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Exploring Sikh Traditions and Heritage

Edited by
Pashaura Singh

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About the Editor

Pashaura Singh is Distinguished Professor and Dr. J.S. Saini Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the University of California, Riverside. His research is in early Sikh history and scriptural studies, particularly the formation of the Adi Granth in 1604. He is the author of four Oxford monographs, including *Life and Work of Guru Arjan: History, Memory and Biography in the Sikh Tradition* (Oxford University Press 2006) that was on the "Best Seller's List" in India. He has edited or co-edited ten volumes, including the notable *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* (OUP 2014). His recent monograph, *A Dictionary of Sikh Studies*, was launched on Oxford Quick Reference in 2019 in commemoration of Guru Nanak's 550th Birth Anniversary.

Preface to "Exploring Sikh Traditions and Heritage"

This volume grows out of the articles published in the Special Issue (SI) on "Sikh Traditions and Heritage," in the Open Access Online Journal, *Religions*. These articles were selected for publication only after a rigorous peer-review process. As a matter of fact, this volume has been a significant venture for me, and I would like to thank the esteemed authors for their patience and collaboration, and for accepting the critique of their work in the review process with grace and perseverance. I would also like to offer my sincere thanks to more than two dozen of external reviewers who took extraordinary measures to go through the specific submissions and to reread at least three revised versions in a time-consuming process before they were accepted for publication. A special credit goes to the editorial staff of MDPI for being meticulous in copy-editing the selected articles before their online publication. I also acknowledge the support of the Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the University of California, Riverside, Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Trust and the Sikh Foundation of Palo Alto, California. Finally, I would like to express my foremost gratitude to Ms. Macy Zong, Managing Editor, MDPI Beijing, for inviting me initially to edit this Special Issue and for overseeing this project right from the beginning.

This volume presents original research on various topics from different theoretical frameworks. The editor has provided an interpretive discussion of various essays in his introduction in the beginning. Although the essays are well documented and discuss certain sensitive issues in a scholarly fashion, the interpretations are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of the editor or the publishers. Considering the essays being available to the worldwide readership through open access, we welcome suggestions and constructive criticism that may be useful to the authors in their future research.

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Editorial

Introduction to Special Issue: Exploring Sikh Traditions and Heritage

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It was quite an exciting moment when the Religions Editorial Office reached out to me to be a guest editor of a Special Issue (SI) on a broad theme of "Exploring Sikh Traditions and Heritage" for the celebrated Open Access Online Journal, *Religions*. In the specific "Call for Proposals" (CFP), we invited scholars to explore Sikh traditions and heritage through interdisciplinary approaches, resulting from academic inquiries into Sikh texts, as well as the practices that surround them and their performance. We encouraged a diverse range of theoretical and methodological approaches, including the disciplines of religious studies, historical studies, textual studies, ethno-musicology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, ethnography, political science, South Asian studies, art and material culture, and ritual and performance studies. After a rigorous process of peer-review of about a dozen submissions only seven articles made the cut for publication in this Special Issue (https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/Sikh, accessed on 25 June 2021). The main purpose behind the idea of this Special Issue was to enhance the field of Sikh studies and to contribute to the production of novel research. It was also meant to usefully supplement or relate to existing literature in the field. Thus, we invited both younger scholars following fresh approaches and established scholars who have already made significant contributions to the study of Sikh traditions and heritage. It is heartening to know that MDPI has decided to produce a Special Issue reprint in the book format, thereby promoting both the Special Issue and the book via social media and conferences, and improving the visibility of the Sikh tradition.

Most instructively, the early twenty-first century continues to be a very exciting time for the field of Sikh studies. Within the last two decades, scholars have begun to question prevailing approaches to the study of Sikhism in both the west and India itself to the point that this least examined, and perhaps, most misunderstood, of South Asia's religious and cultural traditions is now an established part of curricula and scholarly programs across North America and the United Kingdom. Much of the foundational scholarship in the field of Sikh studies has followed historical and textual approaches, sometimes to the extent of softening the focus on Sikh practices, performances, and every day "doings" of Sikh lives. The growing turn in religious studies toward "lived religion" calls scholars to be aware that "religions" are at least as much about the things that people "do" as about the ideas, ideals, and central narratives enshrined within their texts and scripture. Rather than dichotomize text and practice, the articles in this Special Issue have drawn attention to the intersections between Sikh sacred texts and actual practices of the Sikh community.

