UTS ePRESS

PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies

Vol. 18, No. 1/2
Sep 2022

Citation: Chopra, R. 2022. Curating Divinity: Religious Souvenirs, Shopkeepers and Bazaar Curation. *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 18:1/2, 111–124. https://doi.org/10.5130/pjmis.v18i1-2.7809

ISSN 1449-2490 | Published by UTS ePRESS | http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/portal

RESEARCH ARTICLE (PEER REVIEWED)

Curating Divinity: Religious Souvenirs, Shopkeepers and Bazaar Curation

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5130/pjmis.v18i1-2.7809
Article History: Received 02/07/2021; Accepted 24/02/2022; Published 27/09/2022

Abstract

This paper explores the universe of souvenirs of Sikh Gurus and martyrs available in the bazaars around Sikhism's most sacred shrine, the Darbar Sahib in Amritsar. Rather like objects in museum exhibitions, souvenir art actively produces ideas of divinity and martyrdom. The deliberate arrangements of Guru and martyr souvenirs in shopwindows demonstrate the 'sense' of curation of ordinary shopkeepers in the bazaar. Shop displays, I argue, resemble the care of sacred art by museum curators. But there is more to shop displays than mere imitation. I analyse the vis-à-vis between the souvenir displays of two modern martyrs, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the militant leader of separatist Khalistan, and Bhagat Singh, the nationalist hero, that express bazaar understandings of martyr souvenirs as affective objects, possessing both ritual and political value. The curated displays in museums and shopwindows are critical in creating a conscious, purposive aura around modern Sikh martyrdom.

Keywords

Shrine Museums; Amritsar; Religious souvenirs; Bazaars; Curators; Shopkeepers

Museum curators pay attention to the voice of things. They think about the affective nature of objects, consider the ability of objects to reach outward, inviting viewers to imagine the object's history, symbolism, emotional appeal and cultural landscape. Curation in the present straddles the past of the object and creates a future for the object through museum displays. But curation also encourages viewers to look at the sacred object in relation to objects that surround it, to understand a world of ritual value. Curators recognise the affective quality of sacred objects, their capacity to arouse emotion and animate feelings of belief. Fundamental to

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

displays is a curation of sacred feeling. Techniques of exhibition—spotlighting, elevation, spacing, position—create an aura around sacred objects, lifting them out of the universe of ordinary things.

Museum curators detail the histories of sacred objects to understand the significance with which communities endow their sacred objects. Sacred objects are treated as animate by curators who reach out to ecclesiastical authorities or anthropologists to develop codes for the display of such cherished objects. Museums may, for example, replicate places of worship to convey the living quality of a sacred object (Greene 1992; Mauzé & Derlon 2003; Seligman & Monroe 2006). The Bodleian regularly makes provision for a copy of the Shikshapatri, a Sanskrit manuscript to be available for devotee-visitors to perform Arati, the ritual lighting of a lamp as an offering to the sacred text. A curator—from the Latin, *cura*, care[1]—is a keeper of heritage, an interpreter, a specialist in exhibitions and documentation, a care giver, with a 'pastoral' responsibility toward a sacred object.

In earlier work I discussed the politics of displays in shrine museums (Chopra 2013; 2018). In this paper I explore the idea of curation as care, concentrating on displays within shrine museums. Curating exhibitions in shrine museums serves a double purpose: displaying sacred heritage but also recognising museum spaces as sacred. The Kendriya Sikh Ajabghar, the Central Sikh Museum in the Darbar Sahib, one of Sikhism's most sacred shrines located in the north Indian city of Amritsar,[2] is just such a space. Among its holdings of sacred art are painted chronicles of the lives of the ten Sikh Gurus and of martyrs of Sikhism.[3] The painted images of these revered persons, exemplars of virtue and morality, are more than mere exhibits in a museum: they are viewed as *mazhbi tasveeran*, literally religious art, akin to devotional objects. Treated as sacrosanct space, the Central Sikh Museum, which I have discussed at length in other work (Chopra 2013; 2018), is to home revered beings and sacred things. Viewers stand before the exhibits as devotees, in bodily attitudes of reverence, with bare feet and heads covered (Fig 1), as they might before the Guru Granth Sahib (the Honoured Scripture as the Guru).[4] Viewing an image in the museum is considered an act of worship. Each painting and object are carefully curated to evoke belief, memory, and history. Paintings and objects signpost momentous events, visually woven together to create a chronicle of Sikh pasts. The museum, therefore, approximates a memorial, actively creating and commemorating what is to be remembered as heritage and history.

A momentous event of the twentieth century 'recounted' and remembered in the exhibits of the Central Sikh Museum is 'Operation Bluestar,'[5] the military operation mounted in June 1984, when the Indian

1 In the Oxford English Dictionary, 'curate' is a member of the clergy with pastoral responsibility. As a verb, curate means to select, organize and look after objects in a collection or an exhibition. The noun curate and its verb form, curate, are etymologically rooted in the Latin cura, 'care' (Lexico 2022). Under the Roman Empire, the title of curator (caretaker) was given to officials in charge of various departments of public works with public responsibilities (Kissane 2010).

2 Several prominent gurudwaras have important museums within their precincts. For example, Anandpur Sahib in Punjab (Singh 2015); and the Sis Ganj gurudwara in Delhi (Singh 2019) among others.

