culture emerging from Patiala, facilitated by Karam Singh's economic support for works on religion and folklore.

Karam Singh also commissioned poet Ram Singh to translate the Persian book on political sciences, *Ikhlaq-e-Mohsin* to *Suniti Prakash*. Patiala became a haven for writers and poets, with several settling in the region. For instance, Santokh Singh, the famous author of the magnum opus *Nanak Prakash* (1824) and *Sri Guru Pratap Suraj Granth* (1843), moved to Patiala from 1823 to 1829.



Guru Gobind Singh with a Nihang bodyguard, Patiala, Punjab, c. 1830-40. Toor Collection.Picture Credits: Ram Chand/Wikimedia Commons.

Art

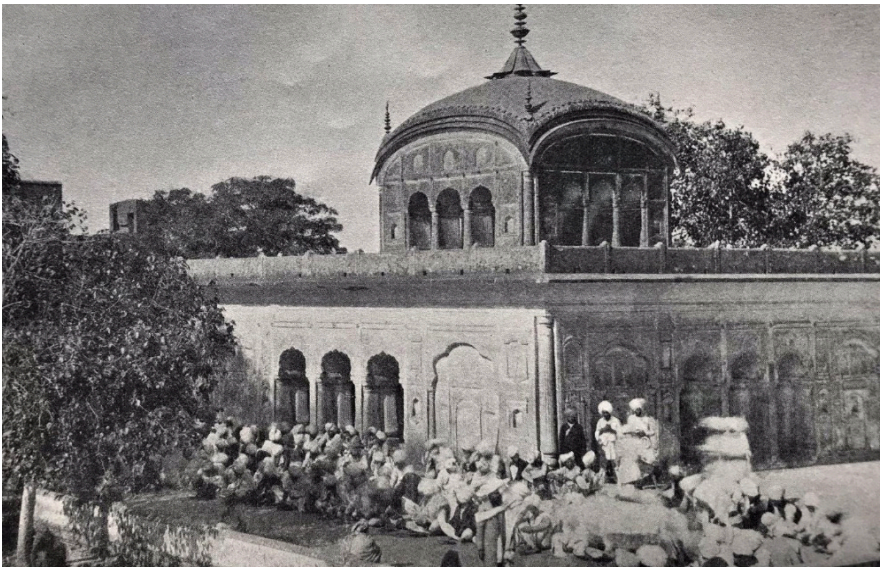
Karam Singh was also a lover of various art forms. During his rule, Patiala became famous for its paintings and drew painters from the hills, Rajasthan, and Awadh. These artists enriched their styles with local Punjabi and syncretic elements, leading to the formation of the

Patiala School of Art. Patiala's art would go on to depict themes ranging from the religious to the secular. Notably, it included depictions of everyday life and ordinary people, subjects often less depicted in art schools across the Indian subcontinent.

Paintings from Karam Singh's era were majorly done with gouache on paper and many of these are in the private collection of the British art collector, Davinder Toor.

Architecture

Karam Singh's contribution to architecture was the creation of a distinct Sikh architectural style, very unlike its counterparts in the Lahore Durbar. The *gurdwaras* built in Phulkian style had domes inspired by Bengal roofs, rather than traditional onion-style domes. Karam Singh, a devout Sikh himself, had countless such *gurdwaras* built across the state, many of which are historically associated with the lives of Sikh Gurus. Sadly, only a handful of these styles remain intact, namely Gurdwara Qila Mubarak in Bathinda and a small portion of Gurdwara Shri Patshahi Nauvin Sahib Qila Bahadurgarh on the outskirts of Patiala. Under the *Kar Sewa* (devotional voluntary service of Sikhism) architectural renovations, the original structures were built over and altered. Most of the style of architecture initiated under Karam Singh is thus lost to time.



A picture of Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib, c. 1909, built by Maharaja Karam Singh in 1844. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Death and Legacy

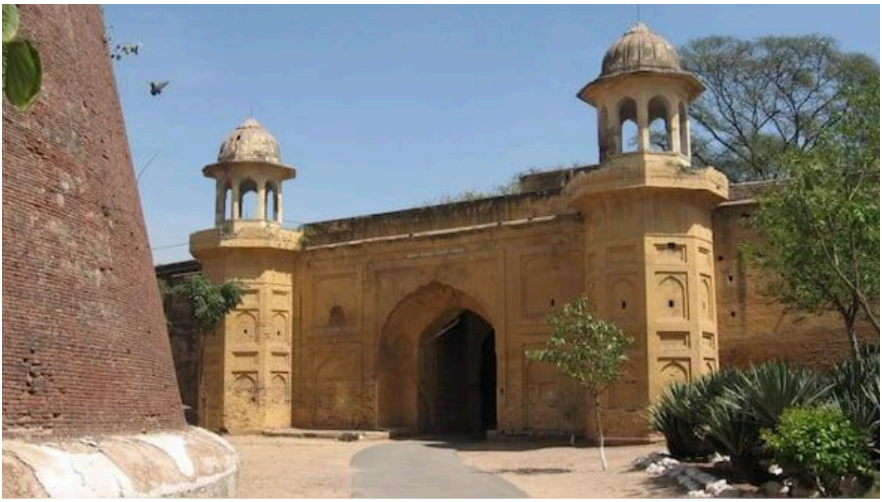
Karam Singh's rule ended in 1845, when he died during the First Anglo-Sikh War. Conspiracies floated around his death, which was rumoured to have been a consequence of everything from illness to poisoning by his own *durbaris* (members of court). One vague report in the Illustrated London News edition of April 1846 claimed that he was hanged by the British for refusing to act against Lahore, as he enjoyed a working relationship with Lahore despite their rivalry.

Maharaja Karam Singh was eventually succeeded by his son, Maharaja Narinder Singh, who would further enrich Patiala with grand architectural projects.
Today, Karam Singh has been forgotten in the city that he once ruled, overshadowed by the legacy of his descendants. Yet it was he who sparked the torch that was carried on by his successors, as far as the patronage of the trinity — arts, architecture, and literature — is concerned.

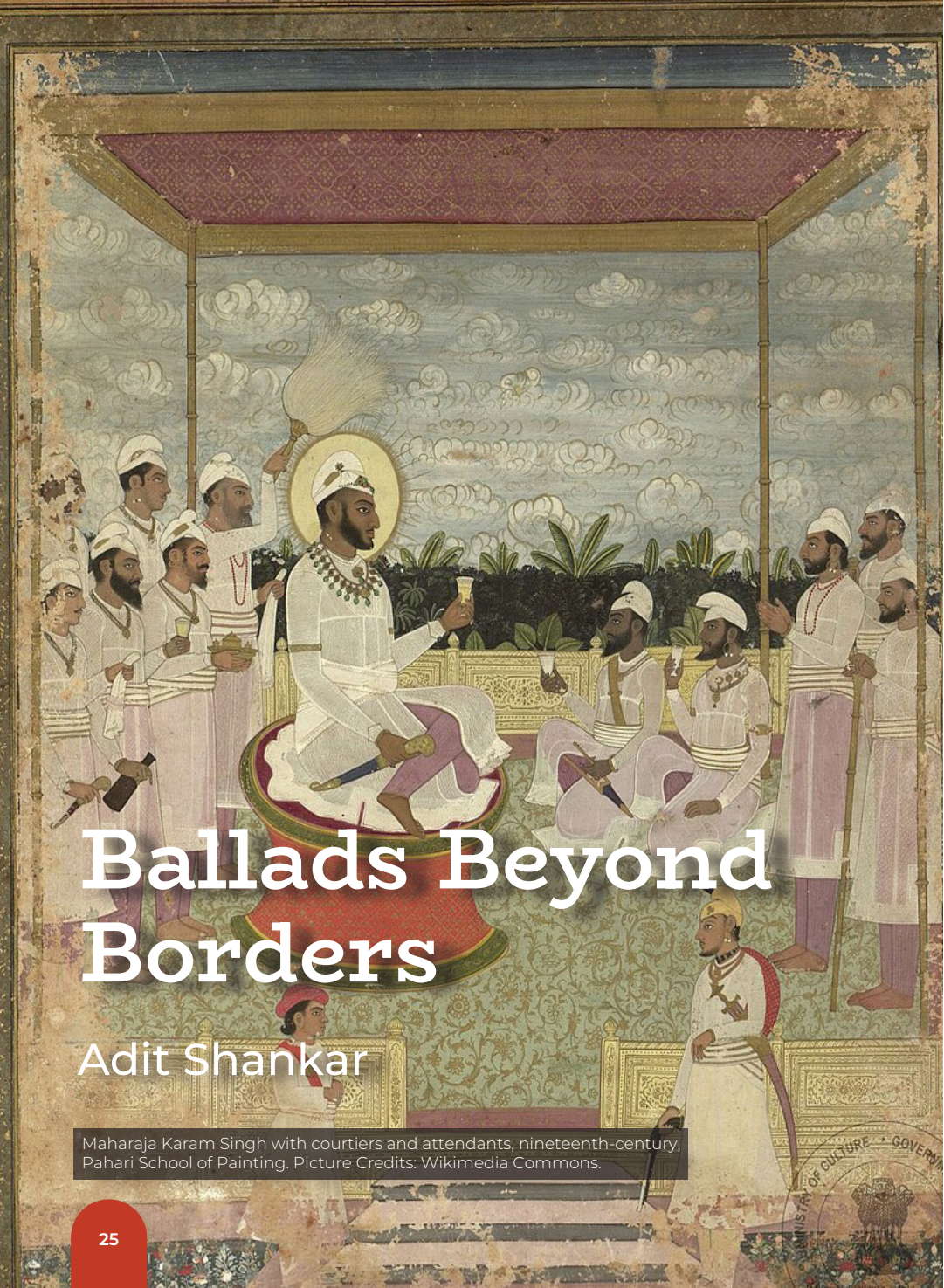
Gurdwara Qila Mubarak, Bathinda, built in 1835 by Maharaja Karam Singh. It is one of the last surviving *gurdwaras* built by Karam Singh. Photo by Harmilan Singh.

Maharaja Karam Singh of Patiala and his son Kunwar Narinder Singh with a holy man. Northern India, Opaque watercolour on paper, c. 1850. Picture Credits: Kapany Collection/Wikimedia Commons.

Photograph from the 1920s by Kahn Singh Nabha of Gurdwara Tilak Asthan (Garhi Sahib) in Chamkaur, constructed by Maharaja Karam Singh of Patiala. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.



Bahadurgarh Fort, originally named Saifabad, was repaired by Maharaja Karam Singh in 1837 and renamed after Guru Tegh Bahadur to commemorate his visit to the fort in the 1660s. Photo by Harmilan Singh.



Ballads Beyond Borders

Adit Shankar

Maharaja Karam Singh with courtiers and attendants, nineteenth-century, Pahari School of Painting. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

The *gharanas* (schools) of Hindustani music often evoke images of established musical lineages, rooted in particular regions or courts for centuries. The association of '*ghar*' (or house) with the term strengthens the idea that *gharanas* are families of musicians, found in the cities they are named after. However, *gharanas* are less individual than they seem, coalescing through extensive cultural exchanges, networks of teachers and students, and chance encounters. The Patiala *gharana* exemplifies these criss-crossings most clearly.

As music historian Radha Kapuria notes, in Patiala, we see "the classic example of a *gharana* emerging as a confluence of different influences and practitioners: from Lahore to Jaipur and Tonk, from Kasur to Kashmir and Kapurthala."

In fact, something as coincidental as Maharaja Karam Singh's (r. 1813-1845) personal passion for music led to the development of the *gharana* in Patiala. He appointing Miyan Ditte Khan as a court musician, whose son Miyan Kallu Khan would eventually go on to be considered the founder of the Patiala *gharana*. In turn, Miyan Kallu Khan's son, Ali Bakhsh, and Fateh Ali (considered both a friend and cousin of Ali Baksh in conflicting accounts), then became modern representatives of the *gharana* and trained several musicians, fondly remembered as 'Aliya-Fattu'.

Patiala's development of the *gayaki* tradition also emphasises the multiplicity of musical styles within a *gharana*. Though there is a belief that each *gharana* represents a distinct style, there are generally overlaps in style across *gharanas*. In Patiala, Miyan Kallu Khan was trained by Tanras Khan of the Dilli *gharana* and other teachers affiliated with Lahore, Jaipur, and Gwalior; so were his students, Ali Baksh 'Jarnail' and Fateh Ali 'Karnail', (the nicknames being Punjabi versions of 'General' and 'Colonel' respectively) titles conferred by Viceroy Lord Bruce. Less known, but as crucial, is the fact that these two were also trained by Goki Bai, a female vocalist of the Jaipur *gharana* and student of Behram Khan — descended from the Dagar family of *dhrupad* musicians, a genre of Hindustani music that predates the *khayal*, is more systematised, meditative, and slower. This traffic of musicians across courts led to a cosmopolitan musical culture, facilitating a mixture of styles.

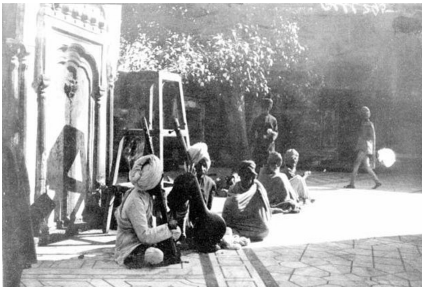
Equally, distinct strands of musical practice emerged within each *gharana* itself. From its inception, Patiala's courtly music culture was eclectic. The last two rulers of the state, Bhupinder Singh (r. 1909– 38) and Yadavindra Singh (r. 1938– 1971), patronised diverse musicians, prominent among them

Ustad Ali Bakhsh, Ustad Fateh Ali Khan, Ustad Kale Khan (representing the *gharana* or Hindustani classical music tradition), Bhai Mehboob Ali alias Booba Rababi (representing the Rababi community associated with the *rabab* and Sufi musical traditions), and Mahant Gajja

Singh (a *kirtani*, or performer of Sikh devotional music).

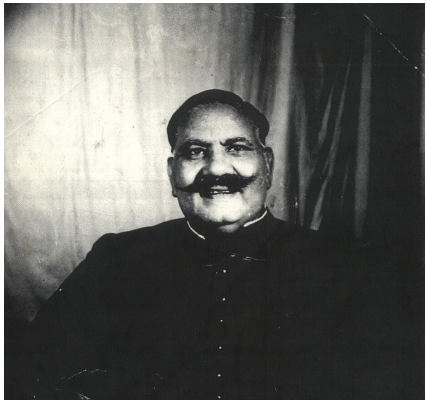
Together these musicians formed an amalgam of various strands of music, encompassing courtly and popular traditions, religious and secular themes.

As centres of patronage shifted to the metropolises of Calcutta and Bombay through the early twentieth-century, musicians began to adapt. This was a time when classical singers found themselves seeking new avenues of patronage through the radio, music conferences, and emerging urban listening circles, as older networks of courtly patronage waned. Bade Ghulam Ali Khan rose to the fore in this context, becoming the face of the Patiala *gharana*. Taught by his uncle Ustad Kale Khan, he had ironically never performed in Patiala. However, he had a cosmopolitan trajectory. Critics suggest that his personal style evolved to suit the appetite of the masses, as compact renditions of *thumris* circulated as records. *Ragas* like *Bhopali*, *Hameer*, and *Adana*, considered light-hearted



Rababis at the Golden Temple, 1903. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Kirtanis Bhai Chhaila on the *tanpura*, Bhai Ghasita on *dilruba*, and Bhai Gopal Singh on *jori* of the Patiala court at the 2nd All-India Music Conference in Delhi, 1918. Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala and his chief court musician, Mahant Gajja Singh brought a troupe of their leading court *raagis* and *rababs* to the conference. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.



Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan began his training in Kasur under his uncle, Kale Khan and father, Ali Baksh, both of the Patiala-Kasur lineage. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

and therefore appealing and accessible, became mainstays of his performances and the *gharana* itself. Perhaps one of the first Hindustani musicians to adapt to new forms and urban audiences, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan even sang for the film *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960).

It is Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's time in Calcutta, and the students he taught, that led to Calcutta becoming the new epicentre for the *gharana* in India. Some musicians were taught by Bade Ghulam Ali Khan himself, his tradition eventually carried on by their own pupils (like Parveen Sultana, whose teacher and father was his student). Others gained their *taleem* (training) through Munawar Ali Khan, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's son. Particularly notable today are practitioners like Ajoy Chakraborty and Kaushiki Chakraborty, given whose popularity the *gharana* is now identified squarely with Bengal.

