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## AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SARBLOH TRADITIONAL ORNAMENTS OF NIHANG SINGHS

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### Contents-

<b>AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SARBLOH TRADITIONAL ORNAMENTS OF NIHANG SINGHS</b> .....	5573
<b>KEY WORDS-</b> .....	5574
<b>INTRODUCTION-</b> .....	5574
<b>PURPOSE FOR THE STUDY-</b> .....	5575
<b>OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:</b> .....	5576
<b>METHOD USED FOR THE DATA COLLECTION-</b> .....	5576
<b>SCOPE OF STUDY-</b> .....	5576
<b>HISTORY OF SARBLOH:</b> .....	5576
<b>THE ATTIRE OF NIHANG SIKHS-</b> .....	5577
<b>JANGI KARA-</b> .....	5577
<b>CHAINMAIL(SANJO)-</b> .....	5577
<b>TEGH-</b> .....	5577
<b>TREHSOOL MUKH-</b> .....	5578
<b>CHAND CHKRI TEER DUMALA-</b> .....	5578
<b>BATTA-</b> .....	5578
<b>CONCLUSION-</b> .....	5582

## Article Info

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**ABSTRACT-**

The present paper attempts to delve into the significance and the dynamics of the traditional ornaments of Sarbloh used as decorative materials in the headgear of the Nihang Sighs which is an integral part of Sikh cultural heritage. The historical background of the significance of Sarbloh in Sikhism is traced in the command of the seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai Sahib in the mid of seventeenth century. The Guru sahib has exhorted the community to use the utensils made of Sarbloh (the wrought Iron) in their day-to-day life. But the utilitarian aspect of Sarbloh gained a new dimension only in the time of the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Sahib in the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was the period when the Guru Sahib laid the foundation of Khalsa panth which is an important socio-cultural, religious, and political institution of Sikhism. The Akali Nihang Sighs who are the custodian and the dedicated and committed warriors of the Khalsa panth, follow a specific dress code and wear a special kind of headgear made of blue colour turban known as Dumala sahib. The Nihang Sighs traditionally decorate Dumala saheb with different Sarbloh ornaments viz. Chakram, Aadchan, Teer, Khanda, Chakrakhanda etc. The colour of the attire and the use of Sarbloh as the decorative and protective materials of the Nihang Sighs signifies bravery, spiritualism, impartiality, martyrdom etc. All these are in accordance with the Khalsa dress code, which is strictly adhered by the Nihang Sighs who are baptized in the fold of Sikhism. To unfold the myriad stories, folk tales etc associated with this important Sikh heritage and to explore the approaches to keep this heritage alive and vibrant in the contemporary times, the researcher has done a meticulous study and followed research methodologies like surveys, interviews, video recordings and photography.

**KEY WORDS-** Sarbloh, Khalsa, Panth, Nihang, Heritage, Dumala, Chakram, Khanda

**INTRODUCTION-**

Paradoxically the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed the emergence of new philosophical ideas and cults across the Globe. In western World important cultural movements were making their presence. Renaissance has now added a new dynamism in man's life and put him in the centre of affairs. Immediately after this Reformation in the 15<sup>th</sup> and in 16<sup>th</sup> centuries gained momentum. Far away from Europe, Islam which had made its appearance in the deserts of Saudi Arabia in the 7<sup>th</sup> century was also making its tremendous effect and impact. The various caliphate houses with the monotheistic messages were reaching to faraway lands. The Indian subcontinent during this period was politically divided but its political chaos was in no way hinderance in the advent and assimilation of new ideas from the foreign lands with its own local belief system. This was a period of intense debate and communication on various issues surrounding around man's life. Various Saints and Sufis during this period started discussing and narrating religious ideologies and tried to create an atmosphere of harmony and conciliation rather strife and animosity. They were so organised and focussed that the period began to be called Indian enlightenment or the renaissance period. In the political arena it was a period of change in the dynasties. The Mughals were all set to replace the Lodhis, the last dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate and were finally uprooted in 1526. During this period in the

cultural and intellectual sphere too there were obvious upheavals. The Sufi and the Bhakti saints were making hard attempts for reconciliation among sects and faiths with rationalism and logics. In these charged atmospheres of the period, we find the emergence of a new socio-religious and cultural sect called Sikhism. Guru Nanak Sahib is historically regarded as the founder of Sikhism in 1469 A.D at a place called Talwandi, now in Pakistan. Since the time-honoured Indian subcontinent has the warriors known for their valour as Nihang or Akali “guru ki fauj” stated by guru Har Gobind. Their traditional dress is “Khalsa Swarupa”. has historical significance adopted in the era of the Mughal empire, blue clothes in the rehat of 10<sup>th</sup> Sikh guru Sri guru Gobind Singh ji at the time of Akali panth, their prestigious ornaments which is also used as protective gears both by men and women. Such as swords, spears, and embellish turbans surmounted by steel quoits. They fought ferociously. Akali Phula Singh ji was a saint of the Khalsa shaheedan misl and head of the Buddha dal in early 19 centuries. Their traditional attire is the symbol of their thinking.