3 Very briefly, Sikhism is a monotheistic religion. A number of scholars of Sikhism have argued that the term 'God' is inappropriate as a translation of Ik Onkar, the Timeless One, and inadequate to understand the meaning of the divine in Sikhism. The word/teaching of the ten Gurus established the congregation, which was sovereign, and maintained that divinity existed in everyone (Fenech & Singh 2014: 154, 225– 226). Martyrs sacrificed their lives in defense of this idea. After the tenth Guru closed the line of succession, the Scripture became personified as Guru and became the center around which the Sikh community coalesced. Martyrs constituted the mobile terrains of piety and were perceived as exemplar beings.

4 In the early years of the eighteenth century, the line of succession was closed by the tenth Sikh Guru and devolved upon the Scripture, the Granth. For Sikhs, the scripture has an authoritative status as the living embodiment of the Guru.

5 The orchestrated military assault on the Sri Darbar Sahib, the eponymous Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar, during the military operation conducted in the first week of June in 1984, is referred to as Operation Bluestar. The army action was executed to dislodge militants who had taken shelter within the sacred complex and had fortified it. The assault on the sacred site is most frequently spoken of as a deeply traumatic event, evoking intense but uneasy remembrances (Chopra 2011: 15, 121–122). The military siege, army occupation, and the shelling of the sacred buildings in the military attack are

army entered the sacred precincts of the Darbar Sahib (Chopra 2011). A bitter, violent battle was fought within the shrine between the Indian army and militant separatists who were demanding a separate state of Khalistan. The battle of Operation Bluestar left its marks upon the shrine's landscape, including the destruction of some of the key buildings within the complex. As a momentous event, Operation Bluestar is widely spoken of and remembered as a wound inflicted by the Indian state upon the Sikh community and its sacred shrine. The wound and the loss are continuously commemorated to this day. Rituals of commemoration—processions, recitations, prayer—are performed in June of every year. Most spectacularly, the exhibits in the gallery spaces of the Central Sikh Museum commemorate the experience of loss. Bullet and tank shells used in the military operation, salvaged from the rubble of destroyed domes and walls, are displayed at the centre and corners of a long gallery in the Museum. A 1987 painting of the damaged dome of the Akal Takhat (Throne of the Timeless One) (Chopra 2011: 137) is prominently displayed. The caption of the painting baldly, but unequivocally, asserts '*Sri Akal Takht fauji hamleh toh baad (6 June 1984)*' (The Akal Takht after the army assault, 6 June 1984). The painting is surrounded by portraits of men who died during the military operation or were subsequently put to death as traitors. The captions under the portraits refer to these men as martyrs, as defenders of Sikhism. Their museum portraits are treated as *mazhbi tasveeran*, sacred art, representations of revered persons (Fig 1).

Figure 1. Visitors and the display of portraits of martyrs at the Central Sikh Museum, Amritsar; © Radhika Chopra (2007)

The gallery opens into the corridor leading out to the museum exit. The corridor is a special exhibition space in itself. The corridor walls are a memorial inscribed with the names of those whose bodies were recovered

perceived as particularly traumatic because of the place of the Darbar Sahib and the Harmandir, the Golden Temple, in Sikh religion and hagiography. The military action was viewed as a forcible occupation and as desecration, ordered and sanctioned by the Indian state (Chopra 2011: 123).

from the debris and could be identified in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar. The blue and white list-on-the-wall is arranged by name, father's name, village and district of the corpse. For many, the corridor is a space for personal and collective remembrance and commemoration. The list-on-the-wall is a substitute for the ritual of *muh dekhna,* a last viewing of the face of the corpse before cremation. (Chopra 2011: 138). In many different respects the Museum is a mnemonic space, where politics and faith intersect, where *viewing* museum exhibits redraws boundaries between sacred and political. The crossing between museum and memorial is evident in the displays of post-Operation Bluestar portraits painted in the early years of the twenty-first century sharing gallery space with images of greater historical pedigree within the Central Sikh Museum.

The contiguity of historically disparate paintings makes the objects and exhibits an analytically important area to understand boundaries and crossings. Among the exhibits, Guru and martyr images are central. These images have become markers of a collective identity, evoked in numerous forms of worship, including most spectacularly, the final prayer—the *Ardas*—recited in shrines at the end of congregational worship when martyrs are invoked and remembered. Martyrs who died defending Sikhism are highly valued as producers of piety. Martyrs continue to be created in response to contemporary politics or social conditions. In the Sikh collective imagination, the invocation of martyrs as defenders of faith is intrinsic to constituting a shared universe of belief. Written and visual chronicles of martyrs become critical texts to reinforce charisma. Visual and written chronicles of martyrdom are carefully compiled, deploying recognizable historical landscapes and incorporating newer events to create the habitus of modern martyrdom. Martyr images are affective objects venerated as *mazhbi tasveeran*, or religious art.

