

Guru Tegh Bahadur Smarak

A spatial tribute to a saint

Gurpreet Singh

Gateway to the city of Delhi as a tribute to Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of Sikhs

With the development of highways and transportation, infrastructure within the National Capital region, the Entry Points into Delhi, the Capital of the country, have assumed immense significance. With its history dating back to the 6th century, including a history as the capital of several empires, entrance to the city of Delhi deserves to be celebrated by commemorating its varied past.

Guru Tegh Bahadur Memorial is one such memorable entry points into the Capital and was designed based on this very premise. A winning entry to a design competition, it was designed by Aakar Design Consultants based in Gurgaon. The foundation stone was laid by Mrs. Sonia Gandhi in February 2004.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The first such entry point that has





The Smarak at dusk



Panoramic view of the Smarak

been envisaged on the historical Sher Shah Suri Marg, now known as National Highway 1 connecting Punjab with Delhi has been designated to the memory of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs.

Guru Tegh Bahadur travelled extensively throughout India spreading the teachings of Guru Nanak. He fought for the rights of the Kashmiri Pandits so that they were able to freely practice and follow their religion in the face of Aurangzeb's rule. In today's context, Guru Tegh Bahadur stood for human rights and he laid down his life in Delhi for the same cause. In this fight, he was not alone but accompanied by three of his followers who also laid down their

Spatial composition
with the Pylon,
monoliths and
the arch.



lives with him achieving martyrdom. Guru Tegh Bahadur's significance in the history of Delhi can be gauged by the fact that two historic Gurudwaras of Delhi i.e. Sis Ganj where Guru Tegh Bahadur and his disciples were be-headed, and Rakab Ganj his final resting place, are in his memory and are important places of pilgrimage.

ARCHITECTURAL INTERPRETATION

The Central Pylon – 24 meters high in stainless steel, lit on top with LED lights bearing semblance to the Nishan Sahib stands in the memory of Guru Tegh Bahadur. The base of this Pylon comprises of eight petals made of hand-beaten stainless steel plates, arranged in elliptical form with gaps to allow water to seep through. This signifies selflessness, a sense of being able to give away, without any expectations. The Guru stood for the rights of the masses and sacrificed his life for what he believed was right and noble. Millions draw inspiration and strength from his life and death, his courage of conviction and his love for the mankind.

The central pylon rises from this vessel of stainless steel, which in turn, originates from a white marble platform symbolizing the power vested in the earth. This is the source from where the Guru derived his strength and courage to stand up against human rights violation.

His three disciples are represented by the three stainless steel arches 18 meters in diameter and are placed surrounding the central pylon as one enters the memorial.

Their shining reflective surfaces, by merging with the surrounding, suggests a sense of dematerialization symbolizing the complete absence of ego and total selflessness of the three disciples.