The development of Sikh power is the most notable development in the 18th and 19th century political history of the Punjab area. Banda Singh (1670-1716) undertook an endeavour for Sikh self-governance following the passing of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708. Gobind's disciples, the Khalsa, were eventually divided into twelve groups, or Misls. Constant incursions by outsiders, frequently insatiable Afghans. The raiders frequently attacked women, and the beauty and valour of Punjabi women were renowned. Women have been instructed in order to safeguard themselves, their families, houses, and towns since ancient times. They were known as sikhnian. “Sikhnian” is an appellation referring to Sikh women in multiple historical documents after the 1700s. It is the feminine variant of the term “Singh”, which is used to refer to all Sikh males. The term denotes defiance and courage, both of which are attributes possessed by Sikh women.

#### **PURPOSE FOR THE STUDY-**

Traditional clothing is made up of conventional costumes and accessories. Nihang Sikhs’ traditional costume not only gives them a unique status, but it also contributes significantly to Sikh culture. However, the study done thus far on them cannot be regarded sufficient. As a result, an in-depth study must be done to bring awareness to the peculiar importance of the Nihang Sikhs’ customary attire.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

- (1) Metal which is used have scientific significance. They wear them on the special occasions like Hola Mohalla, Vaisakhi and visit their religious places with sangat.
- (2) Metal is having historical significance.
- (3) Metal is having technological significance.

**METHOD USED FOR THE DATA COLLECTION-**

This study uses snowball sampling methodology to collect data from key informants within a community. This method identifies participants and expands the sample through referrals, allowing for a broader and diverse pool of individuals with relevant knowledge and experiences. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of interconnected social networks and communities and enhancing the inclusivity and richness of the collected data.

**SCOPE OF STUDY-**

The scope of this study encompasses an investigation into ornaments crafted from sarbloh, exploring their scientific, technological, and historical implications. This research endeavours to delve into the intricate interplay between sarbloh-based ornamentation and its multifaceted significance, ranging from its material composition to its cultural and technological underpinnings. Also, it aims to explain the evolutionary trajectory of these ornaments, shedding light on their role in societal practices and technological advancements throughout history.

**HISTORY OF SARBLOH:**

“Sarbloh” is a distinct and unique metal that holds profound significance in the Sikh faith. This high-carbon iron alloy is not only an integral part of Sikh history but also a symbol of Sikh spirituality and identity. The term “sarbloh” itself translate the “All-iron” or “Wrought iron” in English, although these translations don't fully capture the essence of this special metal.

Importance of Sarbloh is deeply rooted and Sikh tradition and the “Maryada”, which encompasses the code of conduct and practices followed by Sikhs. It is a metal that played a pivotal role in the creation of the Khalsa, the community of initiated Sikhs under the guidance of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. The “Ambrosial Nector” used for the Khalsa initiation was prepared in a sarbloh bowl, stirred with a sarbloh double-edge sword “Khanda”. This historic event symbolizes the unity, spirituality and discipline that the Khalsa embodies. The use of sarbloh articles, such as kara (bracelet) and other items, holds deep spiritual and symbolic significance within sikhism. Choosing sarbloh over other metals underscores values of humility, simplicity and detachment from materialism, all of which are core principles of the sikh faith. Sarbloh's

importance extends beyond its historical context. It's a tangible link to Sikh heritage, a visual marker of Sikh identity, and a reminder of the teachings of the gurus. This metal continues to be an emblem of the Sikh community's unity, strength, and commitment to spiritual growth.