Though the Central Sikh Museum is a key space where images of Sikh Gurus and martyrs are exhibited, the museum is not the only place where images of divinity are found. In the bazaars surrounding the Darbar Sahib, poster portraits of Gurus and martyrs proliferate, actively shaping memories of medieval and modern martyrdom. It is the 'stepping out,' as it were, of the images of Gurus and martyrs, and the placement of sacred beings in 'profane,' mundane spaces of the bazaar that is of particular interest to me. What boundaries are crossed by the bazaar avatars of martyrs? What sense of martyrdom is evoked beyond the confines of the museum and the shrine? What particular intersections of the political with the pious are discernible in their bazaar appearances? Does the contiguity of the bazaar with the shrine compel a synchronised interpretation of souvenir art with exhibits of martyrs of the Central Sikh Museum? Or does the bazaar offer a distinct point of view on martyrdom? If the location of the Central Sikh Museum in the Darbar Sahib enfolds the museum within the space of the shrine, and it is therefore treated as an institutionalised sacred space, then what kinds of spaces are the bazaars, where replicas and posters of pious divine beings are displayed? What should we make of the images and objects of the sacred sold as souvenirs in the shops? In this paper, I take forward my earlier analysis of the politics of modern martyrdom (Chopra 2018), to argue that displays of souvenir art of martyrs in the bazaar contests the singular discourse of martyrdom in the Central Sikh Museum constituted by the displays of modern martyrdom.

Bazaars of Amritsar

This set of questions makes it important to enter and elucidate the complex spaces of the bazaar. The bazaars of numerous pilgrimage centres, including the bazaars of Amritsar, amplify the sacred in commercial transactions. Unfortunately, a comparison with the curated commerce of non-Sikh shrines is beyond the scope of this paper; but the capacity of curated commerce to expand the shrine and the sacred is indisputable. To explore the intersection of commerce with the sacred in this paper I analyse the bazaars of Amritsar which are promoted in tourist brochures as 'must visit' places. Entering or leaving the Darbar Sahib, shop displays of *mazbhbi tasveeran* attract pilgrim-consumers inviting them to dip into their wallets.

Ingeniously crafted and packaged divine collectibles snag a tourist's attention in the competitive spirit of the marketplace.

The work of scholars of material culture (Davis 1996; Jain 2007; Miller 2010; Ramaswamy 2003) is especially interesting for my understanding of how religious art is treated in non-religious spaces like museums and bazaars. As briefly discussed above, sacred objects in museums are recognised as possessing affective, active qualities; but what makes religious souvenirs fascinating is how bazaar displays 'are *designed* to 'act' to animate relations between the devotee and the divine' (Chopra 2018: 54). Sacred souvenirs on shop shelves emphasize piety to boost commercial transactions. Tourist pilgrims might have a predilection toward piety but shopkeepers of religious souvenirs are aware that religious souvenirs are placed in a universe of commercial competition. Unlike a museum display, the affective quality of the sacred souvenir and its ability to access a pilgrim's purse cannot be assumed. Though a highly emotive object, a sacred souvenir is a commodity that competes for attention. 'Spotlighting' a sacred souvenir to stand out amongst a miscellany of objects is imperative for commercial success. To accentuate its special sacred character, shopkeepers treat religious souvenirs differently, setting them apart from other commodities, curating displays that cast an aura around these souvenirs. Distinctive strategies of curation are evident in Fig. 2, where each object draws on each other's ritual value to enhance it. Each object will be dispersed when sold. It is the astute juxtaposition of the dashboard ornament of Baba Dip Singh, nestled against the desk clock with the insignia of Sikhism and Nanak, next to a Golden Temple paper weight enclosed in a dome of plastic, 'framed' by the Indian flag and the Harmandir souvenirs which demonstrate the shopkeepers' *cura* in creating ritual value. The faux jewellery jutting into the display belongs to the universe of the ordinary; its inclusion however, should not be understood as a careless oversight. It seems to me that the vis-à-vis between the 'diamond' bracelet and the plastic-domed shrine paper weight is one of mutual enrichment. Both add lustre to the display and value to each other.

The museum in the shrine and the shops in the bazaar share a key element: the sense of care, *cura*, toward religious artefacts. The deliberate arrangements of sacred souvenirs by ordinary *bazaari-lok* (bazaar folk) create a conscious, purposive aura around them to convey their ritual value. Special packaging, as well as the goods themselves convey a shopkeepers *cura*, the sense of respecting objects invested with 'feelings' of faithfulness. At the same time, sacred souvenirs go beyond the original symbolic value of the religious object, representing the shopkeepers' commercial skills and familiarity with the 'audience' of buyers and consumers. Shopkeepers in shrine bazaars have an expertise located at the busy intersections of subjectivities, events, identities, social processes and the language of things that conveys their care—*cura*—closely resembling curation. Bazaar curation, if I may use the term, impels us to think of shopkeeper as curators, offering a view of special objects in their care. The shopwindow exhibition of objects displays the shopkeeper-curator's perspective, a sense of their being in the world. Objects speak; and shopkeeper-curators speak through the displays and transactions of objects. It is the shopkeepers *cura* that is the focus of this paper.

To elucidate with an instance of shopkeepers' curation, I describe a souvenir produced by two brothers who run a souvenir 'art'[6] shop. The brothers have photographed frescoes painted on the walls of a nine-story Samadhi (cenotaph) in which the remains of Atal Rai (the son of the sixth Sikh Guru, Sri Hargobind) are kept. Part of the Darbar Sahib complex, the frescoes of the Samadhi depict the *janam sakhi*—the life story—of the founder of the Sikhism, Guru Nanak. Pictorial and calligraphed *janam sakhis* were and are cultural documents that enable the spread of Sikhism. Analysing *janam sakhis* Nikki Guninder Kaur

6 To protect privacy, I use a pseudonym for the shop, and call it Sikh Fine Arts. The word 'Art' in the shop sign creates a distinction with other souvenir shops in the bazaar. It indicates the shop owners view of their wares as special objects endowed simultaneously with artistic and divine significance.

