

The Toshakhana Of Gobindgarh Fort: A Symbol Of Wealth And Power In The Sikh Empire

Manwinder Singh^{1*}, Dr. Mohd Ashraf Dar², Dr. Amita Gupta³

^{1*}Research Scholar, Department of History, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara

² Assistant Professor, Department of History, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara

³Assistant Professor, Center for Comparative Religion and Civilization (CCRC), Central University of Jammu, J&K.

*Corresponding author: singhmanwinder94@gmail.com

How to cite this article: Manwinder Singh, Mohd Ashraf Dar, Amita Gupta (2024). The Toshakhana Of Gobindgarh Fort: A Symbol Of Wealth And Power In The Sikh Empire. Library Progress International, 44(3), 22447-22450.

1. Abstract

The Toshakhana of Gobindgarh Fort stands as an important symbol of wealth, power and rule during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the founder of the Sikh Empire in the early 19th century. This fortified treasury was originally designed to protect the vast wealth of the empire including the famous Kohinoor diamond which represents the political and economic power wielded by the Sikh rulers. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the Toshakhana's architectural and cultural significance, exploring its role in the administrative and military strategies of the Sikh Empire. An examination of historical records, archaeological evidence and modern conservation efforts can trace the Toshakhana's transition from a safe vault of imperial treasures to a contemporary museum. In addition, this research highlights the role of the Toshakhana as a symbol of the centralized power of the Sikh monarchy and its relationship with the wider socio-political landscape of 19th century Punjab. These findings contribute to an understanding of how treasuries like the Toshakhana not only held material wealth, but also strengthened the ideological and strategic foundations of imperial rule.

Keywords: Toshakhana, Gobindgarh Fort, Sikh Empire, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Punjab, treasure, Kohinoor diamond, fort architecture, historical preservation

2. Introduction

Toshakhana is called "treasure house" or "treasury" in Persian and Urdu. It is a facility where valuables such as gifts, antiques and treasures acquired by the royal family or officials are stored. Traditionally it was used by kings, rulers or the government to manage gifts and valuables given to foreign dignitaries, heads of state and during public events.

Gobindgarh Fort was built by Sardar Gujar Singh Bhangi of Bhangi Misal in 1760 AD. After the conquest of the fort by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the founder of the Sikh Empire, it was reconstructed in 1805. The fort was built to protect Amritsar from attacks, especially from British and Afghan forces, and to protect the city's treasures. Gobindgarh Fort became the center of military and political power for the Sikh Empire. As the empire expanded under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the fort was strengthened with modern fortifications, including European-inspired defenses. The Toshakhana of Gobindgarh Fort is of great historical importance as it was the treasury of the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early 19th century. The fort in Amritsar itself was a symbol of power, military might and wealth. Toshakhana means "treasure house". It was built to guard the immense wealth of the empire, including gold, silver and precious jewels. It contained an array of valuable treasures, rare artifacts and jewelry. Among its most important materials was the famous Kohinoor diamond which became a symbol of the wealth and influence of the Sikh Empire. This structure was not only a repository of material wealth, it was a strategic center for the empire's economic power and sovereignty. The wealth stored within the Toshakhana funded military campaigns, fortifications and the vast administration of the empire. It also represents the centralized authority of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as a physical reminder of the empire's prosperity and its ruler's ability to defend it. After the British occupied Punjab in 1849, Toshakhana's wealth, including the Kohinoor diamond, was confiscated and taken to Britain as a symbol of the fall of the Sikh Empire. Today, the Toshakhana is a preserved part of the Gobindgarh Fort, serving as a museum that connects visitors with the rich history of the

Sikh Empire and its heritage. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 AD, his empire suffered internal strife and Toshakhana became a symbol of wealth coveted by competing factions. The fort and its treasury came under British control during the First Anglo-Sikh War (1845–1846) and the subsequent occupation of Punjab by the British in 1849. In the second half of the 19th century, the British used the Gobindgarh fort for military purposes and the Toshakhana was rebuilt. Much of the treasure, including the Koh-e-Noor diamond, was taken by the British and eventually became part of the British Crown Jewels. The Toshakhana was not only a repository of wealth but also a symbol of the strength and prosperity of the Sikh Empire. The accumulation of wealth in Toshakhana was a key aspect of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's ability to expand his empire, modernize his army, and maintain alliances. In modern times Gobindgarh Fort is a popular historical site and efforts have been made to preserve its heritage. The Toshakhana of Gobindgarh Fort is part of the historical narrative that depicts the glory of the Sikh Empire and the strategic importance of the city of Amritsar as a center of military and economic power in 19th century Punjab.