### **THE ATTIRE OF NIHANG SIKHS-**

In the Sikh faith adherents engage in a practice of adorning themselves with iron, a symbolic gesture that embodies their commitment to their religious and cultural heritage. This ritual involves the habitual wearing of 1 to 7 iron quoits affixed to their turbans, which are intentionally elevated to towering heights by inserting a knife at the apex and enriching with an iron chain. Additionally, Sikh men commonly carry three or four supplementary knives within their turbans, alongside a spear and many swords secured around their waistband. Notably, this tradition extends to Sikh women, like their male counterparts, proficiently armed and renowned for their weapons adeptly in times of necessity. This deeply ingrained aspect of Sikh identity underscores a broader ethos of martial preparedness and resilience within the community, rooted in a history of defending religious freedoms and upholding principles of justice and righteousness.

### **JANGI KARA-**

The steel bracelet, termed as a kara, is one of the first articles of clothing that a Nihang would wear. The bracelet made from sarbloh acted as both a physical shield during swordfights and a reminder of the commitments a Nihang had made when it was worn on the stronger hand of the warrior. The devotion of warrior to God was to be reflected in its strength, with the unbroken chain of steel serving as a representation of both God's enduring presence and the wearer's unwavering faith.

### **CHAINMAIL(SANJO)-**

A chain shirt was an essential piece of a Nihang's gear. Chainmail, or sanjo, has a long history in Punjab dating back to its arrival by the Persians in the early first millennium. Muskets were used in 18th-century combat, and the Nihang were certainly skilled in their utilization, nevertheless they were stagnant and unreliable, and an actual battle was always determined by swords and weapons.

### **TEGH-**

In addition to the traditional kirpan, or dagger, that Sikhs carry, the term "sword" or "Tegh" refers to a broad, curved blade that is "ten fists long". These weapons stand for a dedication to individualism, made from sarbloh a promise to avenge evil and defend the good in the world.

After acts of kindness and generosity (referred to as “the kettle” or “deg”) had failed, the use of the tegh was to be reserved as a last resort.

### **TREHSOOL MUKH-**

The highest honour for a Nihang was to carry the trident, known as the Trehsool Mukh, made from sarbloh on his turban after having distinguished himself in combat. This demonstrated the powerful connection of warrior with Shiva and offered a lethal, close-range weapon of last resort.

### **CHAND CHKRI TEER DUMALA-**

This handmade shastra is made up of sarbloh as the name suggests that it has a half-moon which is just above the ring which is known as Chakri and these two are placed on the teer. which combines and make it as a whole Chand Chakri teer. The word Dumala “du” means two “mala” means cloth. It is used for the base of turban and another cloth will wrap around the base and it will make turban itself.

### **BATTA-**

Guru Gobind Singh ji used a sarbloh vessel, a “batta” to prepare Amrit, the sacred water of initiation, in his ritual. this choice holds significant significance in Sikh history, symbolizing the sanctity and purity of the initiation process. The spiritual and cultural importance of sarbloh is linked to the foundational events that shaped Sikh identity and ethos. The use of sarbloh in Amrit serves as a tangible embodiment of the enduring principles and values espoused by Guru Gobind Singh Ji.