Figure 2. A souvenir display. In the foreground an ornament for a car dashboard of Baba Dip Singh, desk clock curio with Nanak and the flag with Khanda insignia, and plastic encased replicas of the Harmandir Sahib, the Golden Temple; © Radhika Chopra (2011)

argues that early *janam sakhis* as the 'stories' of the life of the founder were possibly late sixteenth century hagiographies, passed down 'through the years in a variety of renditions' (Singh 1992: 329).

The frescoes emulate the style of medieval miniature prevalent in North India. The owners of the shop, Sikh Fine Arts, have assembled the photographs of the painted frescoes into 'art' book, marketed as a limited edition. Advertised online, the 'art book' can be couriered overseas in international currencies. The limited-edition book participates in the transactional universe of material objects. Despite bearing all the hallmarks of bazaar souvenirs, the owners of Sikh Fine Arts position their art book of the Baba Atal frescoes as a sacred object, not a common souvenir. To mark the distinction, they have 'enclosed' the book in an elaborately inscribed wooden case, denoting the 'treasure' within. The embossed wooden case endows the book with an affective presence, animating veneration. As an 'account' of Nanak's life the art book is a purposive object that orients the art-book souvenir, and those who purchase it, to the devotional domain. Encasing it sets it apart as sacred art. The owners of Sikh Fine Arts speak of the specially boxed book as an act of preserving a valuable heritage that belongs to Amritsar (and to them). It is a view held to a greater or lesser extent by virtually all the shopkeepers who sell religious souvenirs in the bazaars around the Darbar Sahib complex.

Curating Martyrs in the Bazaar

As in the Central Sikh Museum, martyrs are a large presence in Amritsar's shrine bazaars. Souvenirs of a key martyr of medieval Sikhism, Baba Dip Singh, are widely available in the bazaars. The ubiquity of Dip Singh souvenirs indicates both the significance of Dip Singh and of the value place on martyrdom. In Sikh chronicles, Dip Singh is an uncontestably important signifier of Sikh martyrdom, a saint-warrior, producing hand-written copies of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture[7]. Images of Baba Dip Singh, nestled amidst images of revered figures, are not segregated from other souvenir images. A pavement seller displays posters of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, Guru Govind the tenth and last Guru, and Baba Dip Singh (Fig. 3). He also sells brightly coloured posters of muscled wrestlers, plumb, cheerful naked baby boys,[8] and popular folk singers. When I interviewed him, he said that he always props the Guru posters above the heads of others, to indicate respect, but also to catch the attention of passers-by (Fig. 3). Reverence and profit intersect in the curation of his merchandise.

Figure 3. Detail of a pavement poster-seller's curation of Gurus, martyrs and baby boys; © Radhika Chopra (2007)

Sitting in the shadow of the shrine, the pavement seller's poster exhibition shows his astute understanding of techniques of curation—elevation, positioning, spacing—directing attention to the significance of martyrs in the pilgrim town of Amritsar. His curated display allows me to reflect on two other martyr images evident in the shrine-bazaar. The first are images of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, one of the key militant leaders of the Khalistan movement. In the late twentieth century, Bhindranwale was the

7 A number of scholars note the proficiency of Baba Dip Singh in making copies of the Sikh scripture. Pashaura Singh notes "Another beautiful 'Golden Cover Volume' (*sunahiri bir*) ... prepared by Baba Dip Singh in *sambat* 1783 (1726 CE) is in Damdama Sahib in Bhatinda..." (Singh 2014: 130). Louis Fenech remarks "...the famous Baba Dip Singh (d. 1757?), the misl's founder, who was known for his skill at copying and interpreting the Adi Granth..." (Fenech 1997: 635 fn. 73).

8 In the pavement display of valued, though highly gendered, figures the images of baby boys seems to index the value placed on boys vis-à-vis girls, a value evident in Punjab's sex ratios. It is the nakedness of the male babies, however, which is visually significant. Punjabi mothers often leave their baby boys unclothed, though little girls will always be dressed so that their genitals are completely covered. Gendering sexuality is fundamental to Punjabi culture; the forbidden female genitalia is never exposed though it is palpable in masculine insults and boasts (Chopra 2004; Das 1976; Hershman, 1974).

head of the seminary founded by Baba Dip Singh. Often, souvenir posters of the medieval martyr Baba Dip Singh and the modern martyr, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, are placed side by side. Metonymically identified with the demand for a separate state of Khalistan,[9] controversy surrounded the installation of Bhindranwale's portrait in the Central Sikh Museum. The portrait was hung many years *after* other martyr portraits were displayed in the gallery commemorating the modern martyrs of Operation Bluestar, briefly described above. While it aroused a great interest, Bhindranwale's museum portrait was also met with apprehension. I have discussed the controversy around the portrait at length elsewhere (Chopra 2013; 2018); suffice to say that the legacy of Bhindranwale is surrounded by uneasy remembrance.