The time of Partition altered the fate of both the original Patiala *gharana*, still associated with the court, and the branch associated with Calcutta. In what can only be considered a strange irony, the 'Indian-born' court musicians of Patiala — including descendants of Ali Baksh Jarnail, like Amanat Ali Khan and Fateh Ali Khan (named after Fateh Ali 'Karnail') — moved to Pakistan post-Partition, while the 'Pakistan'-born Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and his associates continued in India after a brief stint in Pakistan.

This political fissure permanently impacted the repertoire and subsequent development of the *gharana* in both India and Pakistan. Noted singers of the *gharana* in India continue to be rooted in the more 'esoteric' forms of *khayal gayaki* — compositions that begin with slow and long *raga* elaborations through *aalaap* with the *taal* (beat) speeding up as the piece progresses, open to a great degree of improvisation — and *thumris* (a genre of so-called folk music from the Gangetic plains composed in Awadhi, Bhojpuri, or Brajbhasha, often voiced by women). On the other hand, the Pakistan branch of the *gharana* focussed on the *qawwali*, a mainstay of the Dilli *gharana* but a form that generated a greater degree of interest and mass appeal than slower, *dhrupad*-inspired forms like *khayal*. This also reflects in the significance of poetry and language in these geographies. *Qawwali*, a form that doubled up as a recitation of Sufi poetry and verse, retains a greater archive of poetry from Punjab, while such a transmission of Punjabi-language compositions, and a stress on their

meaning, did not occur to a great degree in India.

Partly, the reason is formal: *khayal* does not depend heavily on the meaning of lyrics to convey affect and music. Words are sounds that bind (the very etymology of '*bandish*' being 'that which binds') the notes of a *raga*. It is, therefore, not puzzling at all that the Patiala *gharana* does not continue to have an extensive collection of Punjabi *bandishes* in active circulation, since its own archive for *khayal* was similar to other *gharanas* where Braj and Hindustani predominated — compositions from the Dilli, Jaipur, and Gwalior *gharana*, from which the Patiala *gharana* traced its descent.

Simultaneously, rather than Punjabi-language compositions, stylistic features from Punjabi folk forms — like the *tappa* — made their way into the *gharana's* style, especially evident in Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's singing.

The *tappa* is characterised by fast-paced and compressed *taans*. Bade Ghulam Ali Khan retained this complex *taan* structure and speed — with most of his recordings often beginning with such sequences rather than slower *aalaaps* — and translated them in the mode of *khayals* and *thumris*.

It is often lamented that the Patiala *gharana* no longer has representation in its own historical backyard: a collective Hindustani music-listening public is virtually unnoticeable in contemporary Punjab. But the series of confluences that animate the two-hundred-year-long trajectory of the *gharana* might also be a source of reassurance. From its very inception, its musical tradition was defined by travel, both physical and formal, allowing us to appreciate even the transformed incarnation of the *gharana* today.

Miniature painting of Baba Farid (also known as Sheikh Farid, Fariduddin Ganjshakar, or Farīd al-Dīn Masʿ ūd Ganj-i-Shakar) from the Alwar School of Art, 1823-24. Tanras Khan, in his composition of Tansen's Miyan Ki Todi, sings:

"अब मोरी नैया पार करोगे (Now, you will take my boat across the river)
हज़रत निज़ामुद्दीन औलिया (Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya)
दुःख दलिद्र सब दुर करो रे (Take away my sorrow and pain)
तानरस खान की लेहो ख़बरिया (Check on your devotee, Tanras Khan)
गंज शखर के लाड लड़ैया (O Nizamuddin, Fariduddin Ganj-e-Shakhar's dearest)."
Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Playing Power in Patiala

Saurav Sagar

Immediately behind Maharajah Yadavindra Singh is Sardar Bahadur General Chanda Singh (1864–1950), a world-renowned polo player who had been recruited by Maharaja Rajinder Singh (r. 1876–1900) into the Patiala Tigers. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

In colonial India, princely authority operated under the constraints of British paramountcy. In this context, cultural domains like sport emerged as sites for the negotiation of power. By the late colonial period, despite political curtailment by the British, Patiala's rulers commanded significant revenue and symbolic capital within the subcontinent. Through sustained investment in both modern and indigenous sports, from cricket and polo to wrestling and hockey, the maharajas of Patiala expressed their sovereignty by actively shaping sporting cultures, institutions, and reputations at large. Patiala would eventually stand out among the other princely states for the scale, diversity, and longevity of its sporting patronage.

Historically Physical

Long before the arrival of British sports, physical culture was embedded in South Asian kingship. In Patiala, these traditions were inflected by Sikh martial culture: *kushti* (wrestling), *ghursawari* (horse riding), *shikar* (hunting), *tirandazi* (archery), and weight training were central to courtly life and military preparation. *Akharas* (gymnasiums) received sustained royal patronage, with renowned wrestlers competing across northern India and victors rewarded with cash, land grants, or ceremonial honours. Bodily discipline and excellence were bolstered by royal support, tied closely to social and economic honour.

By the late nineteenth-century, British cantonments and missionary schools introduced cricket, athletics, and other sports across India. Unlike other regions, where these games remained confined to colonial clubs, Patiala actively incorporated sports into cultural life. Grounds were laid within palace estates and local players encouraged to train alongside elite participants. Patiala's rulers recognised that by excelling at imperial games themselves, they could claim parity with colonial elites.

Photograph of a wrestling bout held in the court of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala state, c. 1903. The Maharaja used to sponsor an annual wrestling competition during the month of Muharram. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Elite Networks with Cricket

Patiala's rulers understood cricket as a social technology, a means to cultivate relationships with British officials, Indian elites, and international players. Maharaja Rajinder Singh thus invested in facilities and talent to raise the quality of play and infrastructure. Matches in Patiala were renowned for their ceremonial grandeur; grounds, such as the Baradari cricket ground, acquired near-mythic status for their meticulous pitches. Visiting teams would go out of their way to include Patiala in their itineraries.

This royal context produced cricketers like Ranjitsinhji Vibhaji Jadeja (Ranji),

who remembered Patiala fondly even as he achieved global fame. In his memoirs, for instance, he recalls the hospitality of the Patiala court with gratitude. In turn, such sportsmen contributed to Patiala's political standing. In 1934, when Maharaja Bhupinder Singh played a crucial financial role in establishing India's premier domestic cricket tournament, he named it the Ranji Trophy — and thus redirected Indian cricket away from overt imperial symbolism toward indigenous commemoration.

Bhupinder Singh also supported the construction of Bombay's Brabourne stadium, by funding the project and acting as a key driving force alongside Anthony S. de Mello. As President of the Cricket Club of India (CCI), he helped overcome land acquisition challenges and donated 50,000 rupees towards construction costs.

Royal patronage could weigh heavily on players too. Cricketers such as Lala Amarnath indicate that there were pressures to playing under the princely gaze, since sporting failure could carry social consequences. Sport thus also reproduced hierarchies within society: players were celebrated, but always within the orbit of royal authority.

The development of Chail as Patiala's summer capital led to the construction of cricket grounds at high altitude. Summer sports gatherings combined leisure with diplomacy. Patiala also sponsored unofficial foreign tours, notably by an Australian team in the 1930s, to demonstrate how princely states could also operate transnationally via sport. Contemporary newspaper reports framed these encounters as evidence that cricket had become a shared imperial language, connecting distant territories through play.

The cricket ground in Chail finished under Maharaja Bhupinder Singh in 1893. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Polo and Hockey as National Pride

While cricket was a symbol of modernity, polo embodied aristocratic lineage. Polo was introduced to Patiala around 1889, when visiting nobles from Dholpur brought ponies and encouraged local aristocrats such as Raja Gurdit Singh to engage in playing.

Early matches took place on makeshift grounds in Patiala, and by 1894, local players were involved in

formal fixtures, including a noteworthy match in Lahore. Patiala's state team, colloquially referred to as the Patiala Tigers, gained formidable national and international repute.

Rajinder Singh, who established the foundations of mounted sports, assembled a cadre of skilled polo players from Patiala's military and aristocratic elite. He financed polo, cricket, and hockey, served as the president of the Indian Olympic Association, and utilised state resources to attract talent and foster competition. With this infrastructural support, Patiala's polo teams secured prestigious titles such as the 1910 Shimla season and the Duke of Connaught's Cup, while also participating in major tournaments in Delhi during the 1920s. The expansive polo grounds established under the maharajas have since transformed into the development of complexes such as the Polo Ground area, the Raja Bhalindra Sports Complex, and the Yadavindra Sports Stadium in Patiala.

Among notable figures in Patiala's polo history is Chanda Singh, who captained the Patiala team and represented India in Europe. He was invited to play for King Alfonso XIII of Spain, but declined to remain abroad without royal permission, an example that highlights the interconnection between personal loyalty and princely service in Patiala.

The emergence of hockey in Patiala, which followed shortly after polo, took a different trajectory. Gaining traction in the early twentieth-century, hockey was initially rooted in military regiments but gradually permeated civilian institutions. Patiala-based teams and regimental clubs achieved significant success in inter-provincial tournaments during the 1920s, contributing to India's broader emergence as a formidable hockey power. In contrast to cricket

The Indian team at the Amsterdam Olympics in 1928 where Major Dhyan Chand made his debut. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

and polo, hockey emphasised collective discipline over individual patronage. It also aligned with the rising nationalist sentiment of India, with wins by Indian hockey teams perceived globally as proof of the country's excellence.

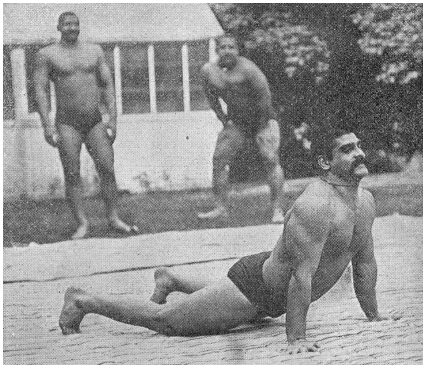
The Sustenance of Wrestling

Wrestling remained tied to indigenous traditions of bodily discipline and strength in Patiala. Royal support for *akharas* and prominent *pehlwans* (wrestlers) linked the court to soldiers, peasants, and artisans through shared practices of training and competition.

Bhupinder Singh patronised great wrestlers, such as Ghulam Mohammad Baksh, known to the world as the Great Gama. Gama lived and trained at the Patiala court, supported by a famously abundant diet and generous stipend. After Gama's 1910 campaign in London, where he defeated numerous wrestlers, Hindi and Urdu newspapers cast his victories over European champions as a rebuttal of colonial ideas about Indian physical inferiority.

> **A particularly celebrated moment came in 1928, when Gama faced Polish wrestler Stanislaus Zbyszko in Patiala and reportedly won within seconds.**

The spectators' responses and the royal honours had quasi-national overtones (with audience chants including "India has won!"). Gama's



The Great Gama clicked while training at his *akhara* in Patiala, 1928. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

decline into poverty after princely support faded, however, also reveals the vulnerability of sportspeople to changing political and economic contexts.

Afterlives of Princely Sports

Even though Patiala's sporting culture was significantly supported by the royals, its enduring legacy transcended the dissolution of princely governance.

Institutions established by royal patronage continued to thrive in independent India. Founded in 1958 at Motibagh Palace under the auspices of Maharaja Yadavindra Singh, the National Institute of Sports (NIS) solidified Patiala's position as a national sports training centre. On 7th May 1961, the Government of India formally established it as a space to institutionalise coaching, sports science, and athlete training in postcolonial India. Today renamed Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports (NSNIS), it is recognised as

Asia's largest sports training institute, often referred to as the 'Mecca of Indian Sports'. Patiala was selected as the designated location under the guidance of government committees that studied sports in India and abroad. This was intentional, as the city already possessed extensive sports infrastructure, a culture of physical training, and administrative continuity shaped by its princely heritage.

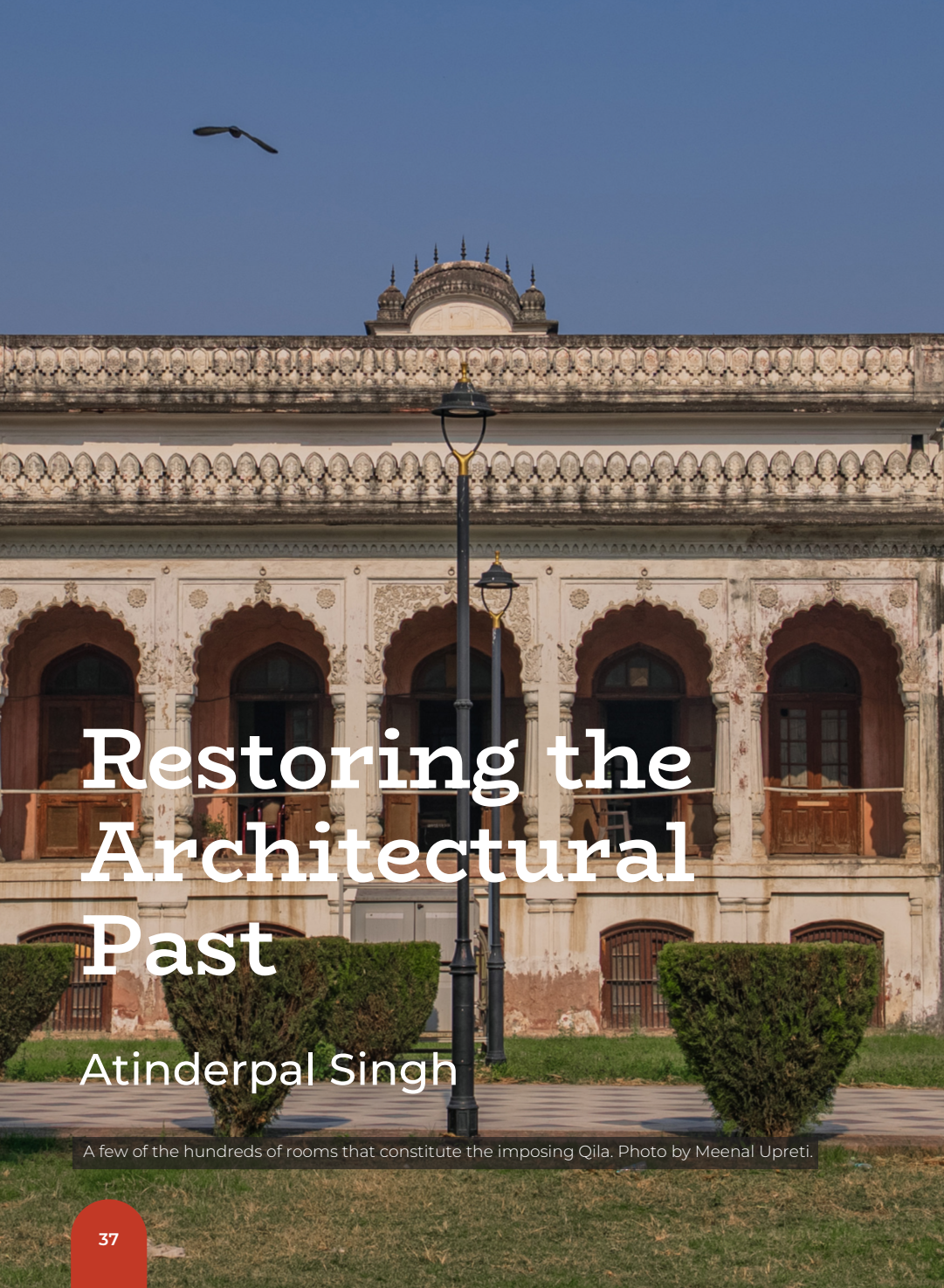
This collective sporting culture continues to find expression in contemporary Patiala. Recently, the Maharaja Bhupinder Singh Punjab Sports University in Patiala has explicitly invoked princely sporting heritage to promote sports education and research. Today, the princely legacy of sporting infrastructure has been folded into Punjab's campaigns against the rise of drug usage. State programmes encourage the youth to join clubs and tournaments to dissuade against substance-usage.

The afterlife of princely sport in Patiala thus leaves behind a complex field, where aspirations for disciplined, "drug-free youth" coexist with new forms of pharmaceutical risk and where the body remains a central site for negotiating power, modernity, and vulnerability.