3. Architectural and Historical Legacy of the Toshakhana

In the center of the Gobindgarh fort is the colonial bungalow to the right (northern direction) of which is the Toshakhana. The building was made of lime plaster. The building of Toshakhana was built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Toshakhana is located in the center below the wall of the northern fort. It is a square building. Toshakhana is divided into two chambers. The walls are supported by a masonry ornamental tower. These buttresses are three-faced tapping column sports with domestic capital. The two chambers have low vault ceilings that are covered by a single vault over them - a double vault system. The 1.5-meter-thick walls and mansions are made of Nanakshahi bricks in lime mortar. No evidence of actual flooring can be seen. Along the wall of a building, living quarters were built for the soldiers. On the south side of the building, a copper electrical transmission system was found. A replica of Kohinoor can also be seen here. It is said that no jeweller has been able to guess the value of Kohinoor diamond. Kohinoor is probably the most famous diamond in the world due to the fact that it was placed here before the British took it away. Which has made the entire country curious about the fort. Maharaja Ranjit Singh received the Koh-e-Noor from the deposed ruler of Afghanistan, Shah Shuja, in 1813 as part of a settlement between the two rulers. Many people from all walks of life watch it, making it one of the best tourist destinations in India. It is believed that Maharaja Ranjit Singh kept a treasure of crores of rupees, 30 lakhs (royal money of that time) and precious jewels and gold and silver were kept in the fort under the guard of 2000 soldiers.

4. Importance of Toshakhana of Gobindgarh Fort

The Toshakhana of Gobindgarh Fort served as the central financial repository for the Sikh Empire. It housed the state's wealth including gold, silver, coins, jewels and valuables. Ranjit Singh's expansion of his kingdom required constant financial support. The revenue stored in the Toshakhana enabled the Sikh Empire to maintain and modernize its army, including the acquisition of advanced European weapons and military training. Toshakhana's wealth was used to build forts, roads and religious institutions. The Gobindgarh fort was maintained and upgraded along with other forts like Phillaur and Govindgarh using these funds. The Toshakhana contributed greatly in bringing wealth and power to the Sikh Empire, which facilitated alliances with other states and European institutions. This boosted Ranjit Singh's diplomatic efforts and helped secure the loyalty of local chiefs and rulers. Treasury is a symbol of centralized control. Ranjit Singh was a far-sighted ruler who created a well-organized administrative system in which revenue was centralized and stored in Toshakhana like at Gobindgarh. From here the resources of law enforcement, governance and overall functioning of the state could be deployed in different parts of the empire as needed. Control of wealth was essential to maintain the loyalty of the nobles and soldiers, who were compensated for their services. Efficient resource management by Toshakhana was thus crucial to the stability of the empire. The wealth of the Sikh empire was not only amassed from conquests, but also from taxes, trade and tributes from local chieftains. The Toshakhana helped ensure the economic stability of the empire by consolidating wealth generated from multiple sources into one safe place to enable efficient budget allocation for various state functions. This economic strength was reflected in the empire's relatively high standard of living for its subjects, which in turn ensured public loyalty to the administration.

The Toshakhana was a visible and tangible symbol of the prosperity, power and freedom of the Sikh Empire. It has preserved not only financial wealth but also cultural treasures, such as precious artefacts, ceremonial objects and jewelry that represent Punjab's artistic and spiritual heritage. The famous Koh-i-Noor diamond and other precious jewels were symbols of imperial grandeur and prestige that were an integral part of the cultural identity of the Sikh rulers. As the spiritual and temporal leader of the Sikhs, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's wealth was not merely personal but was seen as the collective wealth of the Khalsa, which contributed to the Sikh ethos of shared governance and prosperity. The resources stored in the Toshakhana also contributed greatly to cultural and religious patronage. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was known for his contributions to Sikh Gurdwaras such as the Harimandar Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar where he covered the shrine with gold, enhancing its cultural and religious significance. The wealth of the Toshakhana supported the construction and renovation of these

religious centers which were central to Sikh cultural life.