In the shrine bazaar, along with images of Baba Dip Singh and Bhindranwale, images of Bhagat Singh, another key martyr, circulate. Bhagat Singh is commonly claimed as a nationalist martyr. Like Baba Dip Singh's political battles with the Mughal regime in the late seventeenth century, both Bhindranwale and Bhagat were crucial to twentieth century Indian politics, Bhagat Singh in his opposition to colonial rule, and Bhindranwale's violent conflict with the post-colonial Indian state. The key difference between the medieval martyr Baba Dip Singh whose souvenir images share space with Gurus, babies, wrestlers and singers, the images of Bhindranwale and Bhagat are seldom juxtaposed. To my mind, this segregation of images in the bazaars of Amritsar today is an exceptional example of bazaar curation.

Rather like the man himself, Bhindranwale souvenirs, have a chequered history. In the decade immediately following Operation Bluestar in 1984, souvenirs of Bhindranwale were not readily available; and remained largely unavailable throughout the period of the military occupation of the Darbar Sahib and the police operations in the state. However, a bookshop, the *Taksali Pustak Bhandar* run by the seminary founded by Baba Dip Singh, and headed by Bhindranwale before he took refuge within the Darbar Sahib in 1982 till his death in June 1984, continuously displayed Bhindranwale images. The *Taksali* bookshop was virtually the only place where souvenir images of Bhindranwale and books on the militant leader were sold through the period of the counterinsurgency. An open-fronted shop, the *Taksali Pustak Bhandar* wares, especially of Bhindranwale, are unusually enclosed within glass cases. Its shop sign prominently displayed a photograph of Bhindranwale. Since I began to document street signage from 2010, the image of the militant leader has faded. It no longer catches the eye as it did when I began the visual documentation. The fading indexes the sense of anxiety around images that stirred up memories of Bhindranwale. The forcible annexation of the Darbar Sahib, the pronouncements broadcast over the outward facing loud-speakers, the audiences held within the shrine his death in the military operation in 1984 within the precincts of the shrine are uncomfortable remembrances. The unease of memory may have been reason enough for the initial commercial failure of his souvenir images. In the immediate aftermath of Operation Bluestar, the Indian states prohibition on assembly under various provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code regulated spaces around the shrine and were part of the reason for the almost complete embargo on Bhindranwale souvenirs. Throughout this period Bhindranwale souvenir images sold only in the *Taksali Pustak Bhandar* which assiduously promoted his writing and his souvenir images.

By 2013, another shop began stocking souvenirs of Bhindranwale[10]. Located in a busy bazaar street leading toward the Darbar Sahib complex, the shop has a prime location. Its displayed goods are always on view for visitors enroute to the shrine. When I first walked along the busy market street in 2007 at the start of my intensive fieldwork of the areas around the shrine, the shop stocked quite run-of-the-mill

9 Though Bhindranwale was not the first to put forward the demand for Khalistan, in popular imagination he is most closely identified with the movement. Bhindranwale was killed during Operation Bluestar along with many of his supporters.

10 The interregnum between 1984 and 2013, when Bhindranwale's images began to be more widely available, is dense with visual politics. The politics surrounding the mounting of his portrait in the Central Sikh Museum in 2011 and the subsequent building of a memorial in his memory are part of that period which I have analysed in detail elsewhere (Chopra 2013; 2018)

souvenirs. By 2013, small painted plaques of Bhindranwale's face with some of his more famous maxims inscribed directly below his painted visage, were hung right outside the shop. By November 2015, after a sizable portrait of the controversial leader was hung in a central gallery of the Central Sikh Museum (Chopra 2018), large images of Bhindranwale became freely available for sale in the bazaar. Many of the bazaar depictions replicated the Museum portrait. Some superimposed an image of the Golden Temple into the frame, placing the militant leader next to the shrine. From the doorway of the main street shop, Bhindranwale wearing a bandolier across his chest, carrying an arrow, dressed in a *choga* (loose, knee length shirt) and blue turban, in the style of shrine functionaries, gazes directly at pilgrim-buyers (Fig. 4). In the Central Sikh Museum portraiture and in souvenir images available in the shrine bazaar, Bhindranwale appears as pious person and martyr, sharing space with the medieval martyr Dip Singh, simultaneously crafting a discourse of modern martyrdom in the vis-à-vis with Bhagat Singh.

Figure 4. Image of Bhindranwale in front of the Akal Takhat, propped up on portraits of Baba Dip Singh. The Bhindranwale image is based on photographs, whereas the colourful image of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, and of Baba Dip Singh, are clearly drawn from painted portraiture; © Radhika Chopra (2015)

Unlike the *Taksali Pustak Bhandar* devoted to Bhindranwale memorabilia, the main street shop sells a miscellany of souvenir art. The shop has 'integrated' Bhindranwale-as-object with a host of other souvenirs and goods. Without overt statement, there is an internal conversation between the *Taksali Putak Bhandar* and the shop in the main street through their stock of souvenirs. Absolutist in its wares and partisan in its orientation, the *Taksali Pustak Bhandar* harks back to memories of a militant past. Over time, the *Taksali* bookshop has faded both visually and economically, with brief moments of revival. Despite the faded

signage, low footfall, and meagre sales, it continues to exist, almost as of its primary purpose is just that—to exist and keep alive the memory of a singular martyr. By contrast, the main street shop positions its plentiful goods in the competitive spirit of the marketplace. It is in the vis-à-vis with other shops that line the street, that the curatorial sensibility of its shop owners is apparent. It clearly and unambiguously foregrounds the politics of martyrdom in its shop window displays. The curated arrangements of modern and medieval martyrs have galvanised the sale of Bhindranwale memorabilia more actively than the *Taksali* bookshop.