It should be emphasized at the outset that there is a continuing conflict over the nature of traditions and between opposing views of history and practice among Sikhs for over a century, covering a wide range of significant academic issues such as religious orthodoxy/orthopraxy versus fundamentalism, nationalism, economic and political mobility, gender awareness, and cultural transmission and adaptations. Although the limited number of essays in this volume do not address all these issues specifically, they do focus on the transmission of Sikh culture and heritage as well as current dilemmas confronting the Sikh community at the global level. Historical interpretations, ritual performances, the nature of authority and creative responses to changing circumstances are the burning questions that

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do not lend themselves to easy solutions. However, we do hope that an open exchange of ideas and alternative interpretations reduce tension and ultimately lead to a resolution of differences acceptable to Sikhs as a whole. This volume makes a positive contribution towards that process, and for this reason alone this Special Issue may be regarded as the path-clearing work in the field of Sikh studies.

At least four articles in the volume are closely related to the life and teachings of Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of the Sikh tradition. The worldwide celebration of the 550th anniversary of his birth in 2019 prompted both Sikh and non-Sikh scholars to creatively engage with new understandings of his works from fresh perspectives. This is what is obvious in the editor's opening essay, "Speaking Truth to Power," (P. Singh 2020) in which he explored Guru Nanak's *Bābar-vāṇī* in the historical context of Babur's memoirs, called the *Baburnama*. Based on rigorous textual analysis, the essay has made the case for the extension of the number of works in the collection of the *Bābar-vāṇī* from a "fixed" assemblage of "four" hymns to "nine", making it an open collection that dynamically responds to the specific questions raised by historians about Guru Nanak's encounter with Babur. The resulting framework offers a counter perspective to the imperial narrative of Mughal history, providing a fresh analytical gaze into the critical events related to Babur's invasions of India and helping the novel readings of Guru Nanak's verses shine through. Highlighting a radical new reading of the traumatic events of Indian history it has shown how Guru Nanak's voice of resistance became the source of multiple interpretations in the life-narratives (*Janam-sākhīs*) produced by later generations. Departing from traditional views, this essay has brought forth a fresh understanding of the impact of the *Bābur-vāṇī* on the evolving Sikh conceptions of the relationship between spiritual and political powers.

The second article by Louis E. Fenech (2020) examines the "Image of Guru Nanak in the Dadu-Panthi Sources," particularly in the *Bhakt-māl* or "Garland of Devotees" prepared by the Dadu-panthi savant Raghavdas. This late seventeenth or early eighteenth-century text follows the similarly titled *Bhakt-māl* written in 1600 CE by Nabha Das, a text which excludes Guru Nanak, while Raghavdas' text embraces him prominently: "Nanak's true form is that of the sun, the sovereign whose light is diffused throughout the entire world." Fenech takes a notice of this early non-Sikh text and examines the reasons of Dadu strategy of "taming and containing" to bring the Sikhs under the large tent of Vaishnava Bhakti by "Dadu-ising" Guru Nanak and thus by extension the Sikhs: "Raghavdas notes enough of Guru Nanak in his *Bhakt-māl* to ensure that the First Master is fairly ensconced within the model of four [Vaishnava] *sampradāys*." The description of Guru Nanak's children, Siri Chand and Lakshmi Das, along with four established houses of veneration of Udasis, indicates that the author of the text had much interaction with the Udasi lineages, preaching in the southern part of India. The spiritual reputation of the Udasis may be discerned from the sources within the Maratha polity about which Professor Stewart Gordon made a presentation at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The editor brought this reference to South Indian context to Fenech's attention, who was able to cite from his published work (Gordon 2000), providing a detailed account from the city of Burhanpur dating to the 1760s and noting the grant of "monthly wages" to a *Nānak-putra* or an Udasi sadhu. The vibrant presence of the ascetic Udasis in the south provided a stiff competition to the Dadu-panthi protagonists. This seems to be the principal reason for Raghavdas to assimilate Guru Nanak and by implication the ascetic Udasi tradition within the fold of Dadu-panthi tradition.