This patronage of religious and cultural institutions was key to instilling a sense of unity and identity among the Sikhs while contributing to the cultural development of the empire. The wealth of the Toshakhana was used in gifts and diplomacy, which facilitated cultural exchange between the Sikh Empire and other states. was an important aspect of Lavish gifts of gold, jewelry and artefacts from the Toshakhana helped maintain relations with foreign dignitaries and neighboring states. With which cultural diplomacy was encouraged. Such exchanges contributed to the culture of Punjab during the reign of Ranjit Singh. The wealth of Toshakhana under Maharaja Ranjit Singh encouraged efforts to preserve and promote Sikh cultural identity. This included the creation of Gurmukhi manuscripts, financial support for the building of Sikh educational institutions and providing support for the preservation of historic Gurdwaras. By utilizing the resources of the Toshakhana in this way, the Sikh Empire promoted a strong cultural heritage that resonated throughout Punjab at the time.

5. Comparative view of Toshakhana of Gobindgarh Fort

The Mughal Empire at its height controlled much of the Indian subcontinent during the 16th to 18th centuries. Its treasury was located in the fort of the royal capital Agra, which later shifted to Delhi. The Mughal royal treasury, like the Toshakhana at Gobindgarh, housed wealth derived from taxes, nazrana and war booty. Like the Sikh treasury, the Mughal treasury was essential for maintaining a large army and a sound administrative system. Wealth enabled the Mughals to fund extensive military campaigns and maintain a centralized bureaucracy. The Mughal treasury played a major role in cultural patronage, especially under Shah Jahan whose wealth financed the construction of monumental architecture such as the Taj Mahal. In contrast, Maharaja Ranjit Singh used the wealth of the Gobindgarh Toshakhana to fund religious and cultural projects such as the gilding of the Golden Temple. Both treasures enabled their rulers to leave lasting legacies through monumental architecture and cultural enrichment. Like the Toshakhana of the Sikh Empire, the Mughal treasury also held items of incredible value, such as the Peacock Throne and the Koh-Noor diamond. After the Mughals, the diamond came to the Sikhs and was later handed over to the British.

6. Preservation and Modern Relevance

The Toshakhana of Gobindgarh Fort is a treasure of great historical importance. It is not only a symbol of the power of the Sikh Empire but also a symbol of cultural continuity in modern India. Its transformation from a military treasure to a heritage and educational site reflects wider global efforts to preserve historic structures, while reintegrating them into contemporary cultural and public life.

Preservation

After decades of neglect, efforts to restore and preserve the Gobindgarh Fort and its Toshakhana began in the early 21st century, spearheaded by both the Punjab government and various cultural heritage organizations. A number of key initiatives have been undertaken to preserve the structural integrity of the fort and reimagine its role in the public realm: The main conservation projects aimed at stabilizing the architectural structure of Gobindgarh Fort and its Toshakhana which had fallen victim to the ravages of time and conflicts. This included restoring the fort's ramparts, rebuilding areas damaged during the British era and preserving the Toshakhana's original design elements such as its storage vaults and corridors. The maintenance of Gobindgarh Fort is carried out through Public-Private Partnership. This has allowed more investment in the restoration process. Extensive archaeological work has been enabled in collaboration with heritage conservation agencies. This work ensures that both Gobindgarh Fort and Toshakhana are restored to historical accuracy. An important part of conservation efforts is focused on adaptive reuse where the fort and its structures, including the Toshakhana, are repurposed for modern cultural and educational functions. This approach has ensured that the fort remains relevant in a rapidly changing social context while maintaining its historical integrity. Now it has been converted to 'Coin Museum'. Efforts have also been made to digitally document the architectural and historical elements of Toshakhana. These digital records serve as both a backup for physical preservation and an educational resource for future generations. This initiative is in line with a larger global trend of using digital tools to preserve and promote cultural heritage.