Moti Bagh Palace, which now houses the Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports (NSNIS). Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Restoring the Architectural Past

Atinderpal Singh



A few of the hundreds of rooms that constitute the imposing Qila. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Patiala has a long history of maharajas who offered immense patronage to various cultural and developmental works. Under them, art and Punjabi culture flourished in Patiala, particularly emphasised in the architectural endeavours undertaken within the city. However, due to various environmental and physical factors, these monuments have experienced periods of upkeep interspersed with complete abandonment. In Patiala, the process of conservation has faced repeated difficulties and challenges, but the attempt to preserve the city's historic architectural marvels is still ongoing.

Monumental Contributions

The Patiala state focused on consolidating its authority through the construction of forts and palaces that secured and defined its expanding domain. Notably, most monuments in Patiala were built during the reign of Maharaja Narinder Singh (r. 1845-62) and his son Maharaja Mohindra Singh (r. 1862-76). Both were generous patrons of the arts, the education system, and public welfare.

Narinder Singh in particular had a highly aesthetic eye for all forms of art. He built the Old Motibagh Palace, one of the most magnificent buildings in Patiala. Designed along the lines of Shalimar Bagh in Lahore, with terraces, fountains, and canals, the Motibagh is an architectural achievement. Narinder Singh is also said to have built the Sheesh Mahal, bringing in expert artists, masons, craftsmen, architects, and locals to construct the building in Rajasthani style. The murals and miniatures in Sheesh Mahal feature Sikh themes, as well as depictions of Rajput *ragamalas* (miniatures) and *pahari nayak-nayikas* (a style of miniatures from Punjab).

Qila Mubarak, on the other hand, was first constructed as a mud fortification under Baba Ala Singh for defensive rather than ornamental needs. Successive rulers transformed this into a royal residence with brick masonry, distinct sections to attend to state matters, and hybrid architectural vocabulary spanning Mughal, Sikh, Rajasthani, and Colonial influences. In the 1770s-80s, Maharaja Karam Singh undertook the

Mural of Karam Singh of Patiala state from the Sheesh Mahal of Qila Mubarak, c. 1845–62. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

replacement of the mud sections with brick and the expansion of gateways to include inner palaces like Qila Androon, Ranvaas, and Durbar Hall. Under Maharaja Karam Singh, between 1813 and 1845, the Qila Androon came to be decorated with *jharokas* (overhanging enclosed balconies or windows), fresco-painted chambers, and lime-plaster stucco. Painters and craftsmen were invited from Rajasthan, Kashmir, and the Pahari regions to lend their expertise. The construction of the Durbar Hall and Ranvaas were completed by Maharaja Narinder Singh between 1845 and 1862 and these spaces featured *khatamband* (intricate traditional Kashmiri woodwork) ceilings, Sheesh Mahal-style glass interiors, Bohemian glass chandeliers, and Gothic arches and fireplaces. With increased stability in Patiala, the Qila that had been founded for defensive reasons became the ceremonial seat of the Phulkian royals in the nineteenth-century.

At present, the above monuments are in various states of disarray and deterioration, partly as a consequence of time and partly due to the elements: moisture penetration, thermal expansion, pollution, and microscopic biological growth.

Challenges to Conservation

Many of Patiala's architectural sites have been brought under the control of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Restoration and conservation have been underway at Qila Mubarak and Sheesh Mahal for nearly the past decade. Added to the World

A picture of the interiors of the Durbar Hall featuring glass chandeliers and *khatamband* work on the ceiling, published in *Indian States, A Biographical, Historical, and Administrative Survey* (1922). Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Restored paintings inside the Sheesh Mahal in Ran Baas The Palace, Qila Mubarak. Photo by Aalekh Dhaliwal.

Monuments Fund's list of '100 most endangered monuments' in 2004, the Qila Mubarak's restoration was undertaken between the years 2012 and 2026 by ASI and INTACH with monetary assistance from various government programmes. Portions of the Qila — except the Qila Androon housing 13 royal chambers and some Sikh art masterpieces — are now repaired and accessible to the public from 2025. These include the Ranvaas

(a royal guesthouse), Sarad Khana (once a guesthouse for Europeans), Jalau Khana (exhibition hall), and the Durbar Hall (court hall). The Durbar Hall is functioning as a museum and armaments gallery once again, after a span of over 10 years. These preservation efforts have also been carried out in accordance with the Venice Charter Act for the conservation of buildings and its amendments.

Besides this success, ASI's methods for architectural conservation and preservation have faced complications in Patiala. The most prominently employed method is chemical conservation, which utilises technology and chemicals for preservation – take, for instance, employing vaccines to make the walls damp-proof. The resources that this requires, ranging from expenditure to infrastructure to laboratories, has made this method difficult to use in the ongoing conservation work at Qila Mubarak and Sheesh Mahal.

The Qila Androon before being restored, 2012. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

The complexity of design of the Sheesh Mahal ensures a complex conservation process. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

A second approach focuses on structural preservation. In this case, committees, comprising professionals, including art historians and critics, architects, restoration organisations, and contractors, are constituted to develop plans for the protection of monuments against environmental and structural risks, including earthquakes, cyclones, rains, floods, and various pollution factors. Patiala's committee prepared a hypothesis for the repair and maintenance of its historic *bhawans* (buildings). But the organisations to which the restoration work was assigned were unable to submit written records of the activities to undertake and also failed to make public documents that the committee required to ensure transparency and pursue research. As such, this method too has staggered in efficacy in Patiala.

The final method of conservation, which involves raising contemporary awareness around cultural heritage sites, has been slowly undertaken in Patiala. Ran Baas The Palace is an example of the success that this strategy has seen so far.

Rediscovering Royalty at Ranvaas

The transformation of Ranvaas in Qila Mubarak is a critical example of the success of conservation in Patiala. Originally a residential enclave for the royals of Patiala, Ranvaas was tendered by the Punjab Bureau of Investment Promotion and the Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels took possession in 2021. After restoration the property opened its doors as a heritage hotel Ran Baas The Palace in 2025.

Led by Priya Paul, Chairperson of the Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels, and conservation architect Abha Narain Lamba, both have a commitment to reviving historic properties with sensitivity and vision, the project sought to conserve elements of the original while adapting it to contemporary cultural demands. On the one hand, the material authenticity of the historic structure, its lime-plastered walls, traditional courtyard layout, intricate frescoes, timber detailing, and the rhythm of its multi-chambered residential units were preserved. On the other hand, these spaces were gently reinterpreted and modified to support modern hospitality functions and cultural programming that highlights Patiala's rich historical identity. Central to this was the modification of courtyards and private chambers, once intimate spaces of royal domesticity, into public zones of interaction, exhibition, and leisure. The resulting architectural language is neither purely restorative nor wholly modern; instead, it forms a negotiated hybrid, wherein hitherto inaccessible spaces are now made open to a wider audience.

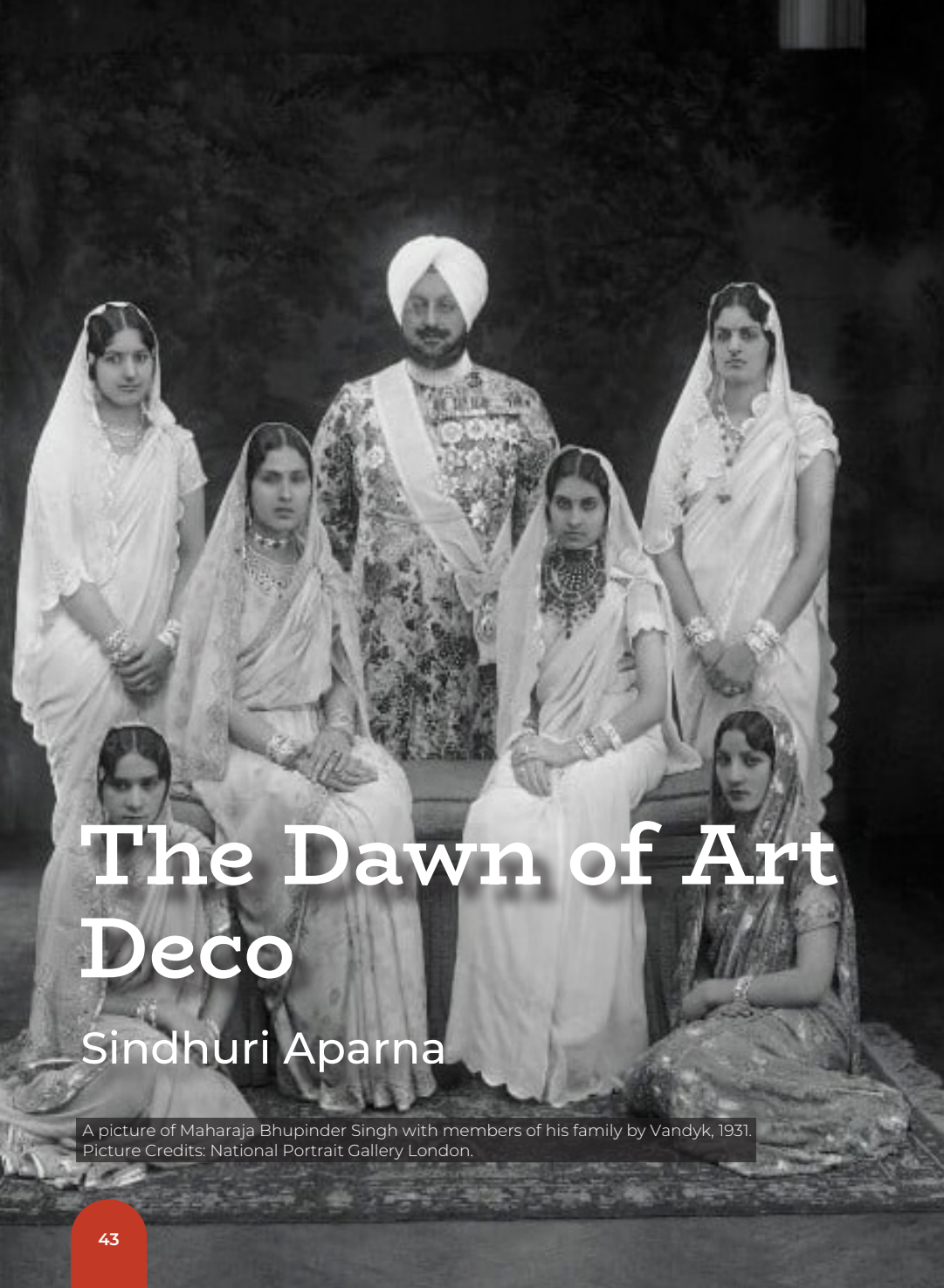
In February 2025, I had the privilege of visiting the historic Ranvaas in the company of Dr Saleem Beg, former convener of INTACH in Jammu & Kashmir and Dr Suresh from Jammu. During our visit, we carefully observed and analysed the significance of preserving such spaces while adapting their functionality.

The restoration of Ranvaas becomes an important case study in balancing

preservation with modernity, exemplifying how historic structures can be revitalised without erasing their embedded cultural meanings. This example has had magnificent success and could become a model for ongoing and future projects of conservation for the rich architectural legacy of Patiala.

Sheesh Mahal under restoration in Ranvaas. Photo by Aalekh Dhaliwal.

Entrance of Ranvaas which is now the hotel, Ran Baas The Palace. Photo by Meenal Upreti.



The Dawn of Art Deco

Sindhuri Aparna

A picture of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh with members of his family by Vandyk, 1931. Picture Credits: National Portrait Gallery London.

Patiala embraced the style of Art Deco in the early twentieth-century, as it travelled across the globe to India and into the princely state. Originally arising in Europe and the United States of America, Art Deco was a response to a new mechanised, electrified age. Leaning into abstraction, geometry, and order, the style prioritised symmetry, repetition, stepped profiles, and streamlined surfaces. New materials such as aluminium, chromium, reinforced concrete, and plate glass were embraced and lent architecture a modern sheen. In India, Art Deco arrived in the decades leading up to independence. Indian architects and craftsfolk encountered it as a language open to negotiation, leading to the creation of hybrid forms grouped under the term 'Indo-Deco:' a combination of geometric abstraction with indigenous motifs, climatic adaptations, and established craft practices.

While Bombay was the first metropolitan centre to welcome Art Deco, the style found a home beyond the city due to princely patronage. The princely states of India were invested in cultural self-fashioning — one arena in which the rulers could continue to express their authority while under the control of the Raj — and quickly took to the rise of Art Deco. Jewellery, interiors, and institutional buildings commissioned by royal courts acted as conduits through which Deco entered smaller cities and regional capitals, acquiring local inflections in the process.

Wearing Deco

In Patiala, the encounter with Art Deco did not begin with architecture. It began with the body. Art Deco arrived through jewellery — objects that were portable, intimate, and performative.

Under Maharaja Bhupinder Singh (r. 1900 –1938), Patiala cultivated a cosmopolitan court embedded in international circuits of luxury and design.

Parisian maisons such as Cartier and Boucheron were invited not merely to supply imitative ornaments, but to reimagine Indian gemstones within a modern visual idiom. In 1925, Bhupinder Singh placed what would become the largest single commission ever executed by Cartier. Vast quantities of rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds from the Patiala treasury were sent to Paris to be dismantled and reset in a style that emphasised the geometry, symmetry, and restraint of Art Deco.

European jewellery design before this period had largely privileged diamonds and platinum, but Indian commissions disrupted this aesthetic and introduced bold contrasts and volumetric richness to Art Deco. The Patiala Ruby Choker, commissioned from Cartier in 1931, exemplifies this synthesis. Composed of 292 ruby beads arranged in graduated rows and punctuated by pearls and diamonds, the choker's structure is governed by repetition and symmetry, while platinum settings provide a restrained framework that allows colour to dominate without excess. The piece occupies a liminal space, neither wholly Indian nor European. The style continues to hold

relevance today: Cartier's Art Deco diamond choker, once part of the Patiala necklace, was worn at the Met Gala as late as 2022.

Cartier's commissions also did not exist in isolation. During Bhupinder Singh's visit to Paris in 1928, he entrusted six iron chests of precious stones to Louis Boucheron. Contemporary accounts record how the Maharaja's collection included over 7000 diamonds and 1400 emeralds. These were transformed into 149 pieces of jewellery, ranging from traditional forms such as *sarpech* (turban ornament) and *bazuband* (arm-bracelet) to necklaces and earrings, all in an Art Deco idiom.

Deco Builds

The transition from jewellery to architecture was gradual: while the former was private and intimate, the latter demanded permanent public presence.

The most confident architectural articulation of Art Deco in Patiala appears with Phul Cinema, inaugurated in 1947. W. M. Namjoshi, the architect of Phul Cinema, was deeply embedded in Bombay's Art Deco milieu.

When he was commissioned in Patiala, he brought with him a vocabulary shaped by Bombay's urban modernism. Phul Cinema's façade, articulated through vertical fins and rhythmic fenestration, emphasises height and movement.

The Patiala Necklace, 1928. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Raj Mandir Cinema in Jaipur also designed by W. M. Namjoshi. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Vertical fluting runs across the façade, drawing the eye upward and softening the solidity of the wall. Stepped roof profiles reinforce this vertical emphasis, producing a silhouette aligned with Deco's fascination with ascent and dynamism.

Inside, the language of Deco is softer and immersive. Sunburst reliefs in the flooring operate as abstracted radiations, anchoring movement while evoking light. Balcony details introduced stylised Indian lotus motifs that were flattened and symmetrical, absorbing indigenous symbols into a modern formal framework. Boundary walls echo this language through stepped, recessed profiles articulated by fluting and shadow. Together, these elements reveal how European Deco principles are adapted to local scale and sensibility.

In the years post-Independence, this vocabulary was recalibrated for institutions of public welfare. An example is the Government Medical College and Hospital, established in 1951: organised around a central tower, the building employs vertical emphasis, recessed planes, and stepped massing to convey authority.

Main corridor of the Government Medical College, Patiala. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Entrance to Phul Cinema Theatre. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Circular windows introduce geometry, while simplified domes and softened edges are reminiscent of older Indian conventions.
The Central State Library, completed in 1955, marks the most resolved expression of Deco in Patiala's civic architecture: its central clock tower is defined by vertical reeding and successive setbacks.

Altogether, Art Deco in Patiala became a means of inhabiting modernity on Patiala's own terms. The movement from jewellery to architecture was also a movement from elite display to everyday experience. When cinemas, hospitals, and libraries became sites Art Deco entered, it also inflected the lives of the urban masses — shaping how modernity was seen, inhabited, and shared.

