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## Beyond Kartarpur

Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro believes the possibilities for religious tourism in Potohar are understated

 by [Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro](#) — November 22, 2019 in [Features](#), [Heritage](#) [1](#)

Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib at Kanoha

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The recent opening of the Kartarpur Corridor is a watershed in Indo-Pak history. The Kartarpur Corridor connects the Dera Baba Nanak shrine in India's Punjab with the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan's Punjab, and it will promote not only Sikh religious tourism but also play a pivotal role in regional peace. The Kartarpur Darbar is believed to be the second holiest site for Sikhs where Baba Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, spent the last 18 years of his life.

Pakistan has a large number of sites belonging to the Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Christian and Sikh traditions. Like other regions of Pakistan, Potohar in the Punjab is host to a number of religious tourist sites which can be promoted to attract both domestic and international tourists. One such site, which has great potential to attract domestic as well as international tourists, is Kanoha – which is located about 10 km from Kallar Syedan town in Rawalpindi district. Kanoha has historic significance for those Sikhs who left Pakistan to Indian Punjab after the 1947 Partition. For there is located the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib at Kanoha in Kallar Syedan tehsil, Rawalpindi. It is believed that Sant Attar Singh Ji of Mastuana (1866-1927) mediated in the forest near Kanoha which was called Palahi di Jhangi (the forest of Cassia).



Sant Teja Singh Ji – (Image Courtesy – The Kalgidhar Trust, Baru Sahib, Himachal Pradesh, India)

Before becoming a Sant, he was a soldier in 54 Sikh Battalion in 1885 which was stationed at Abbottabad. Sant Attar Singh Ji used to spend most of his time in prayers and after serving four years in the army, he left it. He started to mediate at many places in Punjab, Muzaffarabad etc. Many people became his disciples over a period of time. On the request of his devout disciples Bhai Wazir Singh and his wife Bhag Bhari who had wished that Sant Attar Singh Ji undertake Akhand Paath (a three-day uninterrupted rendition of sacred hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib), he went to Thamali village. It is believed that after recitation of Akhand Paath, Sant Attar Singh Ji stayed in the Gurdwara of Thamali for two days and afterwards he went to mediate at Palahi di Jhangi near Kanoha and disappeared for several days. His disciples Bhai Wazir Singh and his wife Bhag Bhari kept searching for him and were very worried. They eventually found him mediating in a jungle near Kahoha. Later on Sant Attar Singh Ji mediated in a Kutiya (hut) which Bhai Wazir Singh had built for him at Kanoha. He also mediated at Luni near Kallar Syedan town, but he spent much time in mediating at Kanoha itself.

Sant Attar Singh Ji undertook a campaign to educate people about the Gurmat (tenets of the Gurus) and a pious way of life. After his death in 1927, his chief disciple Sant Teja Singh Ji (1877-1965) continued to spread his thought and ideology. Sant Teja Singh Ji earned an MA and LLB from the University of the Punjab. Later, he also did an MA from Harvard University. Sant Teja Singh Ji toured the entire Potohar region, collecting donations for the construction of the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib.



Interior view of Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib at Kanoha

In 1935, the construction of the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib was started by Sant Teja Singh Ji, on the place where Sant Attar Singh Ji practiced tapas (austerities). The land for the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib was donated by Bhag Bhari, an ardent follower of Sant Attar Singh Ji.

In 1936, Teja Singh Ji traveled through the entire Potohar area including Kallar, Kanoha, Thamali (now called Dhamali), Beval, Kahuta, Choha Khalsa, Thoha Khalsa, Nara, Mator, Rawalpindi and even further out to Peshawar, Kohat, Nowshera etc. This was done for collecting donations for the construction of the second storey of the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib. The third storey of Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib was completed with the donations by Bhai Prem Singh Ji of Kahuta. The dome or canopy over the Gurdwara Tapiana was made with the donations of Sikh sangat (community) of Potohar in 1940.

The Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib is a three-storey structure crowned with canopy, a distinctive feature of the Potohari style of Gurdwaras. The Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib is built in a square plan. It was designed on the pattern of the Gurdwara Tarn Taran Sahib.

Arches have been created on the four sides of the structure, adding beauty to it. It has four entrances from all cardinal directions. However, the western entrance has been closed. There are donor plaques above each of the entrances. These donor plaques in Gurmukhi have a lot of interesting information about the places, people and their contributions in the construction of the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib at Kanoha. The plaques also tell lot about the major Sikh settlements in Potohar region.

The main entrance of the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib opens to the south. From this entrance, one enters the main hall of the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib. The main hall had been divided into small cells which lie east and west of the main hall flanked by deep recessed arches.

The Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib is a three-storey structure crowned with a canopy, a distinctive feature of the Potohari style of Gurdwaras

A distinctive feature of the main hall is the presence of foliated pillars and inscriptions that are fixed on the eastern wall. Formerly, it was adorned with paintings. Unfortunately, now, the plaster has come off.

There are about 21 donor plaques fixed on the main entrances and the walls of the first, second and third storey. Three donor plaques are also found on the canopy. These donor plaques show the names and amount which was contributed. Some plaques show the amount which was donated by donor in the memory of their daughters, fathers and mothers.

In 1965, Teja Singh ji, the ardent disciple of Sant Attar Ji, established the Kalgidhar Trust, Baru Sahib, which is now running 129 English-medium Schools and two universities in northern India – providing a modern scientific education blended with a spiritual ethos.

Given the historical and spiritual importance of the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib at Kanoha, in Kallar Syedan tehsil, the authorities concerned should restore the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib and promote it as religious tourism site. The Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) should also chalk out a strategy to provide information and arrange trips for the Sikh pilgrims to the Gurdwara Tapiana Sahib. They would have to highlight the historic and spiritual importance of the place to those Sikh pilgrims who come to celebrate the Baisakhi festival at the Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hassan Abdal.

*The author is an anthropologist and teaches at the Department of Development Studies, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Islamabad. He may be contacted at: zulfi04@hotmail.com*

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**Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro**

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