The incorporation of the controversial martyr, Bhindranwale, into the souvenir universe and in bazaar curations, has not remained uncontested. Diagonally across from the mainstreet souvenir shop, another street facing shop refuses to 'house' Bhindranwale in its own displays and sale of souvenirs. In the language of material cultures, shop fronts quicken a conversation between shopkeeper-curators, giving voice to their stances toward the politics of militancy and particular martyrs. Through exhibits of souvenir goods, the creation and contestation of political-religious discourses of martyrdom are on display.

The diagonally situated shop across the main street—I will call it Picture House—has an extended frontage more elongated than most others in this street; its displayed wares have the advantage of snagging the attention of passers-by. Like other little shops along the street leading to the Darbar Sahib, Picture House primarily, though not exclusively, sells Sikh religious souvenirs for pilgrims *en route* to the Darbar Sahib. In addition, its souvenir stock includes a large number of images of *devi devta* (gods and goddess) like Bhagwati and Durga, identified with Hinduism. Attractively displayed symbols of Sikhism and Hinduism are sold as items to fix onto car dashboards or hung from rear view mirrors. Among the miscellany of religious souvenirs displayed by Picture House, one remarkable 'non- spiritual' presence is that of the nationalist martyr, Bhagat Singh. A socialist revolutionary associated with the anti-colonial nationalist movement, Bhagat Singh, was executed for shooting an English police officer. Photographs of Bhagat Singh show him dressed in a khaki uniform, with a fedora and sporting a thin, curling moustache, very much in the style of cinematic heroes. Souvenir plaques, poster art, and T-shirts of Bhagat Singh postulate a visual orientation toward Jallianwala Bagh,[11] a memorial that abuts the Darbar Sahib. It is almost universally acknowledged as the place where colonial power was exerted with brutal military muscle in the massacre of people in the park. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre is categorised as one of the early events that energised the nationalist struggle against colonial rule.

Since I began my research on the shrine bazaars of Amritsar, I have always noticed a painted image of Bhagat Singh in uniform exhibited in the elongated frontage of Picture House. More often than not, it has been a framed painting, though printed posters of a uniformed Bhagat Singh are available in other shops. The prominently displayed Picture House painting is placed at street level, almost as if Bhagat Singh is stepping out into the street to become part of the restless throng. Two aspects of the Picture House display are striking. Though Bhagat Singh was only an eleven-year-old child at the time of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, in the painted (as indeed the printed representations) he is always depicted as an adult. The orientation toward Jallianwala Bagh as a site of an emergent nationalism is unmistakable. Both in his painted adult form and the first-person legends printed on T-shirts ('It seems I must return', reads the legend in Gurmukhi), suggests Bhagat's re-incarnation to rescue a polity under threat. The second striking aspect of his Picture House image, is that Bhagat Singh does not wear a fedora or sport a curled moustache,

11 Jallianwala Bagh is a public garden in the vicinity of the Darbar Sahib. It is known for the massacre in 1919 of unarmed protesters who had gathered there on a ritually significant day, Baisakhi (mid-April), to protest against the incarceration of two prominent Punjabi leaders, under the provisions of the colonial Rowlatt Acts (1919), popularly known as the Black Acts. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre became a turning point in the Indian nationalist struggle. Though a museum existed for many years within its precincts, it was not an imposing one. By the late twentieth century, Jallianwala Bagh is one of the few open spaces within the old walled city of Amritsar, providing a space to amble, hold hands or to use the public toilets, not only as a place to remember a traumatic past. History and everyday life existed companionably in the garden. In 2016, it was refurbished to become a museum-cum-memorial space commemorating past persecution and colonial violence. All the elements of commemoration—plaques, a *son et lumiere* and a museum—are present in Jallianwala Bagh.

in the style promoted by state and nationalist poster art. As evident in Fig. 5, he is depicted with a saffron turban (*kesri pag*, a colour popularly associated with protest).[12] His chin sports a light beard, and a revolver, either tucked into his waist band or held in his hand is visibly painted in. The crisp white shirt and khaki trousers are evocative of modern military uniforms. Souvenir memory evokes and celebrates Bhagat Singh as a modern martyr defending the nation, but also claims him as Sikh, placing his portrait next to images of key Sikh Gurus. Bhagat's Sikhism seems to counter the militant fundamentalist Sikhism represented by the *choga* wearing, full-bearded Bhindranwale, carrying the arrow (Fig. 4). The two martyrs face each other across the street, in an unmistakeable visual dialogue, pulling remembrance and allegiance in two distinct directions.