The façade of Phul Cinema.
Picture Credits: Meenal Upreti.


PHUL

Patiala Outside Patiala: Architectural Diplomacy

Sindhuri Aparna

Zeenat Mahal in Lal Kuan (Old Delhi) captured by Felice Beato, 1858. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

The political geography of the British Indian Empire was never as stable as imperial cartography implied. Though several provinces were under direct British rule, there also existed a constellation of princely states, whose rulers governed internally although under the paramountcy of the Crown. Within this system, territory became the grammar through which sovereignty was quietly expressed. Through the Circular of 1891, Britain sought to discourage Indian rulers from acquiring property within British-administered territory: if princes established architectural footholds in British territory, the distinction between direct and indirect rule, so carefully maintained in imperial theory, risked becoming spatially blurred.

Yet Patiala crossed this precise line. This became possible because the Phulkian states of Punjab — Patiala, Nabha, and Jind — enjoyed guarantees of "all powers and rights internal and *external*," a breadth of power not extended to other princely houses. Thus, Patiala was extended preferential treatment in comparison to other princely states resulting from its unique negotiatory status. For instance, the Nizam of Hyderabad, for all his wealth and influence, was refused his bid to acquire property outside of Hyderabad while Patiala strategically maintained diplomatic agents and posts within British India and other states. Its treaty position afforded it a degree of autonomy that it would utilise via spatial manoeuvres, for its own political benefit, in the late nineteenth-century.

Moving Towards the Mountains

Long before the formal consolidation of Shimla as the summer capital of the British Raj, Patiala had a presence in the Himalayan landscape. In 1830, Maharaja Karam Singh entered a land exchange with the British to receive Jakko Hill and the village of Barauli. This exchange reads, in retrospect, like a prelude to the larger spatial drama that would unfold half a century later at Chail.

Patiala's architectural presence in the larger subcontinent took initial shape when the princely state guaranteed its support to the British Raj during the Revolt of 1857. The reward for this allegiance was territorial expansion in Punjab, but also architectural possession in Delhi: Zeenat Mahal, or Begum Kothi, the Mughal court's palace in Lal Kuan was granted to Patiala.

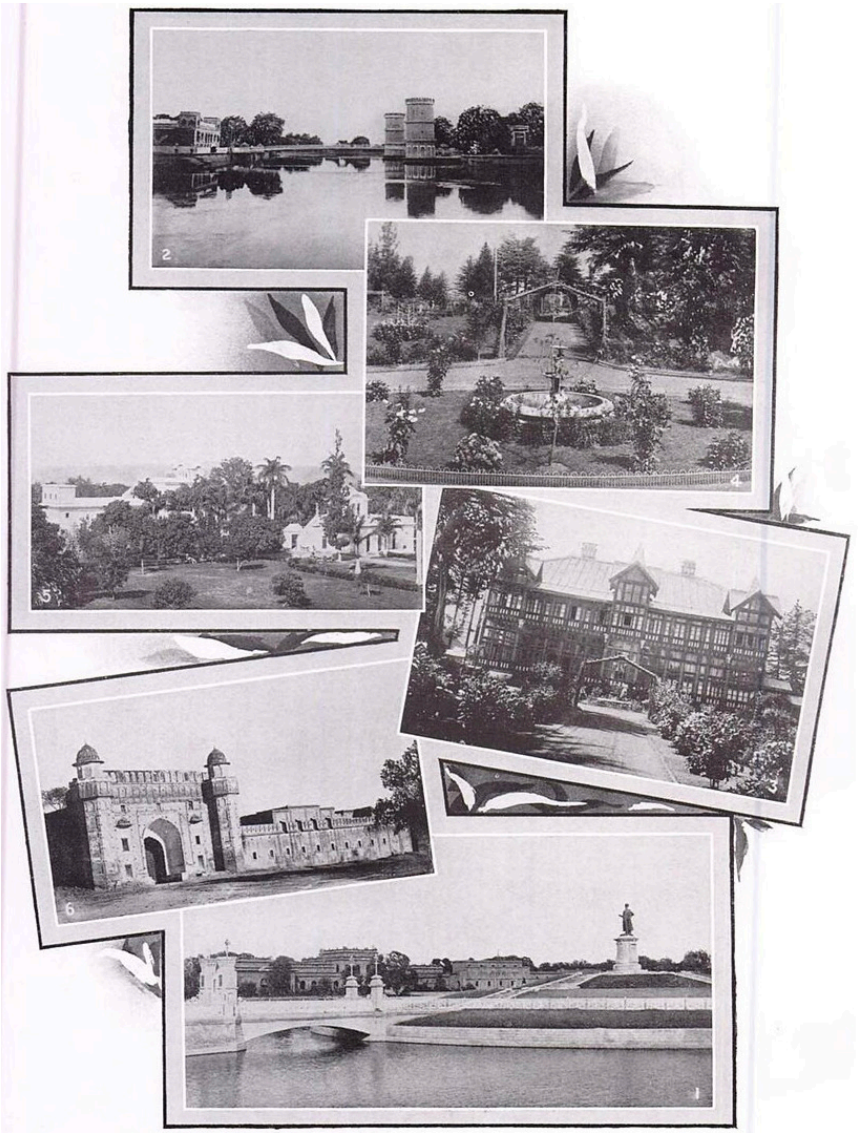
> **Though this first emergence of Patiala beyond its borders was indicative of its political alignment with the British, similar endeavours in the future would place it in the contest of the Raj.**

By the late nineteenth-century, Shimla had become the summer capital of the Raj, at the same time that restrictions on princely acquisition of property within British districts were being articulated with the Circular of 1891. When Maharaja Rajinder Singh, then-ruler of Patiala, was denied permission to construct a residence in Shimla, his response was neither protest nor retreat. It was displacement.

Maharaja Rajinder Singh of Patiala with Viceroy Lord Ripon, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Mohindra College in Patiala, 1884. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Chail, situated roughly twenty-four miles from Shimla yet outside its administrative jurisdiction, offered what Shimla denied: proximity without requiring permission. Until the early 1890s, Chail consisted of forested hills and a small temple. Between 1891 and 1892, the Maharaja transformed this landscape: an electrically lit villa arose, surrounded by cottages, a billiard room, guest accommodation for European visitors, waterworks, a post office, a sub-treasury, and even telephone connections linking the palace to its ancillary buildings. A *bazaar* (market) of fifteen or sixteen shops, tennis and badminton courts, were added to reproduce the sociability of Shimla. Chail thus became not merely a retreat, but a fully serviced seasonal capital of Patiala that echoed Shimla's environment.

Patiala's success at establishing an alternative hill station beyond British sovereignty was a neat maneuver around the border limits laid by the Raj. This success unsettled the colonial administration more than open defiance. The Viceroy deputed Maxworth Young to speak with the Maharaja: Young questioned the Maharaja's prolonged residence in



THE STATE OF PATIALA.

Statue of King Edward VII, Rajinder Hospital, and the Lake, Patiala. 2. Suspension Bridge, Banaser Tank, Patiala. 3. Rajgarh Villa Palace, Chail. 4. Gardens, Rajgarh Villa Palace, Chail. 5. Shalamar Gardens, Pinjaur, Patiala. 6. Old Nizamat-Gah, Rajpura.

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Photographs of architecture and infrastructure related to Patiala state, published in *Indian States, A Biographical, Historical, and Administrative Survey* (1922). Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Chail and the company he kept there. The Maharaja's response subtly indicated his equation of himself with the British: such society, he remarked, was the only kind available to him in Patiala "if, for instance, he wanted to have a fancy dress ball or such like amusement." Young advised him to spend less time in Chail, Shimla, and Calcutta, and more in Patiala attending to governance. This exchange reveals the anxiety that Chail had become a parallel courtly sphere nearby, but outside, British control.

Under Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, this method of utilising geography continued and evolved into a quieter strategy, moving towards subtle acquisition. Properties were purchased in Shimla from British owners, a residence acquired in Bombay from a Parsi family, and garden houses obtained in the bungalow district of Dalanwala in Dehradun. These were not architecturally conspicuous gestures, instead blending into existing residential patterns and attracting little scrutiny. Yet they ensured Patiala's continued presence within the key urban and hill geographies of the Raj.

This negotiation of space and architecture between British authority and Patiala re-emerged distinctly with the announcement of the new imperial capital of New Delhi in 1911. When provision was made for princely residences in the capital, Patiala was allotted a small plot at J-Circus. But Maharaja Bhupinder Singh waited. When he became Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes in 1926, he took the opportunity to purchase a more prominent site: eight acres were granted on a preferential basis to Patiala at the rate of 1800 rupees per acre with a total of 14400 rupees paid. The British government continued to maintain restrictions on princely authority through alternate angles, imposing restrictions on the architectural design of the palaces in Princes' Park. To maintain uniformity, it decided that the government would "furnish the design for the entrance and the compound walls but the design of the main buildings will be prepared by the State architects in consultation with the Chief Engineer, Raisina, Delhi. Before preparing a design the State architect will have to ascertain from the Chief Engineer, Raisina, the focal point and other important conditions which govern the construction of buildings." In 1933, a boundary wall was erected around the site, designed by Edwin Lutyens. Thus, it was clear that the palaces around Princes' Park still had to conform to imperial vision.

Given the worth of Patiala state, it still sought to erect a grand palace in New Delhi since Zeenat Mahal was in ruins.

In 1932, Bhupinder Singh purchased a residence at 5, Prithviraj Road from Rai Bahadur Lala Sultan Singh, treasurer of the Imperial Bank at Delhi, and named it Patiala House — but that was later sold to the Bhavnagar *Durbar*.

The new 'Patiala House' at Princes' Park was designed with careful restraint as a simple brick and mortar palace in pristine white. It was completed in 1940 under Maharaja Yadavindra Singh, who employed Sardar Bahadur Ranjit Singh as the contractor for the palace, Sardar Jagdish Nath as in-charge of the building, and A. C. Malhotra as chief engineer of. Patiala House had a butterfly plan, *chhatris* (dome-shaped pavilions), *chhajjas* (sloping sunshades), and balconies that invoked regional vocabulary, but it was bereft of the dome that dominated all other palaces in Princes' Park. This way, the building aligned itself with the visual discipline of Lutyens' Delhi while still asserting princely identity.

Afterlives: From Princely Presence to Public Institutions

If the creation of these residences reveals the subtlety with which Patiala negotiated colonial constraints, their later histories witness how these sites slipped easily into the working of independent India.

Chail Palace now operates as a heritage hotel, its hilltop quietude marketed as a popular retreat.

> **In Dehradun's Dalanwala, the Patiala residence, later known as Tel Bhawan, became the headquarters of the Oil and Natural Gas Commission in 1956.**

The summer garden house of a princely court was thus turned into a nerve centre of India's developmental bureaucracy.

Patiala House in New Delhi experienced the most dramatic transformation. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the palace was placed at the

The Palace, Chail. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

government's disposal free of rent under emergency provisions. During the war, the Maharaja himself was allowed only a small corner under the staircase on the ground floor and the entire first floor for residence, while the rest of the building functioned as War Office space. By October 1946, when it was returned to the Patiala Durbar, its condition had altered irreversibly and the question of compensation remained unresolved for years. The palace had, in effect, ceased to operate as a princely residence even before the formal end of empire.

In 1949, when New Delhi struggled with a shortage of accommodation for government departments, Patiala House began to shelter officials.

Among those who lived and worked within its rooms was literary figure Amrita Pritam, then employed as a radio speaker at All India Radio.

The role of Patiala House expanded during and immediately after Partition, when it sheltered refugees displaced by violence. In the same year, the Southeast Asia Regional Office of the World Health Organisation began functioning from its premises, with the first World Health Day observed there in 1950.

In February 1949, representatives of nine Asian nations assembled within its

Patiala House in the present day. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

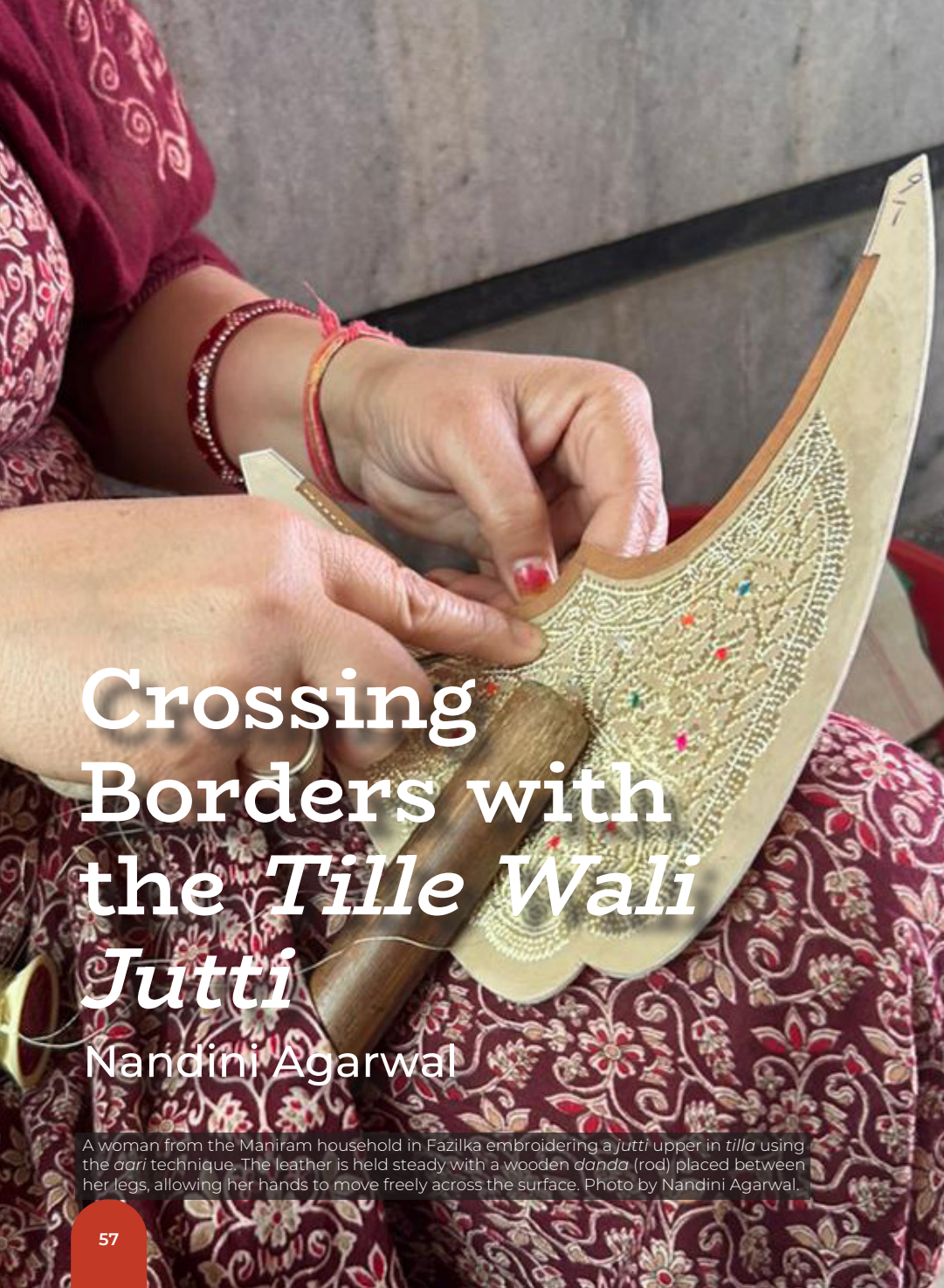
halls to establish the Asian Games Federation under the chairmanship of Maharaja Yadavindra Singh. For a brief moment, the palace became a site of postcolonial internationalism.

By 1978, Patiala House had acquired another identity: the Patiala House Courts. The large rooms, verandahs, and gardens now accommodate courtrooms and lawyers' chambers. While the spatial arrangement remains largely intact, its occupants and purposes have shifted entirely.

These spaces and structures, conceived as an assertion of princely stature, quietly became absorbed, repurposed, and naturalised into the working fabric of the Indian state. Their functions changed, but their spatial authority did not. The afterlives of Chail, Dehradun, and Patiala House confirm the remarkable precision with which these sites had been chosen. They were never peripheral retreats. They were carefully chosen by Patiala because they stood within geographies that remained central to power — first colonial, then republican.

