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SIKH MUSEUMS AS MODEL OF KNOWLEDGE TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

Historically, collecting, maintaining, and studying the artefacts have been the primary functions of museums. This monograph attempts to analyse crucial role played by advanced Sikh museums in stabilising knowledge and transmitting it to the audience. Sikh Heritage Museum in different cities are playing vital role in conservation of their heritage and traditions. Three Museums are revisited in different cities, Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar, displaying antique weapons, manuscripts and portraits to illustrate Sikh history and culture. Khalsa Heritage Centre - 'Virasat-e-Khalsa', Anandpur sahib, Ropar, Punjab, with its 400-seater auditorium, permanent exhibition spaces, two-storey library with historical manuscripts from Sikh History and Heritage; Baba Baghel Singh Sikh Heritage Multimedia Museum, New Delhi – emphasizing Sikh principles through artwork, murals, digital screens, multilingual sound. As reported by The Economic Times, Virasat-E-Khalsa has emerged with most foot traffic, over 5000 tourists visiting daily. These museums have connected generations with their history and heritage by expanding their horizon beyond the traditional bounds. Hence, proving useful in imparting knowledge not merely developing as informational sources but as agents of social and economic transformation. This paper also emphasises on creating awareness among suburbs and creating more and more archives and museums to bring all into one-fold of imparting knowledge traditions among us.

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INTRODUCTION

Museums can be described as the institutions dedicated to the collection, preservation, interpretation, and exhibition of objects of artistic, historical, scientific, cultural or educational significance as per the 2017 definition of International Council of Museums (ICOM). However, we witness a decolonising approach in the definition of Museums. The 2019 definition posits that museums are characterised as democratising, inclusive, and polyphonic spaces that facilitate critical debate regarding both historical and future contexts. The custodians of artefacts and specimens recognise and confront the conflicts and difficulties of the current era. They assume the responsibility of preserving these items for the benefit of society, ensuring the conservation of diverse memories for future cohorts. Throughout history, museums have evolved from their origins as private collections of wealthy individuals to public institutions accessible to diverse audiences. These are significantly important as knowledge repositories, and the influence they wield as social, cultural, and intellectual agents in these days that contribute to the enrichment of society. Museums can vary widely in their focus, size, and scope, but they all share the common goal of showcasing and preserving items of value to humanity.

Functions and roles of museums

- Data Collection: Conservation and Preservation
- Education: Research and Scholarship
- Interpretation and Exhibition: Community Engagement

Brief Introduction about Sikhism

Sikhism often described as one of the world's most unique and profound spiritual religions is a vibrant and dynamic religion that emerged in the Punjab during the late 15 century. Rooted in the teachings of its founder, Guru Nanak Dev. Sikhism stands as a testament to the enduring power of faith, equality, and social justice. Sikhs, find inspiration in a rich tapestry of scriptures, including the Guru Granth Sahib, which is not only their central religious text but also a universal source of wisdom, compassion, and guidance. One of the defining characteristics of Sikhism is its unwavering commitment to the principles of equality and inclusivity. Sikhs believe in the fundamental oneness of all humanity, irrespective of caste, creed, or social status. This is symbolized by the institution of langar, a community kitchen where everyone, regardless of their background, is welcome to share a free meal.

“Sikh museums”, museums that tell the story of the Sikh religion and its Gurus. They not only represent religious aspect, historical aspects and play a significant role in preserving and

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promoting the rich cultural, historical, and religious heritage of the Sikh community. These museums serve as important educational and cultural centres, offering insights into the history, philosophy, and traditions of Sikhism.

Knowledge Management and Knowledge traditions in Sikh Museum

Knowledge management plays a pivotal role in the operation of Sikh museums, offering a profound insight into the rich and vibrant Sikh culture and heritage. Sikh museums are distinct in their approach to knowledge management when compared to traditional Indian museums. This distinction arises from their unique blend of explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge, documentation, digital archives, and most importantly the relation with their history all of which contribute to preserving and promoting the Sikh tradition.