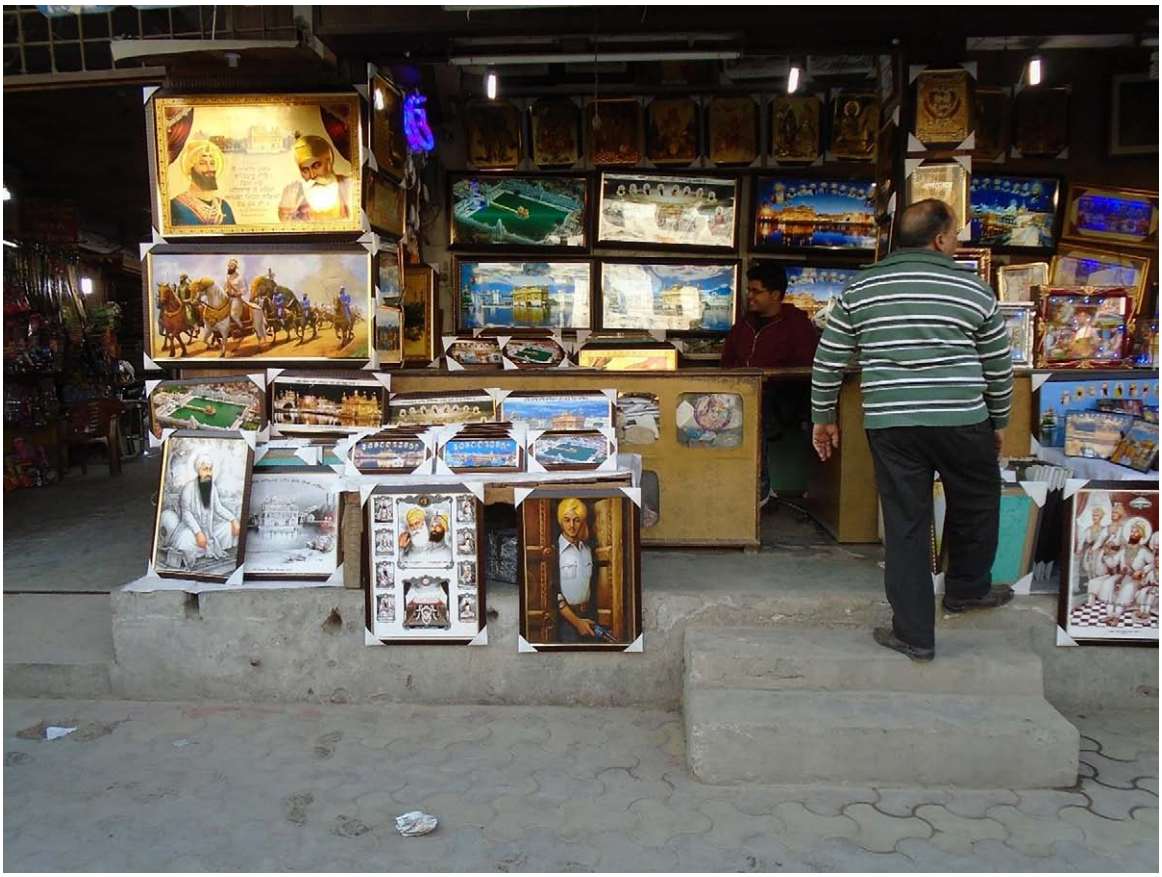

Figure 5. Bhagat Singh, in bazaar souvenir portraits; © Radhika Chopra (2015)

The 'face off' between the portrayals of Bhagat Singh and Bhindranwale are a clearly curated commentary, offered through souvenir objects, of the political credentials of both the Khalistan ideologue and of Bhagat Singh. The sartorial specificity of the image of a uniformed Bhagat in the Picture House display suggests the shopkeeper-curator's interpretation of visual cues to self-consciously portray Bhagat Singh as a modern, valued nationalist martyr, and a nationalist Sikh, simultaneously referencing Bhindranwale's more religious apparel in the images available in the main street shop. Both portraits are publicly displayed, though each evokes a distinct public. Bazaar art Bhagat denotes resistance to the

12 The popular 2006 Bombay film, *Rang de Basanti*, or Colours of Spring (Mehra 2006) celebrating Bhagat Singh and other significant anti-colonial revolutionaries, draws on the connotations between emergent revolutionary spirits, colours of protest, and the blossoming of the yellow mustard flower in *Basant*, Spring..

promotion of Bhindranwale by militant ideologues of Sikhism. Bhagat Singh's portrait 'stepping out' into the bazaar street leading to the shrine is a 'protest' against the power of cliques who promote the doctrines of Khalistan. The metaphoric 'march' to the shrine seems to be a form of resistance by way of the language of things, by those who seek to disengage Sikhism from militant dogmas. Museum curation seeks to fix how martyrs are imagined. Bazaar curations present a variegated view of Sikh philosophies of martyrdom; the bazaar view of martyrdom is dynamic, linking history, heritage, tradition, with contemporary cultures and politics. The two martyr images, of Bhagat and Bhindranwale, are interesting in their differences, but also in the way they seem to converse with one another in continuing the story of martyrdom that is being 'invented' and produced as a chronicle of Sikh history within the shrine—and in the bazaar.