Crossing Borders with the *Tille Wali Jutti*

Nandini Agarwal



A woman from the Maniram household in Fazilka embroidering a *jutti* upper in *tilla* using the *aari* technique. The leather is held steady with a wooden *danda* (rod) placed between her legs, allowing her hands to move freely across the surface. Photo by Nandini Agarwal.

A *tille wali jutti* announces itself immediately: a traditional leather shoe embroidered with metallic gold thread, its embroidery catches the light even before the form of the shoe is fully registered. Across Punjab, this silhouette is familiar across generations of shoe-makers, with several *jutti*-making centres spread across the state, most notably in Patiala, Fazilka, Sri Muktsar Sahib, and Ludhiana. Among these, Fazilka and Patiala offer a strong contrast in their approach to *jutti*-making. Studying these two locations together makes it possible to trace how the same craft responds differently to geography, scale, and economic pressure. When one spends time with the practice beyond the finished appearance of the product, the differences between *juttis* emerge — in materials, labour, and the social structures that sustain the craft.

Fazilka's Craft

In Fazilka, located along the Indo-Pakistan border, *jutti*-making takes place within the home, usually under a single roof shared by members of a family that belongs to the Mochi community. The men cut the leather and construct the *jutti*, while the women embroider the surface. This division is woven into the fabric of social and everyday life. Half in jest and half in seriousness, men in the community state that they marry only women who know how to embroider. "*Varna hamare kis kaam ki?*" they ask, meaning: "*Otherwise, what use is she to us?*" A knowledge of embroidery is inextricable from domestic life and identity in Fazilka.

A display of hand-embroidered *tille wali juttis* at Maniram in Fazilka. Photo by Nandini Agarwal.

Women embroider the *jutti* entirely by hand. A sharp, needle-like *aari* tool is used to work *tilla* (metallic gold thread), along with cotton thread, onto leather.

The embroidery is densely packed, leaving little blank space on the surface. Patterns repeat rhythmically, guided by paper stencils that are drawn and cut by hand. These stencils are embroidered over and the paper remains trapped within the embroidered segments, with any excess portions carefully pulled away by hand after the process is complete. The stencil becomes an invisible yet integral part of the *jutti*, adding structure and weight to the surface.

Fazilka *juttis* use authentic and traditional materials. Soles are made from thick buffalo hide, cut by hand. The upper portion and *aeda* (back or heel portion) are crafted from cowhide. These materials are not only durable, but also adapt to the body over time, softening and shaping the *jutti* to the wearer's foot. Traditionally, if a foot size changes, a Mochi *jutti*-

A paper stencil placed alongside its embroidered translation on leather, showing how a delicate cut motif is transformed into *tilla* work by the women of the household. Photo by Nandini Agarwal.

-maker must soak the *jutti* in water, insert a larger shoe last, and allow the shoe to air-dry so that it can stretch and reshape itself. The materials thus build repair and adaptation into the life of the object.

The process of *jutti*-making in Fazilka is deliberate and slow. The buffalo hide sole is paired with a thinner layer of leather and adhered with leather adhesive applied by hand. The stitching, strong and functional, serves to hold the *jutti* together through years of wear. Hence these *juttis* are expensive, ranging between 2000-5000 rupees and going higher depending on the embroidery. Their cost reflects not just the labour and material, but also their significance. Fazilka *juttis* symbolise a special occasion and auspiciousness, generally worn for weddings, festivals, and important ceremonies.

The process of reshaping a worn *jutti* begins by soaking it in water, allowing the leather to soften and become pliable. Photo by Nandini Agarwal.

Hand tools used in the making of traditional *tille wali juttis* reflect a handcrafted process specific to Fazilka, in contrast to Patiala. Photo by Nandini Agarwal.

Patiala's Production

On travelling to Patiala, it became evident that many *jutti*-makers in Patiala trace their origins to Rajasthan. On asking about this migration, it emerged that their ancestors were brought to the region under royal patronage and gradually settled there over generations.

This movement continues to be reflected in the craft. The *jutti* shares affinities with the *mojari*, a style of footwear associated with Rajasthan, particularly in its use of leather and surface embellishment. Over time, however, the form has adapted within Punjab, taking on a distinct shape and identity shaped by local materials, techniques, and systems of making.

In Patiala, an urban centre with a strong market, *jutti*-making follows a more commercially driven mode of production. The production is organised through an assembly-line-like system, with each family involved in only one step of the process: one household cuts soles, another prepares piping, another handles partial assembly. Unlike Fazilka, where the craft is concentrated within a household with the duties split across the men and women, Patiala's system fragments the craft across homes.

Companies mediate the organisation of labour: families live and work

A more mechanised mode of production in Patiala. Stacks of identical *jutti* soles signal speed, repetition, and scale. Photo by Nandini Agarwal.

Machine-embroidered *jutti* uppers sourced from Lucknow and Bareilly. Photo by Nandini Agarwal.

within the same localities, but they are allotted specific tasks to complete by companies. While final assembly still happens within these neighbourhoods, it takes place only after materials circulate through the company — at which point the company commissions a few families to assemble the *jutti*. Workers are compensated per piece, according to the task they perform. Payment is low, reflecting the reduced value assigned to isolated stages rather than to the craft as a whole.

Embroidery in Patiala has also undergone a major shift. While women are involved, they no longer embroider from scratch. Instead, their work is limited to piping pre-embroidered uppers using rexine. These uppers are machine-embroidered using polyester thread and sourced from Bareilly and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. In rare cases, based on specific orders, hand-embroidered uppers are still used — but even these are usually sourced from Rajasthan. Embroidery, alongside every element of production, becomes a detachable and outsourced component, disconnecting the total craft of composing a *jutti*.

Materials in Patiala have also shifted to affordable substitutes. Rubber soles, cut by machines, are used alongside machine-cut rexine upper surfaces. Patiala applies "*doodh*," a locally used glue, with latex machines to adhere the two surfaces. These changes make production faster and cheaper, but significantly alter the weight, flexibility, and lifespan of the *jutti*.

Inside the craftsman's home, his wife pipes the *jutti* uppers on a sewing machine with remarkable speed and precision. Photo by Nandini Agarwal.

The pricing of Patiala *juttis* reflects this structure. Finished *juttis* usually range between 400-1500 rupees. They are designed to be affordable, lightweight, and suitable for frequent use, catering to fast-moving markets and budget-conscious buyers. Their design language is contemporary, shaped by speed, scale, and shifting consumer demand.

Placing *juttis* from Fazilka and Patiala side-by-side thus reveals more than stylistic differences. It exposes two fundamentally different relationships with tradition. In Fazilka, the *jutti* remains an object tied to ritual, durability, and continuity. In Patiala, it becomes a commodity shaped by speed, cost, and scale.

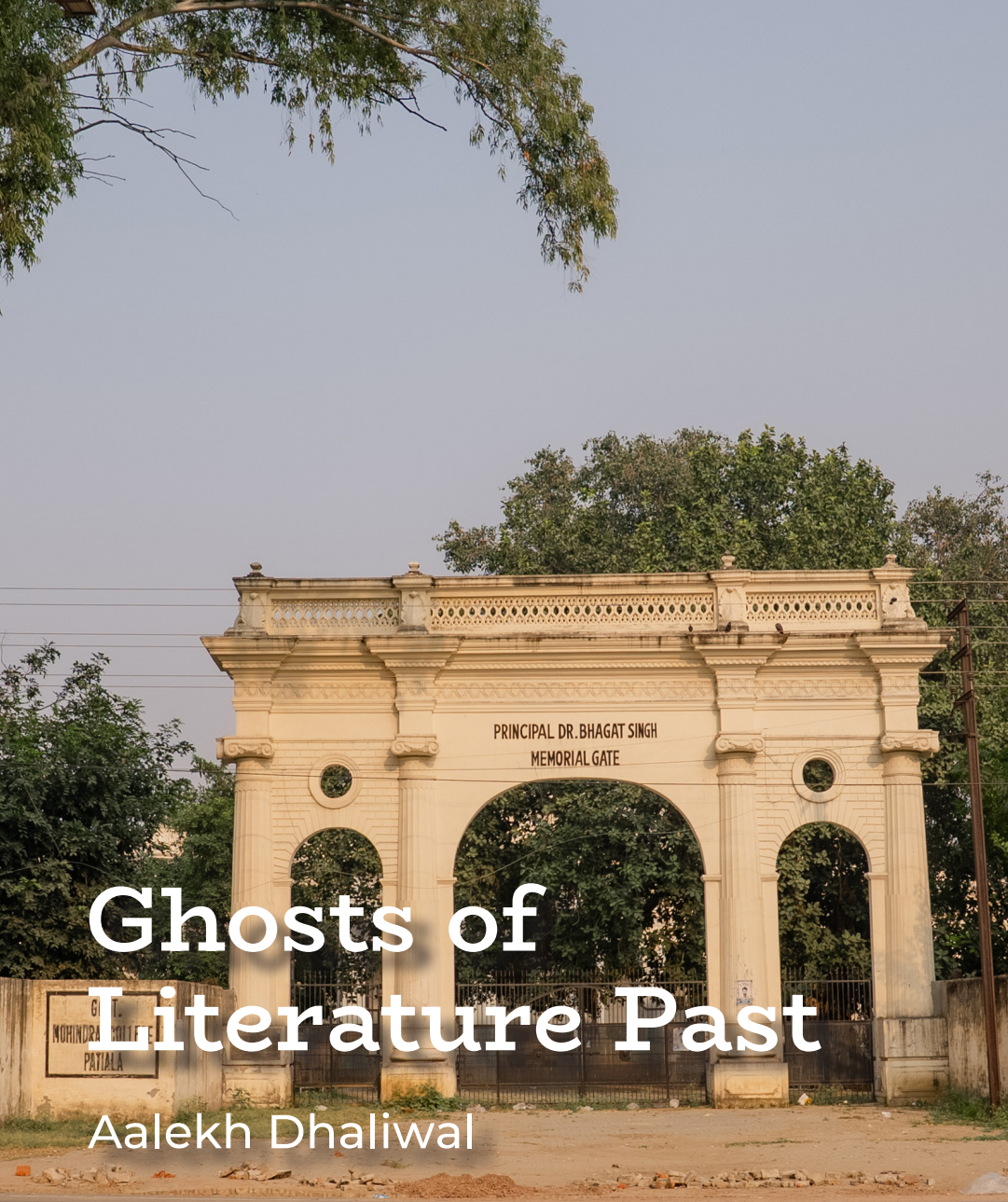
An extensive display of machine-made *juttis* in Patiala, stacked tightly across shelves, showcasing a wide range of colours, embellishments, and surface treatments. Photo by Nandini Agarwal.

Neither exists in isolation from the present. Both respond to economic realities, but they do so in contrasting ways.

This contrast raises a question that continues to linger. If the materials, tools, and processes are entirely transformed, is it still the same craft? Or does it only carry the essence of what it once was?

This essay draws on fieldwork carried out in Fazilka and Patiala, Punjab, as part of an academic documentation project.

Illustration by Jisha Unnikrishnan.



Ghosts of Literature Past

Aalekh Dhaliwal

Lower Mall Road entrance to Mohindra College. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Bhootwara — a den of ghosts — referred to a group of thinkers, writers, and poets across higher educational institutions, specifically Government Mohindra College and Punjabi University, in 1960s Patiala. They came together and rented a two-room house on Lower Mall, where they would congregate, engage in discussions, and entertain visitors from other schools of thought and cities. Some have suggested that the group and its location came to be called 'Bhootwara' since its inhabitants and participants stayed up in discussions all night.

Since this group encouraged conversations among peers as well as between professors and students, it left a deep impact on students of these universities.

> ***Bhootwara* and its participants went against the grain of formal university education, which sought to prepare students for steady future careers: it was neither a systematic space nor a gathering where ideologies were prescribed to its visitors.**

Instead, the thread that wove *Bhootwara* together was a sense of curiosity about the world.

Despite being fragmented, *Bhootwara* finds mention in the literary and philosophical milieu of 1950s-60s Punjab like the works of Surjit Patar, Navtej Bharti, and Dalip Kaur Tiwana. Before the region was mired in the socio-political complexities of the late 70s and 80s, surrounding state autonomy, its *lehar* (wave) of writers and thinkers travelled far and wide. Though *Bhootwara* was not the sole such discussion group at Mohindra College or Punjabi University, the sincerity with which it maintained independent thought was unmatched — and has not been recreated in the years since the group splintered and its 'ghosts' moved on.

The Bridging Baba

A key figure, serving as a bridge between the earliest 'ghosts' and the ones that came later, was Hardiljit Singh Sidhu, or 'Lali Baba' (1932-2014). Neither *Bhootwara* nor Lali Baba can be fully understood in isolation from each other. In an edited manuscript compiled posthumously, those who came in close contact with Lali Baba described him as the greatest

Lali Baba. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

conversationalist of his time. Professionally a professor of linguistics at Punjabi University, Lali Baba was neither a published writer nor a nominee for literary awards, but he left a legacy so indelible that the ethos of literary conversation at Punjabi University still carries his traces.

If not the rented house at Lower Mall, the university's coffee house or the Gol Market were where Lali Baba was often found, drawing hundreds of students and professors into his conversations.

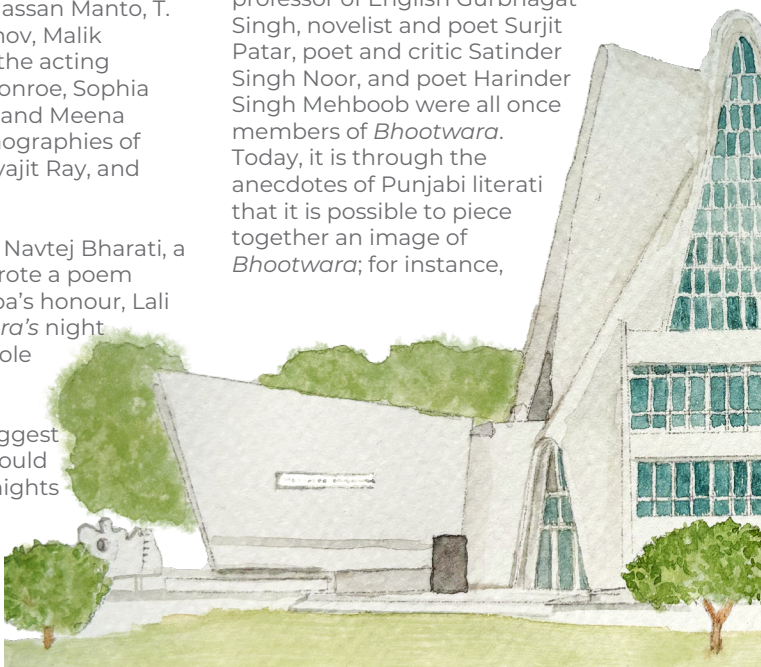
Since his forte was world literature, art, and film, Lali Baba became a window to texts and lives that his students would not otherwise have accessed. Lali introduced *Bhootwara* to dancer and composer Birju Maharaj, filmmaker Ingmar Bergman, writers like Saadat Hassan Manto, T. S. Eliot, Anton Chekhov, Malik Muhammad Jayasi, the acting careers of Marilyn Monroe, Sophia Loren, Suchitra Sen, and Meena Kumari, and the filmographies of Akira Kurosawa, Satyajit Ray, and Marcel Camus.

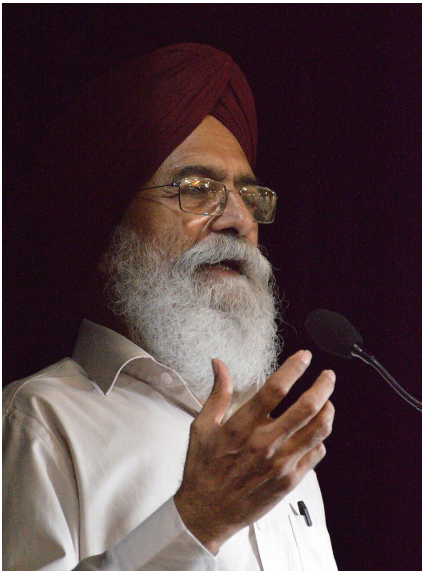
In the words of poet Navtej Bharati, a Punjabi poet who wrote a poem called Lali in Lali Baba's honour, Lali Baba filled *Bhootwara's* night sky with stars and stole their light to shine it upon these greats. Anecdotes of Lali suggest that the audience would rarely realise when nights turned into day, such was Lali's articulate delivery.