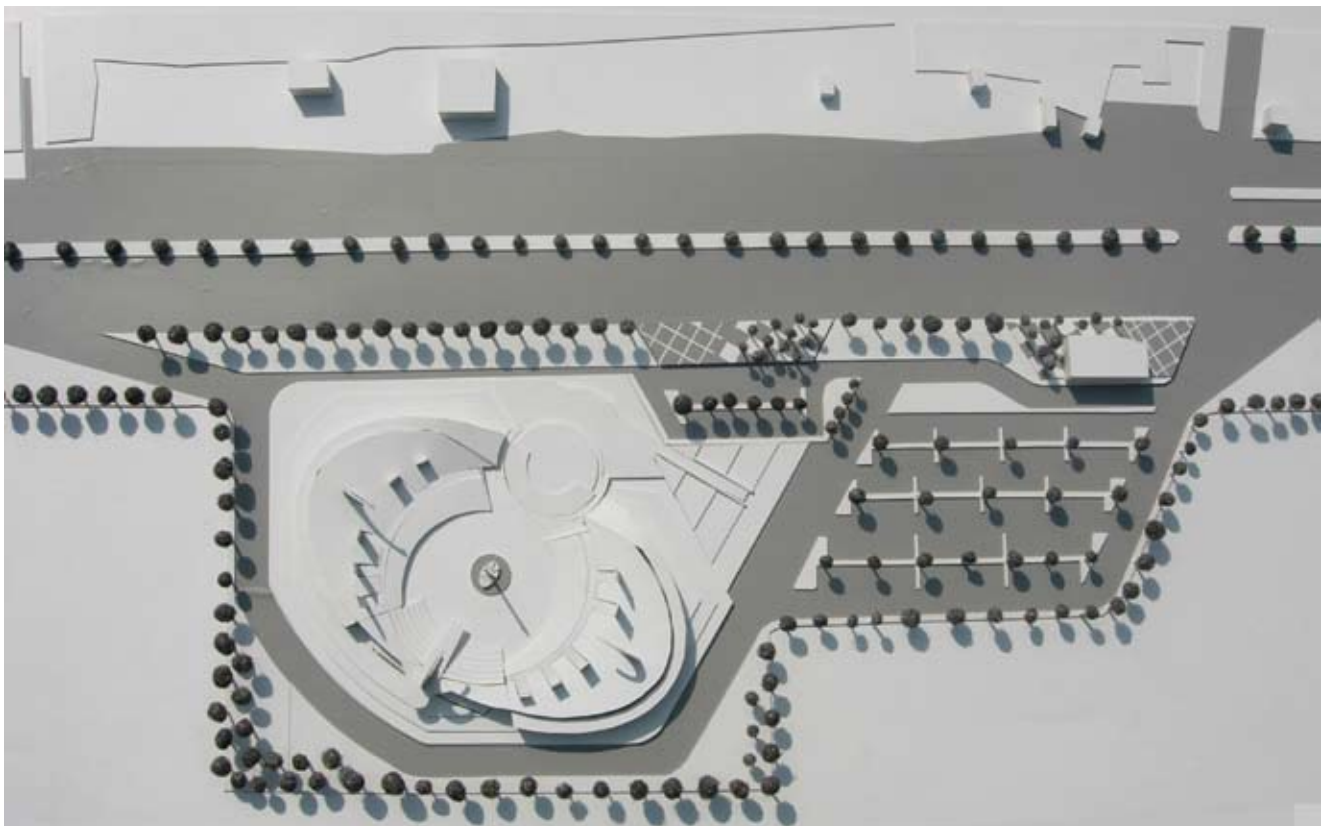
The monoliths



The reflective surfaces of the arch



Site Plan/Model



A composition of materials and surfaces



High earth mound invites exploration

The ten monoliths of varying heights ranging from 5-12 meters represent the ten Sikh gurus with their respective teachings engraved on them. Collectively they form a spiral symbolizing continuity and equality amongst the Gurus while retaining their individuality.

All these elements of significance are composed in an elliptical shaped landscaped bowl (143 x 116 mts.) with the green edges sweeping up to 8 meters in height.

The architectural play of sweeping green curves, geometric granite planes and reflective stainless steel forms create an aesthetic interplay of form and

creates a serene and pleasing environment, truly a place for the people. The nature of the project is primarily composed of different landscape and architectural elements of varied textures and reflectivity. To contain the space, gentle curves are provided through earth mounds. These mounds create tranquil backdrop to the memorial which contains the vision of the central pylon.

The step creating the grandstand on the entry axis is to facilitate an interactive public gathering space. The space below these steps will include the requisite administrative facilities, maintenance, office areas and a cafeteria.

The inherent objective while de-

signing was to use garden landscape as a commemorative environment. Visitors will have the dual experience of a memorial for the Guru, and of a much-needed urban scale landscaped green. This gathering place for people rooted in history would be a befitting Smarak for Guru Tegh Bahadur. ■

Gurpreet Singh is the Principal Partner of Aakar Design Consultants. Photograph: Courtesy the Author.