**Gajga teer dumala**



**Kirpan dumala**



**Chand chakri khanda**



**Nagni**

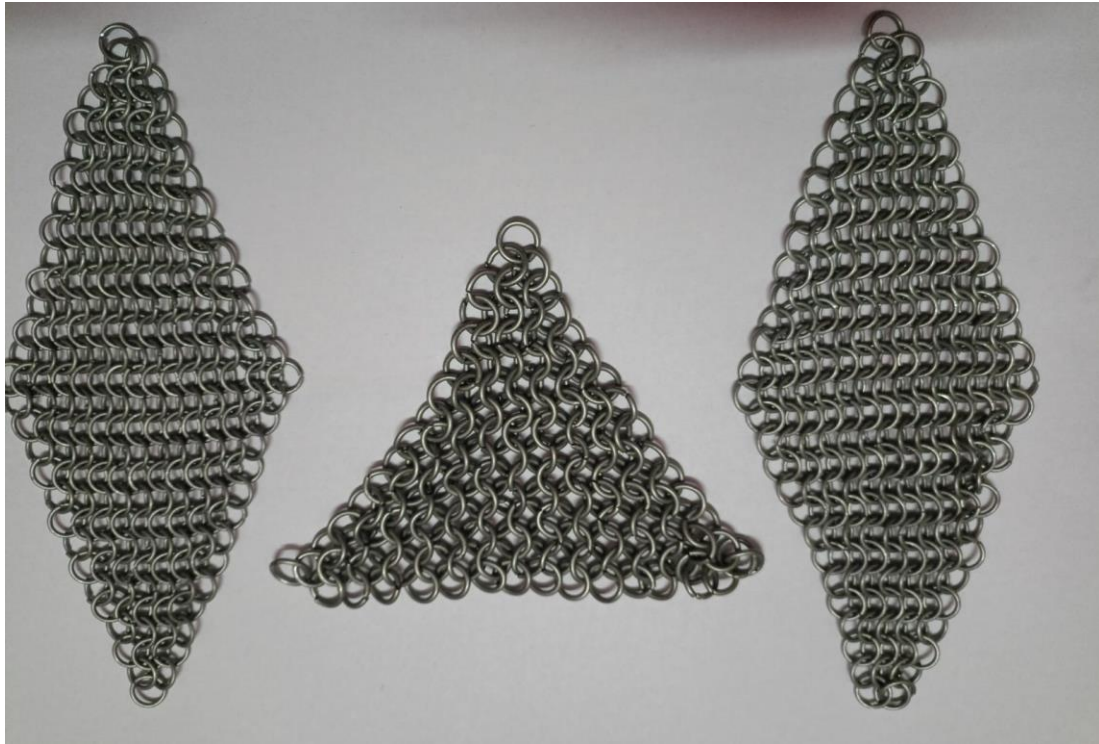


**Chand soti**



**Teer nagni**

**Asthbhuja**



**Chainmail**



**Batta**



**Chand khanda****chakar khanda****Kirpan dumala , khanda dumala, teer dumala, kirpan dumala**

According to their beliefs the Sarbloh metal is a natural conductor, but it also possesses an unusual capacity to hold vibrations. Meditation, for those who are inexperienced with Spirituality, is all about vibrations. When you meditate, you want to keep your spiritual energy within your body and mind (particularly, your pineal gland, as traditional yogic practises suggest). When this energy is conserved, spiritual “vibrations” occur. Vibrations of sarbloh are said to be a manifestation of this. Sarbloh is said to produce a higher state of mind, which may be reached by constantly meditating on the name of Waheguru. This higher condition of

consciousness is known as “Chardi Kala” in Sikhi. Vibration capacity of sarbloh is indicative of spirituality in this way. Sikhs ate using Sarbloh utensils because Sarbloh represents what a real Sikh should aim to be. A sincere Sikh should be attracted to Waheguru in the same manner that Sarbloh is attracted to a magnet.

## **CONCLUSION-**

The research paper titled “*An Analytical Study of Traditional Sarbloh Ornaments Worn by Nihang Singhs*” explores the history and significance of sarbloh-based ornaments in Nihang Sikh culture. It provides insights into the socio-cultural implications of patronage towards these artifacts and the dynamics of preservation and appreciation within contemporary Sikh communities. The study aims to contribute valuable perspectives on understanding the enduring relevance and potential ways to safeguard these cultural artifacts.

Traditional Nihang Sikh attire and jewellery continue to conceal distinctive characteristics made from sarbloh. Symbolizing adherence to cultural and spiritual traditions. The observed diversity and variance in a Nihang Sikh’s traditional dress serve to establish a sense of social reverence and belonging within the community. The significance attributed to sarbloh extends beyond mere materiality; it embodies historical resonance as the metal intimately linked to the formation of the Khalsa, signifying unity and initiation under the guidance of Guru Gobind Singh ji. Embracing sarbloh articles reflect humility and simplicity, aligning with Sikh principles by discouraging materialism and fostering a modest way of life. Furthermore, the utilization of sarbloh underscores the spiritual ethos of Sikhism, serving as a poignant reminder for the adherents to transcend ego and uphold the core tenants of the faith. Historically, sarbloh holds paramount significance as a metal utilized by Sikh ancestors to resist injustice and uphold righteousness, thereby contributing to the preservation of Sikh heritage. The adoption of sarbloh articles helps not only facilitates the preservation of Sikh identity but also fosters dialogue about Sikh values an history. By embracing sarbloh, Sikhs demonstrate respect for Guru Gobind Singh Ji's teachings and honour his guidance. Additionally, sarbloh Serves as an educational tool, enabling Sikhs to disseminate narratives and values associated with the formation of Khalsa. In essence, the significance of sarbloh transcends mere utility, encompassing historical, spiritual, cultural, and educational dimensions, all of which contribute to the rich tapestry of Sikh tradition and beliefs. Beyond adornments, sarbloh finds practical application in the crafting of utensils for cooking and eating, as well as serving as weapons for defense or protection in times of conflict. Notably, sarbloh is predominantly employed in the

production of headgears, further emphasizing its centrality in Nihang Sikh and attire and symbolism.

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