Another story goes that after listening to Lali's introduction to Bengali cinema, students would be inspired to cycle to Ambala Cantt to the only cinema that screened Bengali films.

So although the ghosts of *Bhootwara* lived like *faqirs* — wandering ascetics — they engaged in works from around the world.

Lali kept *Bhootwara* alive through his involvement and extended its forum to other eccentric thinkers, poets, and writers. Renowned Punjabi-language writers became part of *Bhootwara* when they did not have an identity of their own, slowly emerging as distinct voices in affiliation with *Bhootwara*. Writer Dalip Kaur Tiwana, academic and professor of English Gurbhagat Singh, novelist and poet Surjit Patar, poet and critic Satinder Singh Noor, and poet Harinder Singh Mehboob were all once members of *Bhootwara*. Today, it is through the anecdotes of Punjabi literati that it is possible to piece together an image of *Bhootwara*; for instance,



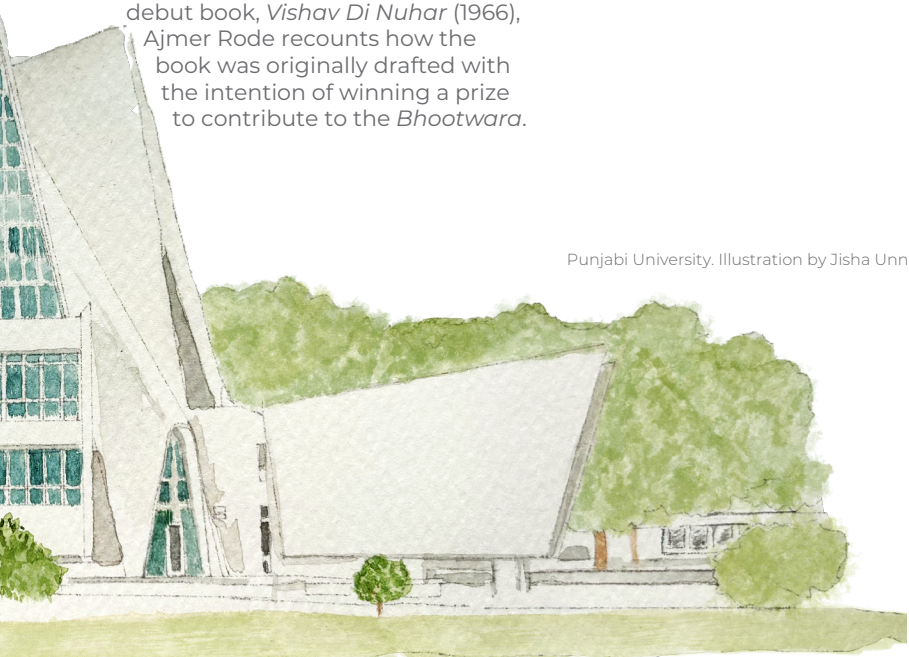


Dr Surjit Patar, at the opening ceremony of Wiki Conference India, 2016. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

members wrote books and papers to win prizes that could then financially support *Bhootwara* or pay for the celebrations. In the summary of his debut book, *Vishav Di Nuhar* (1966), Ajmer Rode recounts how the book was originally drafted with the intention of winning a prize to contribute to the *Bhootwara*.

A gathering near Gol Market, Punjabi University. Reminiscent of the gatherings of Bhootwara. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

Given the long and lasting legacy of *Bhootwara*, it is fair to say that any conversation around Patiala is incomplete without remembering it. Although this 'den of ghosts' no longer exists and its metaphorical ghosts are actual ghosts today, the nature of the discussions had over six decades ago are still exemplary and inspiring.



Punjabi University. Illustration by Jisha Unnikrishnan.

Patiala on the Palate

Vernika Awal

Local eateries offer both volume and taste. Picture of Sadhu Ram Kachori. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Situated within the Malwa region of Punjab, part of the cis-Sutlej tract, Patiala's culinary landscape reflects both the agrarian abundance of its surrounding hinterland and its courtly refinement. In Patiala, the agrarian base of Punjab translates into a culinary culture that moves fluidly between field, kitchen, and court.

My engagement with this culinary history has extended beyond documentation into interpretation. This has been possible through my work with Ikk Panjab, where archival fragments and oral histories are translated into dishes experienced in the present; also critical was the process of working on *Delectable Punjab*, an initiative that traces culinary memory across the region, in which the name of Patiala recurs frequently.

With a reputation for excess and theatricality, Patiala's recipes rarely existed as fixed instructions; they circulated instead through memory, often tied to households that had moved between princely service, Partition displacement, and resettlement across the city and its surrounding towns.

At Ikk Panjab, an incorporation of dishes associated with the Patiala court were approached as living expressions of a culinary temperament. Preparations such as *tandoori bater*, drawing from hunting traditions, and *kibti* chicken, slow-cooked and layered, entered the menu. These dishes reflect a culinary language shaped as much by royal kitchens as the wider Malwa region, where richness and scale are not exceptional but expected. There is an insistence on generosity — of fat, of spice, of portion — that mirrors the ethos of the court itself, where food functions as indulgence and assertion.

Generosity is embedded in Sikhi's values around *langar* (community kitchens) where cooking and eating are shared without prejudice. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Recipes were conveyed in gestures rather than measures, with instructions such as "add ghee until it feels right," pointing to a form of knowledge grounded in repetition and sense rather than standardisation. This approach resonates in the work of chefs like Chef Parvinder S. Bali, whose work on Patiala cuisine has been influenced by a family-held collection of recipes from the royal household.

Shared with him by Captain Amarinder Singh and written in Gurmukhi, the recipes are marked by now-obsolete systems of measurement — units such as *masha* and *ratti*, or references to ingredients priced in *annas* — and so the text resists direct translation into contemporary culinary language. Instructions were often elliptical, with measures conveyed through approximations such as "four *anghoothis*," requiring not only linguistic interpretation, but an understanding of technique and proportion.

Chef Bali's work reconstructs the culinary traditions of Patiala's royal kitchens via translating them — retaining the density and character of these dishes while allowing them to exist within a contemporary dining context. This involves translating ingredients, techniques, and a way of thinking about food — one that privileges time, sequencing, and a calibrated richness built through layering rather than excess alone. In working through reading the recipes, the challenge is not in the precise reproduction of these dishes, but understanding the logic that held them together.

What emerges from this process is less a fixed compendium of dishes and more a record of a culinary sensibility. The recipes reflect a cuisine anchored in Punjabi ingredients — seasonal produce, dairy, and game — while absorbing influences from Mughal, Afghan, and later European traditions. The range of preparations, from slow-cooked meats and *dum* (slow cooking in a sealed pot over a fire) techniques to puddings and continental dishes, points to a kitchen shaped by movement and locality. The manuscript itself, with recipes attributed to rulers, head cooks, bakers, and associates, suggests that the kitchen functioned as a space of exchange rather than hierarchy.

This logic of abundance extended beyond the kitchen into the social life of the court. The oft-repeated story of the Patiala peg, associated with Maharaja Bhupinder Singh and his reputation for extravagant hospitality, is less about the measure of whisky itself and more about proportion. Said to be defined not by standard units, but through the span of a hand or the gesture of pouring, the peg becomes an index of a broader cultural disposition in which abundance is deliberate.

Beyond curated menus, Patiala's food culture asserts itself clearly in its everyday spaces, where the distance between royal and vernacular collapses without ceremony.

Today, the *besan ki barfi* at Jaggi Sweets remains one of the city's most recognisable expressions of this continuity — dense, slow-cooked, and carrying the deep, almost toasted aroma of gram flour worked patiently over heat.

Ambala Chaat on YPS Road. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Standing at the counter, one notices a steady flow of customers from nearby *bazaars*, many of whom have been coming here for decades. Equally central are the *dhabas* (eateries) clustered around older commercial areas and arterial roads leading out of the city. At Saini Dhaba, the food arrives without mediation: mutton and chicken curries built on deeply reduced gravies, dals finished with *ghee*, and breads that move from *tandoor* (traditional clay oven) to table. There is no attempt here to aestheticise or reinterpret; the food is structured around appetite, repetition, and richness.

At another level, there has been a parallel effort to reintroduce elements of royal cuisine within the spaces that once housed it. Ran Baas

Slow mornings at the *halwai*. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

The Palace, within the restored Qila Mubarak complex, draws upon archival references to recreate dishes associated with the Patiala court.

Moving between these contexts — from dhaba to sweet shop to palace dining room — it becomes evident that the princely kitchen and the street-side eatery exist within the same continuum, bound by shared inclinations. This understanding has shaped how we have approached menu development at Ikk Panjab. Rather than isolating royal cuisine as something elevated, the intention has been to position it within the broader spectrum of Punjabi food, allowing dishes such as *kibti chicken* to sit alongside more familiar preparations without hierarchy. In doing so, the menu attempts to reflect what Patiala, and Punjab at large, itself demonstrates: that excess and everyday abundance are not opposites, but part of the same cultural logic.

Evenings at Swami Kulfi. Photo by Meenal Upreti.


The spread at Jaggi Sweets. Photo by Vernika Awal.

A generous helping of *falooda*, in complete Patiala style. Photo by Vernika Awal.

No room at Old Malhotra Sweets Corner in Anardana Chowk. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Tales From Tripuri Town

Aalekh Dhaliwal

A young girl singing along to a *kirtan*. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Every city has localities where, if one tries hard enough, everything can be found. Tripuri is Patiala's very own Magic Lamp. In August 2025, when my mother and I visited Tripuri, for this project, to understand the ethnic footprint that its migrants left on the city, we were ecstatic to experience a sense of community that is otherwise fast-eroding. This is not to romanticise the haphazard urban expansion of Tripuri and the consequent civic problems: flooded streets in the monsoon, narrow gullies unsuitable for traffic, and an increasing law-and-order problem. Nevertheless, Kashmiri Gurdwara Road remains bustling as ever, Gol Gappa Chowk retains its world famous stature for street food, and the many Partition-displaced communities come together to support commercial activity in Tripuri.

In 1947, during Partition, a community of artisans from Multan and Bahawalpur moved safely to Patiala. This was made possible because of the friendship between Maharaja Yadavindra Singh, the last of the Patiala maharajas before India's independence, and Sadiq Mohammad Khan, the Nawab of Bahawalpur.

Some Sikhs and Hindus of Bahawalpur were escorted to the newly-carved borders and settled in refugee camps in the royal race-course — which has become today's Tripuri Town. Maharani Mohinder Kaur, whose farm in Hirabagh became part of Tripuri, was the point of contact for the rehabilitation, logistics, and settlement of Partition refugees in Patiala.

Lateral view of the few remaining original structures of the houses built in Tripuri Town in the 1950s. Photo by Aalekh Dhaliwal.

While driving towards Kashmiri Gurdwara Road, a friend's father pointed out some old houses. These were the original structures built in the 1950s, when refugees were newly rehabilitated. Though most are now demolished to accommodate changing trends and expanding families, some continue to be used by migrant labourers. One family kindly allowed some pictures of their quarters: the plot housed a single-story structure with a sunken front room to receive visitors, little to no view of the inside rooms, an outhouse to the right, and a backyard with space to store wood and other materials.

On our walk through the bylanes of Kashmiri Gurdwara Road, we stopped to chat with Mr Ahuja, textile business owner and Indian cricketer Kanika Ahuja's grandfather. Mr Ahuja himself is a treasure trove of stories: he showed us a letter posted to his store with only 'Gol Gappa Chowk' in the address line, proof of the lore that the chowk is world-famous. He reiterated what we had already sensed while walking through the gullies: that although it is cramped now and expansion is majorly illegal, Tripuri was one of the most well-planned residential areas of post-Partition India. The PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) Town Development Board had used a methodical system to allocate plots to refugee families. It is also on his advice that we ate some of the best *gol gappe* I have had in the eponymous chowk.

Kashmiri Gurdwara Road is lined with stores selling *phulkaris* (traditional embroidery), Bahawalpuri crockery, all kinds of textiles, electronics, and everyday items. The refugee communities brought with them *phulkari* to post-Partition Patiala, which became a hub for the craft.

Called *Gulkari* in Iran where it was first practiced, *Phulkari* is a traditional embroidery of undivided Punjab that was worked using a counted darning stitch (*phulkari tanka*) from the reverse side of the fabric.

Typically executed on handspun cloth with *pat* (silk threads), it

Photograph of a Patiala Punjabi woman (Ilahijan Tawayif) in *phulkari*, c. 1900. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

features motifs such as *butis* (small floral forms), *bagh* (dense, all-over embroidery), *chope* (ceremonial borders), and *vari-da-bagh* (bridal coverings), often arranged in geometric patterns that reflect both everyday life and symbolic meanings.

In post-Partition Patiala, this practice found new ground, and the city emerged as an important hub for the craft. Machine-made *phulkari* on synthetics have now made their way into Patiala's *bazaars*, but the original craft continues to survive because of artisans. Among them is handloom artist Dr Lajwanti Chabra, awarded the Padma Shri in 2021 for her work in reviving and retaining *phulkari* by

conducting workshops and exhibitions, including at NIFT campuses, across India. On a call with Lajwanti's daughter last year, I learnt that they would be busy until March 2026; even while speaking, she was at their workshop preparing for upcoming global exhibitions.

On Kashmiri Gurdwara Road, Corner Dupatta Store is a large family store that sells *phulkari*, through whose handmade designs Sonia patiently guided us. We got a masterclass in telling machine-made *phulkaris* apart from handmade, tried two elaborately embroidered *baghs* on khaddar cloth, and were introduced to the store's original designs of *phulkari* bedsheets and phone-bags.

To end our evening in Tripuri, my mother and I made our way to Gurdwara Singh Sabha Muzaffarabad (Kashmiriyan), the *gurdwara* that lends its name to this main commercial artery of Tripuri. The *gurdwara* has a distinct golden dome — as do three other *gurdwaras* in Tripuri Town — and presents itself amidst a row of stores.

The commemoration painted on the entrance can be translated to: "*To remember the martyrs of 1947, Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, by the Muzaffarabad community of Tripuri Town.*"

Kashmiri Gurdwara Road, the hub of commercial activity in Tripuri Town, takes its name from this Gurdwara. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

To further understand the significance of this *gurdwara* and the commemoration, one must go back to October 1947. During Partition, hundreds of Pathan tribesmen were hired as mercenaries to run amok in

A *bagh phulkari* design that took four months to embroider. Photo by Aalekh Dhaliwal.

Kashmir, a princely state whose fate was then undecided. They massacred people in Muzaffarabad, leaving the Sikh community of Muzaffarabad displaced. The community moved multiple times before they arrived and settled in Tripuri in the 1950s. Through conversations with a few *sewadars* (volunteers), I got to know that all the funds for the founding of the *gurdwara* in October 1966 were collected by the community: they were neither aided by the state or central governments, nor patronised by the Maharaja and his family. Although the *gurdwara* is now under the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) mandate, which manages the upkeep of *gurdwaras*, this has not brought about any material changes. But even today, these families come together in times of need, host events in commemoration of their experiences, and have even established a public library for children to use.

As my mother and I exited, young children were coming together for their evening *kirtan* (devotional-prayer songs) practice, bringing along harmoniums and *tablas* (musical instruments). We were informed that a group of children had hosted an hour-long *kirtan* for the *sangat* (congregation of Sikhs, usually religious) a few weeks ago. They host such *kirtans* often and people from near and far congregate to encourage the young participants.

As we drove away through Tripuri Town's winding alleys, my mother and I relished our versions of the day in silence. Strangers had opened their homes and hearts to us — they had ensured I had all the information and pictures I needed to write this piece. These exchanges stand as testament to the success of projects like this one.

Women creating a *phulkari* piece. Illustration by Jisha Unnikrishnan.

A *kirtan* congregation led by children. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

The commemoration plaque inside the Gurdwara Sahib premises. Photo by Aalekh Dhaliwal.

The Revival of Plants

Aalekh Dhaliwal in conversation with Rajneesh Kumar

Baradari Bagh. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Patiala is a city of greenery: in addition to the historical bontanical park Baradari Bagh, its universities boast of botanical gardens and it is surrounded by Bir forest reserves, with the nearest being adjacent to Moti Bagh Palace.

So when Gurpreet Sunny Singh founded RoundGlass to foster sustainability within the Punjabi community, Patiala became a launch-pad for their projects. I sat down with Dr Rajneesh Kumar, who is leading the project, to discuss RoundGlass' ideas and plans for Patiala, and by extension, Punjab.