The third article by Tejpaul Singh Bainiwal (2020) deals with the first Sikh Center established by Guru Nanak in 1519 at Kartarpur on the right bank of River Ravi, now situated in Pakistan on the border between India and Pakistan. He examines the "religious and political dimensions of the Kartarpur corridor" by exploring "the global politics behind the lost heritage of the Darbar Sahib." The celebration of the 550th anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak and the construction of the Kartarpur Corridor has helped the Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur in Pakistan gain global attention. In November 2018, the decision of the governments of Pakistan and India to open the Kartarpur Corridor across

the river Ravi—linking Dera Baba Nanak Sahib (in India) and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur (in Pakistan)—marked the possible beginning of a new era of cooperation and a symbolic movement in the shared cultural history of the Punjab. After the completion of the corridor in 2019, thousands of Sikhs embarked on a pilgrimage to Pakistan to take part in this momentous occasion. However, conversations surrounding modern renovations, government control of sacred sites, and the global implications of the corridor have been missing in the larger dialogue. Using historical and ethnographic methods of interviews and examining the Darbar Sahib through the context of the 1947 partition and the recent construction of the Kartarpur Corridor, Bainiwal departs from the metanarrative produced in Indian media surrounding the Darbar Sahib and explores the impact that Sikhs across the globe had on the "bridge of peace", the politics behind the corridor, and how access to sacred Sikh spaces in Pakistan was only partially regained. He specifically highlights the role of Diasporic Sikhs in reviving the lost heritage of Darbar Sahib, particularly the Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation and the Guru Nanak Shrine Fellowship for starting the process of renovation of this sacred site. In fact, the original impetus for this renovation resulted from the close friendship between two men: Dr. Gurcharanjit Singh Attariwala, a Canadian-based ophthalmologist, and Lieutenant General (Retired) Jahandad Khan, a General in the Pakistan army and former governor of Sindh. The two first met when Genral Khan was traveling across Canada and the United States to raise funds for his Al-Shifa eye hospital in Rawalpindi in the late 1980s. The humanitarian purpose of the Al-Shifa hospital motivated Dr. Attariwala and other Sikh professionals in Calgary to help General Khan's efforts. Dr. Attariwala visited Pakistan to attend a conference in Karachi in 1992 that coincided with an invitation to attend the marriage of a friend's son in Lahore. It was during this trip that Dr. Attariwala and his wife Gurdev Attariwala were informed of "Pakistan's Darbar Sahib" at Kartarpur, a sacred heritage which they found in ruins on their visit. Dr. Attariwala prevailed upon his friend, General Khan, to approach Pakistan authorities to start the process of renovation of this dilapidated shrine. During the editor's research visit to Pakistan for a week (24–31 May 1999), he saw firsthand the work of renovation in progress. After the completion of renovation, the Gurdwara of Darbar Sahib was opened for the first time to public in November 1999 at the celebration of Guru Nanak's birth anniversary. However, it took another two decades to open the Kartarpur Corridor to provide access to Sikhs living in India and abroad. Bainiwal ends his article with a caution that "the threat of closing the corridor due to political tensions may always remain, but so will the drive of the global Sikh community to keep these sites intact and accessible."

The fourth article on "Remembering Guru Nanak: Articulation of Faith and Ethics by Sikh Activists in Post 9/11 America" by Sangeeta Kaur Luthra (2021) explores the role of activism as an inflection points for engagement with religious and cultural identity by younger generations of Sikhs in the US. As an anthropologist, Luthra employs the method of ethnographic field work by interviewing young Sikh millennials who view social justice activism, humanitarianism and Sikh *sevā* ("selfless service") as central and equal to other pillars of Sikhism, such as worship and devotional practice. In everyday acts, such as serving meals to those in need, organizing for civil rights, lobbying governments, marching and speaking out against bigotry and hate, and working to build a more just and equitable society, they seek an alchemy of imagination and ethical practice at the heart of Guru Nanak's faith. Luthra begins with the reflections of a female Sikh activist about her personal journey learning about Sikh faith and history, and her activism and personal interests. In her analysis, the effects of the post 9/11 backlash against Sikhs in the US are compared to Guru Nanak's experiences of and response to violence, strife, and injustice. The social, psychological, and spiritual benefits of service for those who provide service and care are explored in relation to Sikh philosophy, and from the point of view of contemporary cultural and historical studies of Sikh *sevā* and humanitarianism. For Luthra, the current generation of Sikh American activists, a mix of millennials and Generation Z, often express their faith and identity first and foremost through ethical practice.