- Explicit knowledge in Sikh museums primarily encompasses information that can be readily codified and communicated. This includes historical texts, scriptures, manuscripts, and printed materials that provide a concrete understanding of Sikh history and teachings. One remarkable feature of Sikh museums is their extensive collection of sacred scriptures, particularly the Guru Granth Sahib. These texts serve as repositories of explicit knowledge, offering visitors an opportunity to learn about the core principles of Sikhism.
- Tacit knowledge plays an equally vital role in Sikh museums. Tacit knowledge refers to the unwritten, experiential knowledge that is deeply ingrained in the Sikh community. It includes traditions, rituals, and the spiritual connection that Sikhs share with their Gurus. Sikh museums often incorporate oral history projects and interactive exhibits to capture this tacit knowledge. Visitors can engage with knowledgeable guides or listen to personal narratives from the Sikh community, gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances and intangible aspects of Sikhism. This approach sets Sikh museums apart from many Indian museums, which may focus more on explicit historical facts and artifacts.
- Documentation is a crucial aspect of knowledge management in Sikh museums. Meticulous record-keeping ensures the preservation of historical documents, photographs, and artifacts for future generations. Many Sikh museums employ skilled archivists and historians to maintain and catalogue these collections. The documentation process also includes digitization efforts to create a comprehensive digital archive. This safeguards the materials from physical deterioration and allows for easy accessibility by researchers and the public alike.
- Digital archives are another distinctive feature of Sikh museums' knowledge management. These archives house a vast repository of digital content, including historical photographs, manuscripts, audio recordings, and videos. By digitizing their collections, Sikh museums transcend geographical boundaries, enabling people from around the world to access and explore their cultural heritage.

Tradition of Preserving History amongst Sikhs

The sense of relation that Sikhs share with their Gurus and their history is deeply rooted in the very essence of Sikhism, transcending the boundaries of time and space. At its core, Sikhism is not just a religion but a way of life, a spiritual journey that intimately connects individuals with their Gurus and the remarkable history that has shaped their identity. This profound sense of relation is a testament to the enduring legacy of Sikhism, where the preservation of traditions is not a recent phenomenon but a time-honoured practice.

The relationship between Sikhs and their Gurus is characterized by a deep sense of reverence and devotion. Sikhs view their Gurus not merely as historical figures but as '*Sacha Patshah*' the True Lord' Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, initiated a tradition of spiritual leadership that continued with the ten successive Gurus. Sikhs believe that the Guru's teachings, encapsulated in the Guru Granth Sahib, offer spiritual enlightenment and guidance for living a virtuous life. The preservation of traditions in Sikhism is not a new phenomenon; it is deeply ingrained in the faith's history. One striking example is the display of *Shastras* (weapons) at the Akal Takht Sahib (Amritsar), temporal seat of authority and other historical Gurudwaras. This tradition dates to the times of Guru Hargobind Sahib, who initiated the concept of the "*Akal Takht*" or "Throne of the Timeless One" to represent the temporal authority of the Sikhs. The preservation of traditions in Sikhism, whether through the display of *Shastras* or the maintenance of a unique identity, reflects the timeless nature of Sikh values and principles, is the testament to the resilience and strength of the Sikh community in preserving their faith and heritage across centuries.

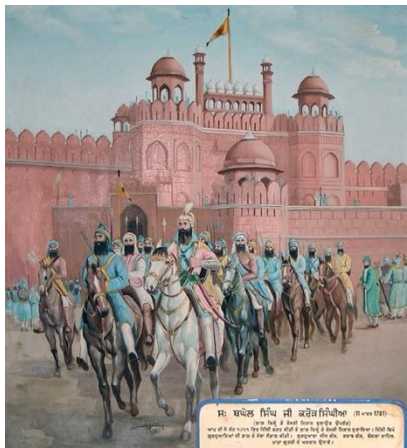
Central Sikh Museum (Golden Temple), Amritsar, Punjab

It is located within the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar, Punjab and was established in 1958 with the aim of preserving and exhibiting valuable artifacts related to Sikh history, culture, and religion. The museum is managed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which oversees the administration of Sikh religious institutions. This Museum is currently being restored, and a new Interpretation Centre for the Complex is being built by the SGPC.

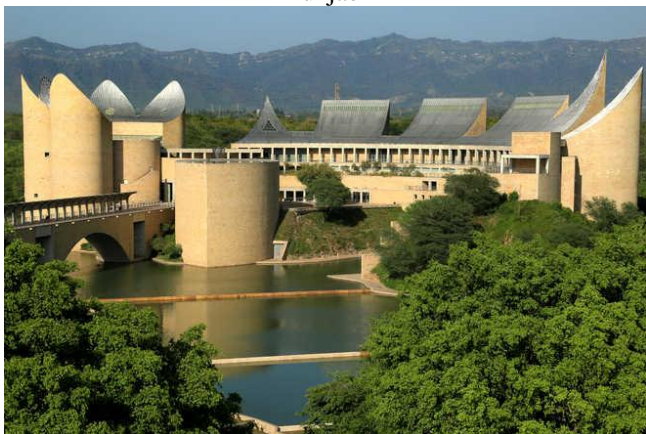
The museum is organised into sections based on Sikh history. The lives and ways of Sikh Gurus, Hindu and Muslim Saints have been depicted in the first hall through portraits. The travels (*Udasis*) of Guru Nanak are depicted in the second room along with some images of priceless artwork on the walls of Gurdwara Baba Atal Rai. The period of the Sikh Conflict after 1708 comes next. Central Sikh Museum's paintings depict Sikh gurus, saints, warriors, and other notable Sikh personalities who have contributed for Sikhism. The prices paid for the heads of Sikhs are shown in portraits of the Sikh Martyrs (Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Taru Singh, Bhai Dyala, and Bhai Mati Dass). It features an extensive collection of coins, antique weapons, and historic texts. It also has an excellent library. Great Sikh painters' paintings, rare pencil sketches, musical instruments, the rarest stringed instrument, and weapons & guns of Sikh Raj are all on display in the museum.