Around 2015, Dr Kumar was leading projects for Thapar's Paryavaran Welfare Society while undertaking his PhD in biotechnology. The team carried out various activities in Patiala city. A planting project that they undertook involved converting Dr Kumar's car into a mini-nursery, containing everything from saplings to tools. For another project, they conducted around 350 cleaning campaigns, including cleaning 18 bus stops. In the early years, the team created a two-kilometre nature park and trail along Nabha Road, the boundary delineated in collaboration with the State Forest Department. As a result of these efforts, Dr Kumar was conferred the Green Punjab Mission State Award in 2016.

In 2017, he was approached by the newly-founded RoundGlass Foundation (RGF) to lead a solid waste management project. Since then, Dr Kumar has also designed and led the Billion Plants for Punjab Project for RGF. They began in Patiala and are now beginning to scale to

A herd of spotted deer at the Patiala Zoo, Bir Moti Bagh. Photo by Meenal Upreti.

Doaba and Majha, aiming to go pan-Punjab. Any mass-scale planting project needs nurseries for experimenting with saplings and to provide favourable conditions for indigenous varieties to grow before being transplanted into the land bank. Learning from the State Forest Department, which has nurseries near areas fed by *nahrs* (canal waterways), the RGF team designed a similar structure. Their nursery in Village Lang, Patiala, spread across four acres, functions as a research centre and seed bank for Punjab's native tree species. The team conducts research around when to sow varieties of fruits, how long it takes them to sprout, and how long it takes the *paneeri* (sapling) to form. They found out that while amla takes two days, some varieties of jamun take fifteen. With this knowledge in mind, they went forth with their larger project. Across Punjab, 29 acres have been dedicated to such nurseries across Patiala, Bathinda, Firozpur, and Faridkot. With the expansion of this project to Doaba and Majha, RoundGlass will allocate space to nurseries in Amritsar and Hoshiarpur with the aim of planting 10 lakh saplings this year.

Acquiring land banks where the indigenous varieties can be transplanted once they have grown into saplings is a fairly top-down process. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Assistant Deputy Commissioner (ADC) at the district levels are involved, alongside the Block Development Officers (BDOs) of blocks and the village *sarpanches* (village chiefs). Once the District Nodal Officer informs the RGF team of pockets that qualify for land banks, they conduct surveys by interacting with *sarpanches*, even finding spaces that may have been missed by the BDOs. The survey is an extensive three-step process that aims to find if water is easily available near the land, if there is permission to install a boundary wall around the plot, and whether the village has any capacity for labour.

Once they have their findings and the go-ahead from state departments, RGF provides machinery support to level the ground and create pits for planting saplings. Local labour is allocated through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), with RGF ensuring a local monitoring team stays on-ground.

In addition to their deliberate search, RGF has also received offers of land — measuring between one kanal to eight acres — from over 200 individuals and families. NRIs in particular have a tendency to offer land. There are two considerations when RGF accepts such offers:

1. water availability, and
2. the availability of labour for upkeep and maintenance, since MGNREGA cannot be allocated for private land.

As with government land banks, RGF assists with everything else. This is not to say that RGF has not faced setbacks: while expanding towards Rajpura and Mohali, there have been massive issues with water availability. Punjab's water toxicity is not a secret: a trip around river Ghaggar will reveal that locals are forced to use toxic water.

For RGF, Patiala was their first choice to begin planting projects because it is the greenest city in Punjab, after Chandigarh. There are *birs* (grass-lands, scrub forests, or protected jungles) all around and so many botanical parks in the city. More than a royal city, it is *baaghan da shehr* (city of gardens). After three years of robust planting across Patiala district, the land banks are turning into self-sustaining forests. RoundGlass is currently planning to incorporate an exit strategy, wherein the land banks are formally handed over to village *panchayats* (local self-governments).

In addition to these direct interventions, RGF also compiles informational videos and material. Dr Kumar is also involved in these tasks. A book project is in the pipeline, the team having gathered information on the native tree species of Punjab from older folks in villages that they visited during the Billion Trees project.

Another project in mind is a 'Tree Directory,' wherein trees older than 50 years will have their location recorded; the directory will be reviewed every three to five years, and a copy for each village will be given to the *panchayat* and the local *gurdwara*.

The hope is that once the government marks these trees for protection, a fund will be allocated for its upkeep and one villager placed in charge of maintenance and recordkeeping.

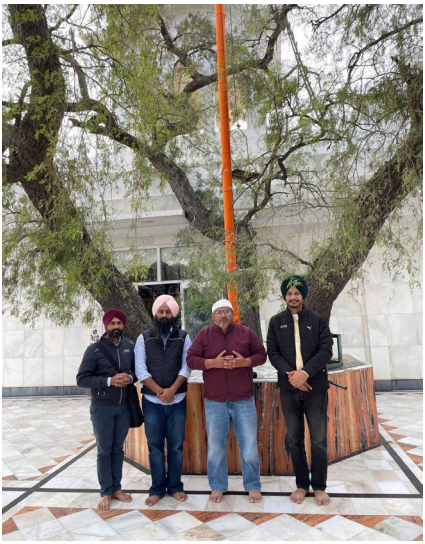
For another project, Dr Kumar has collated information on the *gurdwaras* and villages of Punjab that have been named after trees. In total, he found 319 villages — 34 in Patiala — that are named after trees. For example, Deluana Village in Mansa and Deleya da pind in Faridkot both take their name from the tree that grows the red-green dela berry.

The RGD team undertook a *yatra* (pilgrimage) from Keshgarh Sahib (Anandpur Sahib) to Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo), tracing Guru Gobind Singh's journey with his Singhs.

Information sessions about plant species and varieties for the public. Photo by Dr Rajneesh Kumar.

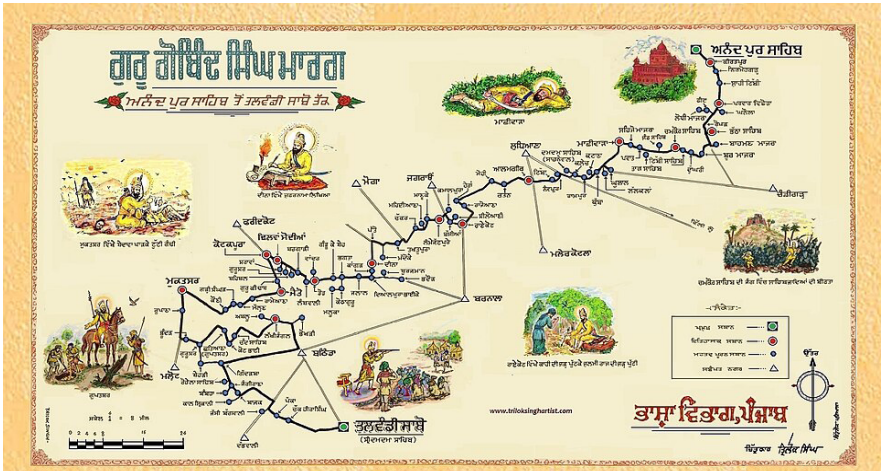
It has been recorded that the Guru's group divided their party across households so that no single one would be burdened with the responsibility of feeding them all. In a village of poor folks during a time of drought, when Guru Sahib asked his Singhs what they had eaten in the homes where they rested, they replied that they had been served *falliyan* and *peelaan* — a local variety of beans and potatoes. By going from village to village and engaging with such oral history, the RGF team has come across varieties and species that are also part of the stories told about Sikh history.

To round up our conversation, Dr Kumar shared a personal anecdote from his childhood. His grandfather, who ran a cement shop in Hathur, Ludhiana, would walk from the bus stop to his shop and use one hand to



The RoundGlass team on their fact-finding trip. Photo by Dr Rajneesh Kumar.

spread the *daane* (grains) he had brought along every day, so birds



Trilok Singh Artist has prepared the road map of Guru Gobind Singh Marg and designed the brochure.Language dept. Punjab published it (16"X24") and distributed. Giani Zail Singh , Chief Minister, Punjab has inaugurated the Guru Gobind Singh Marg road project on 10th., April 1973. This marg is from Anandpur Sahib to Talwandi Sabo. This map was published in many books

Guru Gobind Singh Marg is the route taken by the Tenth Guru, Sahibe-e-Kamal Guru Gobind Singh from Anandpur Sahib to Talwandi Sabo covering about 600 kms in 1704. Picture Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

A *langar* (community kitchen) of indigenous plants on the occasion of Vaisakhi. Photo by Dr Rajneesh Kumar.

could feed on them through the day. Dr Kumar grew up seeing this and has continued his work in this vein. He has experienced nature very closely and has persevered even when disappointed with some circumstances. Ten years ago, he did not think that the work he was undertaking with RGF was plausible — that they are going pan-Punjab now, that they have raised self-sustaining forests in so many villages, and that people are becoming connected in such fruitful ways everyday.

Baradari Bagh. Illustration by Jisha Unnikrishnan.

Bazaar Encounters

Patiala's craft traditions have grown through successive migrations, from its founding to Partition, each bringing new practices that enriched existing ones.

AC Market

A covered market in Adalat Bazaar, AC Market spans four floors and is said to be among the firsts in Punjab to feature escalators. A popular spot for wedding shopping, it also offers a cool escape from the heat, and here one must try the *banta* lemonade, sweet potato *chaat*, and Patiala's famous *kulche choley*.

Location: Adalat Bazaar, Patiala
Days: Monday - Sunday
Timings: 9:30 am – 8:30 pm (Monday - Saturday), 10 am - 1 pm (Sunday)

Sher-e-Punjab Wholesale Market

In the 1950s, a section of shops in the Qila Mubarak area caught fire and were damaged. Traders were relocated to what is now known as the Sher-e-Punjab market. This is a wholesale cloth market where one can find a variety of fabrics and readymade garments.

Location: Lahori Gate, Patiala
Days: Monday - Sunday
Timings: 10 am – 8 pm (Monday - Sunday)

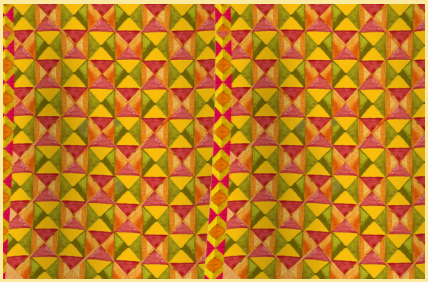
Achar Bazaar

A narrow alley for homemade pickles and chutneys, Achar Bazaar is a quiet stretch flanked by the busy Anardana Chowk on one side and the noisy Bartan Bazaar on the other. The many interesting smells of homemade pickles in reused plastic jars is reminiscent of the region's food culture.

Location: Dera Chatta Magni Ram, Achar Bazaar Street, Patiala
Days: Monday - Saturday
Timings: 9 am - 8 pm

Kashmiri Gurdwara Road, Tripuri Town

Kashmiri Gurdwara Road is lined with stores selling *phulkaris*, Bahawalpuri crockery, textiles, electronics, and everyday goods. Even if you're not shopping, it offers a masterclass in phulkari embroidery — best followed by a stop at Gol Gappa Chowk for some



of the city's finest *gol gappe*.

Location: Tripuri Town, Patiala
Days: Monday - Sunday
Timings: 9 am - 10 pm (half day on Sunday)

Books Market

As the name suggests, Patiala's Books Market offers new and second-hand books. Though it now leans towards exam material, its streets evoke Calcutta's College Street — look up to spot ornate grillework and Art Deco details in the surrounding buildings.

Location: Lahori Gate, Patiala
Days: Monday - Sunday
Timings: 9 am - 8 pm (half day on Sunday)

City's First

Notable moments in Patiala's history that have shaped the city and, by extension, the region.

Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports

Established in 1961 in the premises of the Moti Bagh Palace, NIS is India's first sports institute and Asia's largest. India's first health minister and later the sports minister, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur of Kapurthala was instrumental in setting up the institute in Patiala.

Malwa Cinema

Located on Mall Road, Malwa Cinema — Patiala's first Art Deco single-screen theatre — was commissioned by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh in 1939. Now defunct, it once seated nearly a thousand people. Succeeded by Phul Cinema, designed by W. M. Namjoshi, it highlights the centrality of cinemas to the Art Deco movement in North India.

Government Mohindra College

Founded in 1875, Mohindra College was the city's first degree college and,

at the time, the only institution between Delhi and Lahore offering modern higher education. Its historic building, designed in a distinctive 'M' shape, reflects the Indo-Saracenic style and was originally affiliated with Calcutta University.

Punjab State Archives

The Punjab State Archives, the largest repository of archival material in North India, houses records of princely states, the Lahore Durbar, and manuscripts in Persian, Gurmukhi, and Tibetan. The building, in the colonial style, features decorated parapets and Gothic gingerbread detailing.

Old Moti Bagh Gurdwara

Built by Maharaja Narinder Singh in the 1850s, the Old Moti Bagh Gurdwara is Patiala's first and only public *gurdwara* that is devoid of any dome and is octagonal in shape. The 200-year old Nishan Sahib (Sikh flag) was

erected in the spot where Guru Teh Bahadur visited on his way to Delhi.

City Offbeat

Beyond its familiar streets, Patiala and its surroundings hold many unusual sites shaped by local history, belief, and landscape.

Bahadurgarh Fort and Gurdwara Sahib

Bahadurgarh Fort is 7 kms north-east of Patiala and was built by Nawab Sef Khan as Sefabad. It was reconstructed by Maharaja Karam Singh in 1837 and renamed Bahadurgarh in memory of Sri Guru Teg Bahadur. The Gurdwara Sahib is located within the premises of the fort.

Location: Rajpura-Patiala Road, Bir Bahadurgarh
Days: Sunday (the fort is a police training institute)
Timings: 12 pm - 4 pm

Bir Moti Bagh

This sanctuary, spread over an area of

654 hectares, was once frequented by the Royal family of Patiala. The maharajas of Patiala visited this area for game hunting, something that they did in a well-organised set of events, highlighting their chivalry.
Location: Bir Moti Bagh
Days: All Days
Timings: 24 hrs open

Patiala Handicraft Workshop Cooperative Industrial Society

Over the last few decades, Rajpura has emerged as the centre of handmade phulkari embroidery, with artisans moving here from Patiala. Thus, the cooperative society ensures that knowledge traditions are passed down.
Location: Rajpura
Days: Contact before visit

Malerkotla

Malerkotla is best known as a symbol of communal harmony in Punjabi, most notably during the Partition in 1947 when the Muslim population of the town remained unharmed. Visit for the *mutton barra* and *seekh kebab* while

taking a walk around the Old City.
Location: 80 kilometres from Patiala
Days: All Days
Timings: 24 hrs open

Sanghol

Excavated between 1968 and 1990, Sanghol revealed a large Buddhist stupa and monastery complex. The 1980s excavations uncovered over a hundred carved stone slabs and pillars from the Kushan period, reflecting the Mathura School of Art. The Sanghol Archaeological Museum preserves coins and seals of the Hephthalite rulers Toramana and Mihirakula.
Location: 55 kilometres north of Patiala
Days: Tuesday - Sunday
Timings: 10 am - 4:30 pm

Cultural Convergences

Patiala's syncretic culture is embedded in its very founding, with communities settling from far and near.

Gurdwara Sri Dukhniwaran Sahib

In 1672, Patiala, then Lehal Village, was infected by a fatal disease. At the

request of the villagers, Guru Tegh Bahadur came and meditated by the village pond, after which the illness is said to have subsided. The site came to be known as Dukhnivaran Sahib, literally meaning the 'eradicator of all suffering'.

Dargah Sanjha Peer

Established to commemorate Hazrat Inayat Shahwali Chishti of the Chishti Sufi Order, the Dargah is replete with several syncretic symbols- a photo-graph of Guru Nanak next to that of the Kaaba next to that of Sai Baba alongside that of Hanuman. Punjabi and Hindi typography adorn the walls and so do Persian miniature motifs.

Shri Kali Devi Temple

Built in 1936 by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh, the six foot idol in this temple was brought from Bengal by the Maharaja himself. It houses a large collection of *patras* (manuscript) supposed to have been written by Rishi Ved Vyas, the composer of the *Mahabharat*.