The fifth related article on "Narratives in Action: Modelling the Types and Drivers of Sikh Activism in Diaspora" is written by J. Singh (2020), who develops a typology of different types of activism among Sikhs in diaspora based on an analysis of historic and contemporary media sources (newspapers, radio, television, online), academic literature, ethnographic fieldwork and a series of semi-structured interviews with self-identifying Sikh activists mainly in the United Kingdom. He assesses the reasons behind a variety of different incidents involving Sikh activists, how they view the drivers of their activism and to what extent this activism can be regarded as being "religiously motivated". The author critiques existing typologies of "religious activism" by developing a typology of Sikh activism which challenges the distinction often made between "religious" and "political" action. His analysis is based upon narratives from the Sikh tradition, namely (1) organizing a protest in Birmingham against the staging of a play, *Behztī* ("Disrespect"), and its depiction of rape and murder in a gurdwara; (2) campaigning against interfaith *Anand Kāraj* ("Sikh marriage") ceremonies in gurdwaras, highlighting how Sikh activism often reference the Sikh literature to support their claims; (3) referring to the Sikh concept of *mīrī/pīrī* through which religion and politics are bound together; and (4) mobilizing around single-issue campaigns (*morchās*), from the Akali *morchās* in the 1920s to the turban campaigns in the 1960s to various campaigns post-1984, highlighting how martyrs (*shahīd*) continue to inspire the Sikh activists. Concluding his arguments skillfully, Jasjit Singh brings forth six essential features that trigger Sikh activism: social justice, humanitarianism, religious enforcement, diaspora nationalism, community defense, and personal/factional strategy to gain control of the gurdwaras.

The sixth article on "Autoethnography: A Potential Method for Sikh Theory and Praxis Research" by Narinder Kaur-Bring (2020) makes the case for a new method of doing research in the field of Sikh studies. She argues that the systematic analysis in autoethnography of a person's experience through reflexivity and connecting the personal story to the social, cultural, and political life has synergy with the Sikh sense-making process. Accordingly, deliberation (*vichār*) of an individual's experience through the embodied wisdom of the Gurū (*gurmat*) connecting the lived experience to a greater knowing and awareness of the self is an established practice in *Sikhī* ("Sikh practice"). Kaur-Bring explores autoethnography as a potential research method to give an academic voice to and capture the depth of the lived experiences of Sikhs: first, by articulating the main spaces of synergy of autoethnography with *gurmat vichār* ("deliberation in light of the Gurus' teachings"); second, discussing common themes such as inclusivity of disregarded voices, accessibility to knowledge creation, relational responsibility, and integrity in storytelling common to both autoethnography and *gurmat vichār*. She complicates that to write by foregrounding personal experience without "narcissism" requires a process of getting to know all the facets of self. About the inclusion of others, she maintains that autoethnography attempts to walk in "the shoes of the other" while simultaneously acknowledging that it is still "my feet in their shoes". Citing a passage from Guru Amar Das' *bāṇī* ("inspired utterances") that "the stories of one's ancestors makes their descendants good children," she sums up her final arguments by claiming that the autoethnographic approach has the means to illuminate nuances in understanding *Sikhī* that is transformative and familiar to the ancestral process of how Sikhs have made sense of themselves and the world around them.

The final article on the "Institution of the Akal Takht" by Gurbeer Singh (2021) examines the transformation of authority in Sikh history within the Sikh Panth ("community"). Following the sociological approach, the author employs theories of legitimacy and authority to explore the validity of the authority and legitimacy of the Akal Takht ("Throne of the Immortal") and its leaders. In addition to applying Max Weber's three types of legitimate authority—*charismatic, traditional and legal*—he uses Berger and Luckmann's theory of the *symbolic universe* to establish the constant presence of traditional authority in the leadership of the Akal Takht. Additionally, he refers to Merton's concept of *group norms* to explain the loss of legitimacy at certain points in history, even if one or more types of Weber's legitimate authority match the situation. He forcefully argues that the Akal Takht's

authority, as with other political religious institutions, is in reciprocal relationship between the Sikh population and those in charge. He uses the fluidity in authority at various points in Sikh history to offer a solution on the issue of authenticity and authority in the Sikh tradition. In his conclusions, Gurbeer Singh makes the point that when the interests of Sikhs in India and abroad do not correlate and group norms between the two groups continue to grow apart, the disconnect of the Akal Takht with the greater Sikh populace will continue to grow. This may cause the need for the *Shiromaṇī Gurdwārā Prabandhak Committee* (SGPC, "Chief Management Committee of Sikh Shrines") at Amritsar and the Akal Takht to reorganize in a way that allows Sikhs in the diaspora representation in the Akal Takht and the SGPC in order to continue a proper reciprocal relationship between the institution and the people, especially as the structures of authority and legitimacy continue to change as time passes.