Modern Relevance

In modern times the Toshakhana Gobindgarh Fort plays an important role as part of the museum which educates people about the history of the Sikh Empire. Visitors can see artefacts, replicas and exhibits that depict the legacy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Toshakhana's role in ruling the empire and the fate of treasures like the Koh-e-Noor diamond. It has had a positive economic impact on the region, promoting local crafts and promoting Amritsar as a cultural and historical destination. Tourist arrivals in turn help fund ongoing conservation efforts. Toshakhana is not just a static museum but part of a living cultural revival. Events like cultural festivals, re-enactments and traditional performances take place inside the fort, keeping the spirit of Sikh history and culture alive. It is important to promote Punjabi heritage and foster a deeper understanding of the historical context of the region.

The fort and its Toshakhana serve as an educational tool for schools, universities and researchers. By offering guided tours, lectures and interactive exhibits, the site promotes awareness of Sikh history, Indian colonial encounters and heritage conservation. This coincides with a larger trend in heritage sites globally where the focus has shifted to active education and public engagement. For the people of Punjab, the Toshakhana is a powerful symbol of their historical identity and pride in the Sikh Empire. The effort to preserve it is part of a wider movement to reclaim and celebrate Punjab's rich past. The story of the Toshakhana treasures, particularly the saga of the Koh-i-Noor diamond, resonates deeply in local and national narratives making it relevant to both cultural memory and historical scholarship. The revival of Toshakhana in the context of global heritage conservation is a reflection of worldwide efforts to preserve historical treasures and forts as sites of shared memory. Similar to the Tower of London or Topkapi Palace, Toshakhana now stands not only as a symbol of the past but as a living heritage site continues to contribute to regional identity and global historical dialogue.

7. Conclusion

After Lahore, the biggest and holy city in the Sikh kingdom was Amritsar, due to which Gobindgarh Fort was built here. The Toshakhana of this fort which was once the center of wealth and rule of the Sikh Empire has been transformed into a vibrant cultural heritage site that combines history and modernity. Its conservation efforts marked by restoration, adaptive reuse and digital documentation have not only protected the physical structure but also revived its historical and cultural significance. As a museum, educational hub and tourist destination Toshakhana serves as a living monument to the glory of the Sikh Empire. It instills pride in Punjab's past and promotes cultural and historical awareness. Toshakhana's heritage as a treasure of governance has evolved into a repository of cultural memory that demonstrates the power of heritage preservation in shaping contemporary identity. The modern relevance of the site highlights the enduring value of historic treasures in education, cultural revitalization and economic development. In conserving Toshakhana we not only honor the past but also ensure that it remains a source of inspiration and connection for future generations.

References

1. Grewal, J.S. (1998). *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Singh, P. (2013). *Empire of the Sikhs: The Life and Times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (J. M. Rai, Ed.). Peter Owen Publication.
3. British Library: Sikh Empire and Ranjit Singh.
4. Singh, Khushwant. *History of the Sikhs: Volume 2: 1839-1988*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
5. Grewal, J.S. *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (The New Cambridge History of India). Cambridge University Press, 1998.
6. Singh, K.S. (2004). *People of India: Punjab*. Anthropological Survey of India.
7. Anand, Anita. *Koh-i-Noor: The History of the World's Most Infamous Diamond*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.
8. Hooja, R., & Jain, S. (2016). *Conserving Fortified Heritage: Vol. Chapter six- Brick Fort of Punjab by Grumeet Singha Rai*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
9. Dhillon, K. S. (2011). *ROLE OF SELECT COURTIER AND OFFICIALS AT LAHORE DARBAR (1799)* (Doctoral dissertation, PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA).
10. Mishra, S., & Sahni, S. Bazar in Medieval India—Case of Amritsar.
11. Nagar, S., & Rama, M. L. S. IMPORTANCE OF MONUMENTS IN SIKH
12. HISTORY. *MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH'S MONUMENT AND OTHER HISTORICAL PLACES IN AMRITSAR*.