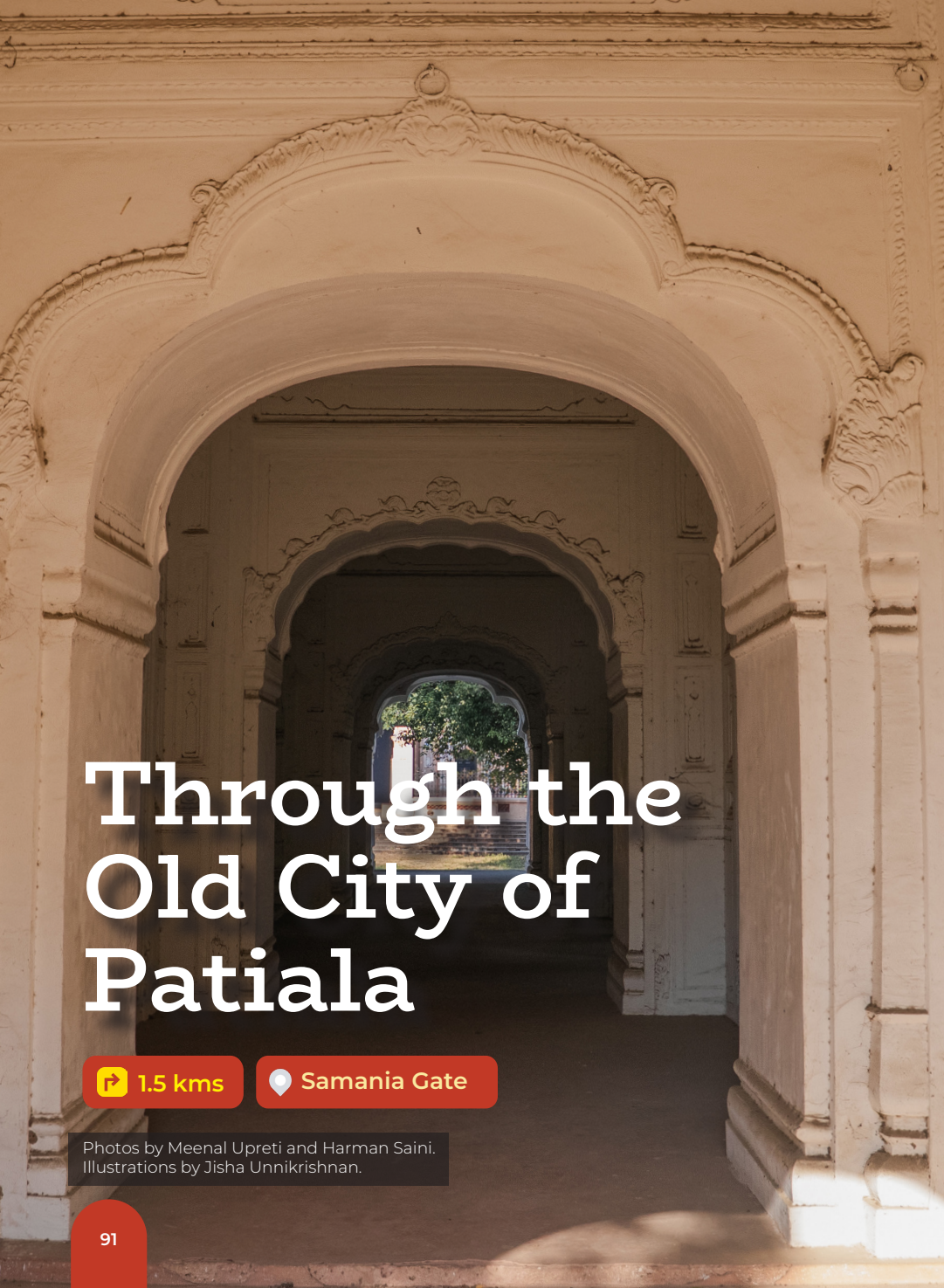
Central Methodist Church

This Methodist Protestant Church developed as a result of Christian Missionary activity in Punjab after the Phulkian treaty with the British.

Peer Baba Rode Shah

The uniquely green façade of the building gives away this Dargah. It is visited by people of all faiths and the *Urs* (annual celebration) is known for bringing various Punjabi folk musicians together.


Trails



Through the Old City of Patiala

1.5 kms

Samania Gate

Photos by Meenal Upreti and Harman Saini.
Illustrations by Jisha Unnikrishnan.

01. Samania Gate
02. Shahi Samadhan
03. Adalat Bazaar
04. Darshani Gate
05. Qila Mubarak
06. Sarad Khana
07. Ran Baas

Peeli Sadak

Old Sabji Mandi Road

Peeli Sadak

Patiala, a city with its own vibrant culture and charm, holds a special history. With its monuments showcasing a blend of Sikh, Mughal, and colonial architectural influences, one also finds Rajasthani *chattris* (cenotaphs) dotting heritage spaces of the city, alongside the city's reputation as a historic hub for arts and handicrafts like *phulkari* and *juttis*. Patiala's royal past, in particular, takes center stage in any discussion of the city, with several heritage structures bearing the mark of its royal legacy. This walk invites you to experience some of these structures through an exploration of its early settlements: Samania Gate, Adalat Bazaar, Shahi Samadhan, and the Qila Mubarak Complex.

1 Samania Gate

The gates of Patiala were commissioned to be built in the 1850s by Maharaja Narinder Singh after demolishing the mud wall around the city. Samania Gate stands on the old road, which went to the town of Samana. When the princely state was at its zenith, the gate also had a functioning *gurdwara* in its upper storey and its arches are still beautifully painted with murals from Hindu epics, scenes of Sikh martial arts, and traditional wrestling themes.

2 Shahi Samadhan

The royal memorials are among the largest examples of Sikh architecture. Built in the 1840s, the *samadhi* of Baba Ala Singh and various small *chattris* of his successors and family members are located here. The façade of the mausoleum, primarily constituting sandstone and marble inlay, is replete with elaborate stucco work featuring Persian calligraphy and Hindu motifs. The *parikrama* (circumbulatory structure) is an ode to the design and symmetry of Sikh religious structures: a central chamber surrounded by smaller chambers for prayer. The Mughal-style central dome and its load-bearing arches are hallmarks of the mausoleum's design.

3 Adalat Bazaar

Central to the city's commerce, Adalat Bazaar can easily be described as Patiala's beating heart. With smaller markets like AC Market and specialised streets like Bartan Bazaar within its jurisdiction, this is where one can buy anything one names: punjabi *juttis* that are handmade and customisable, jewellery ranging across one's financial means, colourful *parandis* (hair ornaments), or turbans in each shade of every colour group!

4 Darshani Gate

The first gateway to be constructed in all of Patiala, it connects the oldest settlement of Sirhindi Bazaar — where one of the first communities, the Hindus of Sirhind, settled — with the Qila Chowk. It also serves as the main entrance to Qila Mubarak. Today, the roof features floral frescoes and the internal area hosts a few jewellery stores.

5 Qila Mubarak

Founded as a mud fort by Baba Ala Singh in 1754, Patiala's Qila Mubarak served as the royal residence of the Royal family, with various additions made to it by maharajas of Patiala. The fort is divided into two sections: Qila Androon, forming the interior older portion, whose different chambers are embellished with the unique Patiala School of Painting; the outer additions, which include Ranvaas, Durbar Hall, Sarad Khana, and Jalau Khana. Large parts of the fort complex were recently renovated, most significantly with the restoration of Ran Baas The Palace and the Qila Gallery.

6 Sarad Khana

The cool house of the maharajas was built in Neo-Gothic style to escape the brutal Punjab summers. With a monolithic marble fireplace and a deep well, water from which circulated within channels in the palace walls and basement, Sarad Khana is a wonder of traditional engineering. In addition to serving as the summer home for the royals, this was where European guests were hosted.

7 Ran Baas

The erstwhile royal guesthouse is now a luxury hotel within the Qila. Restoration began over a decade ago, in 2013, under Abha Narain Lamba. It once housed the female quarters (*lassikhana*), where food for 35,000 people was prepared.

Other chambers here include a Sheesh Mahal, a chamber with mirrorwork. The complex also hosts intricate frescoes, depicting courtly scenes, Hindu mythology, motifs of regional architectural styles, and the artistry of master miniaturists from present-day Kashmir, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pradesh.

Please Note:

- Photography is allowed but with caution within interiors, contingent on permissions.
- It is a leisurely stroll with several stops to talk and discuss.
- Please wear comfortable clothes, footwear, and carry a hat/umbrella along with a bottle of water.
- Please start early, as the roads tend to get busy, and the weather becomes less enjoyable later in the day during summers.
- Please respect the cultural and religious significance/sentiments of the spaces.

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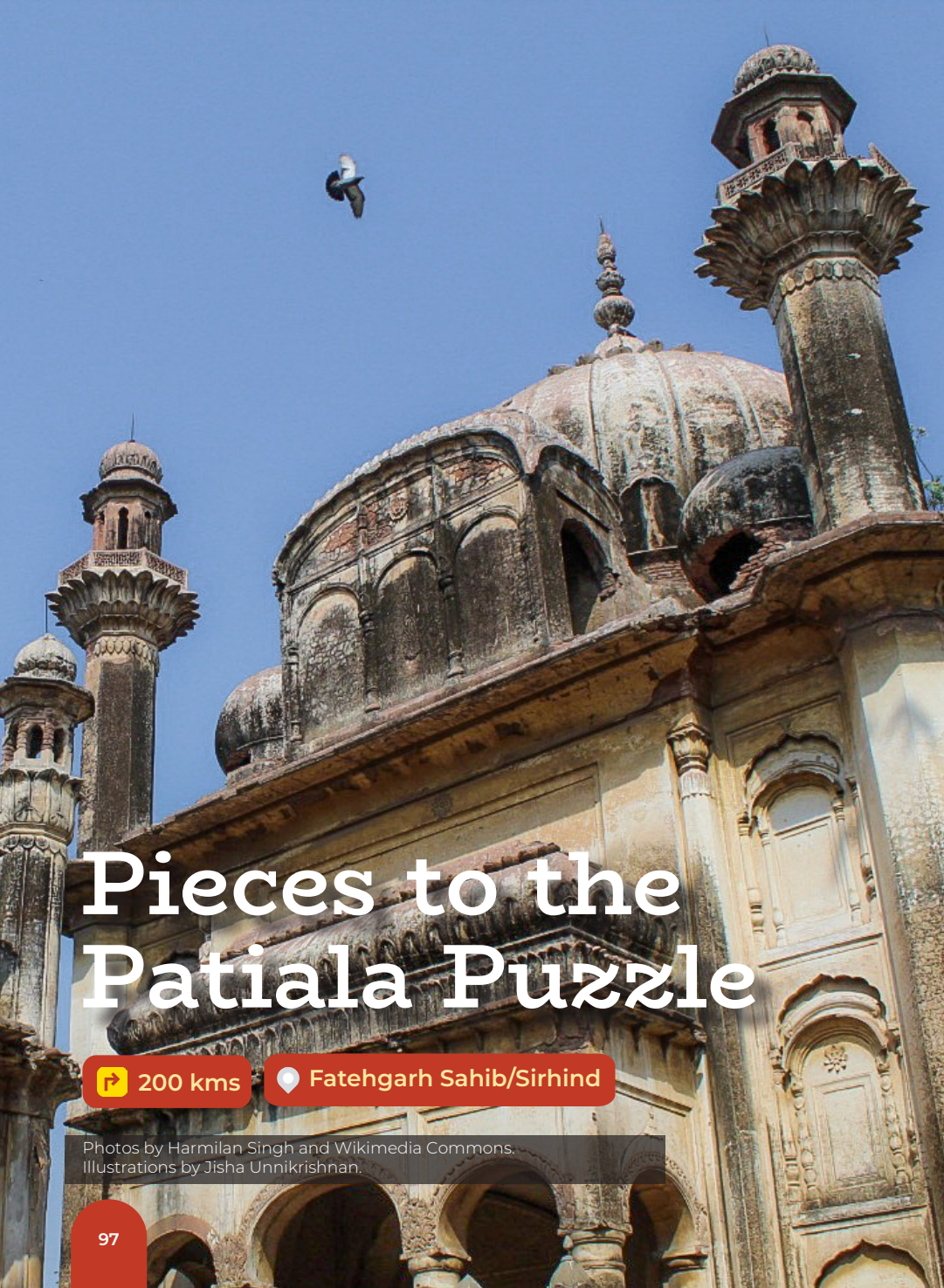

Pieces to the Patiala Puzzle

200 kms

Fatehgarh Sahib/Sirhind

Photos by Harmilan Singh and Wikimedia Commons.
Illustrations by Jisha Unnikrishnan.

01. Fatehgarh Sahib/Sirhind
02. Malerkotla
03. Sangrur
04. Nabha

To understand Patiala, one must become acquainted with the city's relationship with its neighbours. This trail begins with Fatehgarh Sahib — erstwhile Sirhind — and ends in Nabha, with stops in Malerkotla and Sangrur. While most of these were connected through the Phulkian Dynasty, they emerged as important and historic centres in their own right

Each of the cities were central to Sikh, Mughal, and, eventually, independent India's history. This Malwa belt, once the stronghold of royals for two centuries, emerged as a bastion of Punjabi communism and leftist activity post-independence: it was known for its '*jholey wale*', members of various socialist groups who would wander around with a bag and their books in tow. In search of these overlapping and opposing histories, we undertake this longer trail.

1 Fatehgarh Sahib/ Sirhind

Forty kilometres north of Patiala, Fatehgarh Sahib is an important site in the intertwining history of Sikhs and Mughals. Sirhind is the older commercial town, reclaimed after Sikh military commander Banda Singh Bahadur won it at the Battle of Chappar Chiri from the Mughals; Fatehgarh Sahib is the district headquarters. Many historic gurdwaras and dargahs dot both towns. Gurdwara Fatehgarh

Sahib, Rauza Sharif, and Aam Khas Bagh bring together stories of Sufi saints and events from Sikh history. Rauza Sharif is dedicated to Ahmad Sirhindi of the Naqshbandi Sufi Order and Aam Khas Bagh retains the remains of a highway inn built by Akbar and renovated by Shah Jahan on the Grand Trunk Road.

2 Malerkotla

Malerkotla is best known as a symbol of communal harmony in Punjab: during Partition, the Muslim population of the town remained unharmed. Today, it remains a bastion of syncretism and royal history. Enter the Old City through one of its gates and make your way to Mobarak Manzil, the former royal residence. Close by is the Shahi Maqbara, the royal burial grounds built in Mughal architectural style. Finally, after a short detour at Jeeru

Rehmani for their *korma* and *phirni*, visit the fifteenth-century shrine of Baba Haider Sheikh, the founder of the city and the predecessor of the Afghan Sherwanis, the Nawabs of Malerkotla.

3 Sangrur

Former capital of the Jind princely state, Sangrur's old city is symmetrically planned. Banasar Bagh, its green axis, was built as a leisurely retreat by the royals in a blend of Mughal and later colonial architectures. On the outskirts of Sangrur is Gurdwara Nankiana Sahib, associated with Guru Nanak's visit. This is also the home of Bibi Gulab Kaur: born in Bakshiwala village, she was a Ghadar revolutionary who joined the Ghadar Party in Manila and was central to its publishing activities. With a press pass in hand, disguised as a journalist, she would distribute arms to other Ghadarites.

4 Nabha

Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha played a central role in the beginning of Jaito Morcha, a significant event in the Akali-led Gurdwara Reform Movement in Punjab that successfully transferred control of Sikh religious institutions to the community instead of British-decided *mahants* (caretakers). Within the Old City today, you will find the remains of Nabha Qila. Nearby is Gurdwara Dera Baba Ajaypal Singh (Ghorhian Wala), dedicated to Guru Gobind Singh Ji's *nagarchi* (war drummer), said to have resided there for four decades. Finally, there is the private property of the erstwhile Nabha Riyasat, Hira Mahal, whose ground floor holds relics important to Guru Gobind Singh.

Please Note:

- Photography is allowed (in the interior and exterior buildings).
- For this trail, participants will either require a vehicle or need to make use of the local autos once in the city.
- Wear comfortable clothes, footwear, and carry a hat/umbrella along with a bottle of water. Carrying a scarf when entering the dargah is advised.
- Kindly respect the cultural and religious significance/sentiments of the spaces.

Aalekh Dhaliwal is a researcher and practitioner working across architecture, politics, cities, gender, food, migration, and ethnography. Her current work focuses on coffee trade networks, their politics, and ensuring fair returns for farmers.

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