The essays in this Special Issue/volume reflect multiple approaches to look at various academic issues in the field of Sikh studies. They are presented to the wider audience through open access for critical appraisal so that new ways of understanding the Sikh subjects are developed in the future. Frequently, we come across the mention of "Global Sikhism" or the assertion that Sikhism is now a global religion because of the Sikh presence in the diaspora, with less explicit discussion of variations that may exist among and within the contexts of cultural and national locations. Thus, even as local specificity is held to be critical in the study of any Sikh population, we can discern a corresponding (if perplexing) increase in the discourse about both global and diasporic Sikhism. In order to problematize how local experiences, confirm and yet complicate notions of global and/or diasporic Sikh belief and practice, this volume is focused on "Sikh traditions and heritage".

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Article

Speaking Truth to Power: Exploring Guru Nanak's *Bābar-vāṇī* in Light of the *Baburnama*

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Abstract: This essay offers in-depth analysis of Guru Nanak's works, collectively known as the *Bābar-vāṇī* ("arrow-like utterances concerning Babur"), in the context of the memoirs of the first Mughal emperor Babur (1483–1530). It extends the number of works in the collection from a 'fixed' assemblage of 'four' to 'nine,' making it an open collection that dynamically responds to the specific questions raised by historians about Guru Nanak's encounter with Babur. The resulting framework provides us with a fresh analytical gaze into the critical events related to Babur's invasions of India and helps the novel readings of Guru Nanak's verses shine through. It also examines how Guru Nanak's voice of resistance was interpreted in the narratives produced by later generations. Departing from traditional views, the essay ends with a new understanding of the impact of the *Bābar-vāṇī* on the evolving Sikh conceptions of the relationship between spiritual and political powers.

Keywords: *Bābar-vāṇī*; Babur; *Baburnama*; Dawlat Khan Lodi; Gurdas; Guru Nanak; *Janam-sākhīs*; Miharvan; Rattan Singh Bhangu; Saidpur

1. Introduction

The year 2019 marked the global celebration of the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of the Sikh tradition. It provided a unique opportunity for academicians to critically reassess the ongoing significance and relevance of Guru Nanak's social, spiritual, philosophical and political contribution to the world. In this context, Roopinder Singh interviewed Professor J.S. Grewal (b. 1927–) on 19 October 2019, an interview which is now available on YouTube under the caption: "Sikh history scholar Prof JS Grewal speaks to *The Tribune* on Guru Nanak Dev." During his conversation, Grewal referred to the "very powerful verses" of the *Bābar-vāṇī* in which Guru Nanak "is questioning God" about the suffering of innocent people. According to Grewal, "why do people suffer?" remained a standing question for Guru Nanak, a question which is not "fully answered" in his inspired utterances (*bāṇī*). He further remarked that the *Janam-sākhīs* ("Life-narratives") simplify this question. As an eminent historian of the Sikh tradition, Grewal acknowledged that Babur's successive invasions of India were the "most important political events" of Guru Nanak's times about which "his expression is very rare" (R. Singh 2019). The powerful nature of these verses may be related to the etymology of the word *vāṇ*, meaning "arrow" and making the compound *Bābar-vāṇī*, "arrow-like utterances concerning Babur." In Sikh scriptural terminology, the arrow is the *shabad*, the inner Word through which the Guru communicates with those who seek him out (*Gurū Granth Sāhib*/GGS, p. 1374). Therefore, the verses of the *Bābar-vāṇī* pierced the hearts of Guru Nanak's audience like discursive arrows. Acknowledging the terse nature of Grewal's observations in the interview, we intend to look at the *Bābar-vāṇī* from a fresh perspective.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the verses of the *Bābar-vāṇī* in detail to find the answers to the multiple questions raised by historians from time to time: namely, whether Guru Nanak and Babur met each other, and, if so, when, where, and under what conditions? If they met, whether Guru Nanak blessed Babur that his dynasty would rule over India? (G. Singh 1987, p. 90). Considering the