Bazaar curation, evident in the placement and spotlighting of souvenir objects is neither *ad hoc* nor unreflective. Bazaar curations are material accounts, available to all manner of viewers: pilgrims, customers, municipal officials and anthropologists, through techniques of curation evident in shop frontages, signage and displays of souvenir art. The conspicuous curations are responsive to the politics of martyrdom. The visual is critical in foregrounding the debates over martyrdom, offering a point of view generated through transactions with viewers/consumers of images and artefacts. Viewpoints are perceptible in the assembly of artefacts in each shop. Inserting themselves into a discourse of religious sentiment there is a metaphoric 'pointing' toward two spaces that bracket the street - the Darbar Sahib at one end and Jallianwala Bagh at the other. The affective value of martyr representations evokes the creation of 'feeling' toward revered beings housed within different shops. Critical to the displays are the commentaries of shopkeepers as curators, of what, where and how the sacred is constituted and accessed. Speaking through souvenir art, sold in the shrine bazaar, *bazaari lok* (bazaar folk) state, without overt confrontation, the right to comment on what they claim are controversial practices within the shrine museum. Characterising themselves in conversations as 'mere *bazaar* people', 'ordinary' and 'humble', shopkeepers actively offer a distinct position on specific martyrs and postulate 'care' of martyrdom in souvenir art. Through souvenir goods, shopkeeper-curators convey the virtue imbued in each material artefact sold in their respective shops, because, as they see it, those who sell such goods might be ordinary, but are steadfast believers and upholders of the faith. The intimacy between artefact and person is unmistakably voiced in the conversion of the souvenir from 'common' or 'commercial' good to an object invested with ritual value. The staging of the *bazaari* self as 'ordinary' almost humble, enables shopkeeper-curators to comment on *museum* curations, without the drama of overt disapproval. The muffled criticism needs to be understood as an insertion by *bazaari lok* into the conceptual congregational community, and the 'right' they accord themselves to speak through displays of souvenirs.

A shrine and its surrounding bazaar are a place of intricate intersections of distinct economies creating and envisioning 'feelings' for the sacred. The conflicting poster art of Bhagat Singh and Bhindranwale stand testimony to political events that have inflected the shrine and its surrounding bazaar. The political contours of events enter the universe of souvenirs. Ritual objects sold in bazaars cross the threshold to enter the shrine in critical ways. Small vinyl faces of Bhindranwale are found on doorways within the shrine. Pilgrims enter the Darbar Sahib wearing t-shirts on which Bhagat Singh is prominently displayed. In his work on the masjid and the *suq*, the mosque and market, Gilsenan (1977) analyses the sacred canopy the mosque casts over the *suq*. The stamp of bazaar souvenirs upon the spaces within the shrine needs to be considered, for goods of the bazaar are affective in the creation of religious emotion and feeling for the sacred.

The curated universe of religious souvenirs interrogates some recent repudiations of material manifestations of Sikh religious life, denounced as posing a challenge to the pre-eminence of 'the word' in Sikhism. On the other hand, bazaar transactions and discourses uphold the capacity of the material to delineate spaces as special and set apart, encourage worship and orient pilgrims and tourists to places of worship. The universe of ritual goods and souvenirs makes the sacred accessible and understood in the bazaar, through transactions at various levels, that 'make' the souvenir distinctive. Ritual attitude is inculcated by visits to the shrine and views of museum displays in the Central Sikh Museum. From the

perspective of the bazaar, reverence and ritual attitude are equally inculcated by practices of piety promoted in bazaar curations. Martyr images in the museum are 'left behind' once the pilgrim-believer leaves the museum gallery. By contrast, bazaar martyr images enter the home as souvenirs purchased as part of a pilgrimage to the shrine. The sacred souvenir keeps alive the feelings of devotion but is also treated with a degree of intimacy. It might be placed on a bedroom shelf, or at the front door to greet visitors. Importantly, each souvenir emerging from a material universe, represents and reflects contemporary political events and allegiances. Souvenirs are active in creating a sense of religious community and polity. Souvenirs embody sentiments that go beyond conventionally classified religious feeling. The politics of remembrance that was sought to be subdued within the museum displays thrive in bazaars transactions, in shopkeeper displays and pilgrim purchases.

Amritsar, globally acknowledged as a sacred centre for Sikhs is oriented toward the Darbar Sahib. But the shrine is ensconced in the midst of busy bazaars. Though the shrine dominates the city skyline, it nevertheless opens out toward the bazaar and the city. In the contiguity of shrine and bazaar, the placement of martyr portraits in the museum as well as martyr souvenirs of the bazaar offer a perspective of the bazaar as a space of the sacred. Rancière's view resonates in the curation of souvenir art. 'On the other hand, however, the aesthetic revolution is first of all the honour acquired by the commonplace….it shifts the focus from great names and events to the life of the anonymous; it finds symptoms of an epoch, a society, or a civilization in the minute details of ordinary life' (Rancière 2004: 33). Visually and materially, a sense of the core and edges are created through imposing architecture and museum curations. The shrine metaphorically stands at the core. The bazaar, in this paradigm is the periphery. But the goods of the bazaar alter the landscape to tell a different story, of religious feeling marketed in religious goods. Bazaar curations are presented as expressive of faith. Objects are invested with thought, vital to the transaction of ideas, anchored in a key conceptualisation of the bazaar as generative of the sacred. What is presented in bazaar curations—and therefore what viewers see—is not a shop *and* a shrine, but spaces that jointly produce and complete the sacred.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the reviewers of this article for their insightful comments and suggestions which have helped me improve my paper. The lacunae that remain are entirely mine.

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