It is interesting to observe the wooden comb (*kangha*) of Guru Gobind Singh, arrows, bow, iron chakras (circles) for warriors to wear on their turbans, and an iron jacket formed of wires (*Sanjoe*). Weapons from the Sikh Empire, wooden canopy supports plated in silver from Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign,

and musical instruments like the Saranda of late Baba Sham Singh (the hymn singer in the Golden Temple), among others, are all preserved in the museum. It transports readers to the Sikh Empire, the battle of the Punjabi-speaking state for freedom, the Sikh-Nirankari Kand (Clash), and the era of attack on Akal Takht Sahib, Amritsar in 1984. There are also portraits of prominent Sikh religious, political, and social figures on exhibit.



Victory of Sikhs on Delhi, Central Sikh Museum
Khalsa Heritage centre: Virasat-e-Khalsa, Anandpur Sahib,
Punjab



Virasat-e-Khalsa, also known as the Khalsa Heritage Complex, is a remarkable museum and cultural centre located in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab. To mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, it was inaugurated on November 25, 2011. Designed to celebrate and showcase the rich cultural and historical heritage of the Sikh community, Virasat-e-Khalsa stands as an architectural marvel and a symbol of Sikh pride and identity.

Architectural Marvel:

The Virasat-e-Khalsa museum complex is a masterpiece of contemporary architecture designed by renowned architect Moshe Safdie. It covers an area of over 100 acres and comprises two main buildings—the Sikh Heritage Museum and

the Khalsa Reference Library. The architectural style of the museum draws inspiration from traditional Sikh architectural elements, with modern design concepts seamlessly integrated into the structure.

The Sikh Heritage Museum:

The Sikh Heritage Museum is a multimedia-rich museum that presents the history, culture, and philosophy of Sikhism in an engaging and immersive manner. The museum showcases the significant milestones of Sikh history, beginning from the times of Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh and beyond.

Exhibits and Galleries: The museum features several galleries and exhibits, dedicated to specific periods and themes in Sikh history. Some of the prominent galleries and exhibits, each dedicated to specific periods and themes in Sikh history.

- Sahib-e-Kamal Gallery
- Khalsa Raj Gallery
- Chardikala Gallery
- Virasat Gallery
- Sahib-e-Kamal gallery portrays the life and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev. It highlights their spiritual journey, interactions with people from diverse backgrounds, and vision of equality and compassion. The Turning Point section focuses on the transformation of Sikhism under the guidance of Guru Gobind Singh. It delves into the establishment of the Khalsa Panth and the creation of the Khalsa code of conduct.
- Khalsa Raj gallery depicts the era of the Sikh Empire and showcases the cultural, military, and administrative achievements of the Sikh rulers, including Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- Charhdi Kala gallery reflects the indomitable spirit of the Sikh community, emphasising their resilience in the face of adversity.
- Virasat gallery pays tribute to the Sikh community's contribution to society, highlighting their involvement in various fields such as arts, literature, medicine, and education.

Interactive and Multimedia Experience

The Sikh Heritage Museum employs state-of-the-art technology, including audiovisual presentations, 3D holographic projections, and interactive displays, to create an immersive and educational experience for visitors. This innovative approach allows visitors to engage deeply with the history and teachings of Sikhism, making the museum suitable for people of all ages and backgrounds.

The Khalsa Reference Library

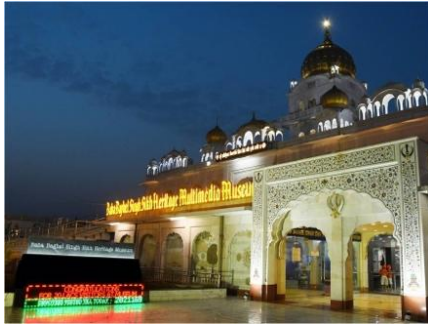
The Khalsa Reference Library, located within the complex, serves as a repository of valuable historical documents, manuscripts, books, and references related to Sikhism. It facilitates academic research, scholarly work, and further study of Sikh heritage, culture, and philosophy.

Cultural Heritage

In addition to the museum and library, the Virasat-e-Khalsa complex features beautifully landscaped gardens, reflecting pools, and open-air exhibition spaces. It also houses a research centre, auditorium, educational facilities, and an amphitheatre for cultural events and performances.

Virasat-e-Khalsa is not just a museum but a symbol of Sikh pride and a testament to the rich cultural legacy of the Sikh community. It serves as an essential educational and cultural centre, promoting an understanding of Sikh history, values, and traditions among visitors from around the world. As one of the most visited museums in India, Virasat-e-Khalsa attracts people of all faiths and backgrounds, fostering intercultural dialogue and appreciation for the universal message of Sikhism—equality, justice, and the oneness of humanity. It stands as a beacon of inspiration and a source of national pride for the Sikh community, further solidifying Anandpur Sahib's status as a significant pilgrimage and cultural destination in Punjab.

Baba Baghel Singh Multimedia Museum, New Delhi



Baba Baghel Singh Sikh Heritage multimedia museum, Gurudwara Bangla Sahib, New Delhi (built in 2014) is named in honour of Baba Baghel Singh, a valiant Sikh soldier who made a vital contribution to the defence of Sikhism. In 1783, he conquered Red Fort in Delhi and established several historical Gurdwaras in Delhi. It was created with the intention of educating both current and future generations about Sikhism and its tenets and goals. The museum's goal is to emphasise the essential tenets of Sikhism using paintings, digital technology, displays, mural projections, and multilingual sound to highlight the rich Sikh legacy. The museum has an auditorium with modern amenities to see the old pieces of art. The museum contains theatre to accommodate 170 people at once and four galleries with a combined total of 250 paintings. Five-minute documentaries about Sikh gurus and soldiers are shown there. In addition to audio recordings of the objects are available in three languages-Punjabi, English, and Hindi. The museum provides several other services. It offers publications about Sikh history in variety of regional Indian languages such as Telugu, Kannada, and in some foreign languages like French, Italian, and Russian.

An art piece of Mata Khivi, wife of Guru Angad, the second Guru, serving *langar* in a *pangat* with her own hands depicts an important component of Sikh egalitarian philosophy. A very significant piece of art is a portrait of the Sufi saint Mian Mir laying the foundation stone for Sri Harmandir Sahib. The picture illustrates the Sikh gurus' belief that everyone with a spiritual connection to God should be included, regardless of their community of origin. An artwork of Baba Baghel Singh

capturing the Red Fort serves as the starting point for the museum's tour. Paintings commemorating the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, founding of the Khalsa, and the life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh are displayed in the first gallery. Additionally, there is a piece of art showing the "Khandā" religious emblem. A Sikh wedding's (Anand Karaj) customs and traditions are explained in one gallery, along with the concept of the ceremony known as *Laavan*. 'Baba Baghel Singh Sikh Heritage Multimedia Museum' is a popular attraction not only for Sikh visitors but for all communities.

CONCLUSION

Sikh museums have emerged as vital institutions that play a crucial role in preserving, promoting, and propagating the rich cultural, historical, and religious heritage of the Sikh community. These museums serve as powerful platforms for education, cultural enrichment, and intercultural dialogue, catering to diverse audiences worldwide. Through their innovative and immersive exhibits, Sikh museums offer visitors a deeper understanding of Sikh history, philosophy, and traditions. By using modern technologies, interactive displays, and multimedia presentations, these museums create engaging experiences that resonate with people of all ages and backgrounds. Sikh museums are fulfilling their role as social, cultural, and educational agents in several ways:

The future of Sikh museums looks promising, with opportunities for growth, innovation, and expanded global outreach. As technology continues to advance, these museums can embrace digital platforms to reach a broader audience worldwide, ensuring that Sikh heritage and values are accessible to people across geographical boundaries. Sikh museums can further develop collaborations and partnerships with other cultural and educational institutions, creating a network of knowledge exchange and cultural diplomacy. By engaging with researchers, institutions, and communities worldwide, Sikh museums can enrich the global understanding of Sikhism's profound impact on humanity. It should be highlighted that there are numerous Sikh museums, but more should be built in suburban and rural locations to engage more communities to explore untouched worldwide Sikh cultural heritage.

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