circumstantial evidence, W.H. McLeod cautiously accepted the possibility of the meeting between Guru Nanak and Babur: "It cannot be ruled out as completely impossible, but it certainly appears to be most unlikely" (McLeod 1968, p. 138). While modern historians are divided over this question of meeting between the two, we will allow the relevant texts to speak for themselves in this study. The overall structure, organization, and the underlying arguments of this essay will be focused on four major points: first, Sikh scholars have generally agreed that there are four specific verses of Guru Nanak that refer to Babur explicitly; second, there are additional verses that could be read as referring to Babur and some supporting evidence for this comes from the analysis of the text of the *Baburnama*; third, subsequent Sikh literature, particularly the *Janam-sākhīs*, has interpreted the *Bābar-vāṇī* in a range of ways, and these may be read as changing social/historical contexts and sectarian concerns; and finally, analysis of the *Bābar-vāṇī* and their subsequent Sikh exegesis can elucidate evolving Sikh conceptions of the relationship between spiritual and political powers. Thus, we will offer some intriguing analyses of Guru Nanak's verses, as well as subsequent interpretations of those verses and events in the Guru's life as exposed in the *Janam-sākhī* traditions. We will begin with a brief introduction to the actual historical context in which the verses of the *Bābar-vāṇī* originated and Guru Nanak's early life at Sultanpur Lodhi, where he came into contact with *Nawāb* Dawalt Khan Lodi (a.k.a. Daulat Khan Lodi) and his subsequent travels. The introductory section will end with a brief note on the theme of the title of this essay, while the concluding section will address the impact of the *Bābar-vāṇī* on Guru Nanak's later works.

In the first place, we need to look at the previous attempt made in 1968 by W.H. McLeod, who critically examined Guru Nanak's life narratives in light of Babur's memoirs concerning the third of his preliminary expeditions into North India when the Mughal army assaulted the town of Saidpur, the modern day Eminabad in Gujranwala District in Pakistan (McLeod 1968, pp. 132–35). In this context, the earliest narrative of *Sākhī Mahalu Pehile Kī* (1570–1574) is quite explicit that Guru Nanak witnessed the sacking of Saidpur by the Mughal armies, and it contains the story of his meeting with Babur. The invading emperor is told: "Mīr Jī, if you desire mercy from God, release the prisoners" (*mīr jī mihar chahidā hai tān bandīvāṇ chhoḍi dehi*, Padam 2014, p. 213). Babur then clothed the captives and set them free. The question is generally raised that "it comes as rather odd that if this incident actually took place, Babur failed to mention it in his diary, *Baburnama*, which otherwise records meticulously every detail of his encounters" (Khalid 2016, p. 96). The absence of any mention in Babur's memoirs about his meeting with Guru Nanak can be explained by the fact that the text of *Baburnama* breaks off at the events of year [Hijra] 926 (1519–1520 CE) and picks up again six years later in year [Hijra] 932 (1525–1526 CE, Thackston 1996, p. 307). Notably, the attack upon Saidpur was "frustrated by the news which took him [Babur] back to Kabul and thence to Qandahar, that an incursion into his territory had been made by Shah Beg" (Beveridge 1921, p. 429). Thus, Babur had to rush back to protect his home territory without writing anything about the Saidpur event in his memoirs, and there was no indication of his intention to join battle with Sultan Ibrahim Lodi (r. 1517–1526) under those circumstances. The issue of silence of Babur's meeting with the Guru in his memoirs will receive a further comment in the concluding section.

Secondly, we must acknowledge that the *Janam-sākhīs* and other Sikh sources blend history and mythology to describe Guru Nanak's actual encounter with Babur at Saidpur. We will discuss in the later section the evolution of the narrative positioning between the Guru, Babur and God over time within Sikh history-writing. For instance, Bhai Gurdas (ca. 1558–1636) narrates an actual submission by Babur when he meets Baba Nanak along with a certain *Nawāb* (*Vārāṅ Bhāī Gurdās/VBG* 26:21), while Rattan Singh Bhangu specifically mentions the name of the *Nawāb* as Dawlat Khan Lodi who arranged the personal meeting between the two (Dhillon 2004, p. 265). During the last quarter of the fifteenth century, Dawlat Khan Lodi was the local noble (*Nawāb*) of Jalandhar Doab, with Sultanpur as his capital. One of his officials, Jai Ram, was married to Guru Nanak's sister, Nanaki. Jai Ram secured young Nanak employment as a steward (*modī*) of Nawāb's granaries and stores at Sultanpur Lodhi, situated on the main road that connected Lahore with Delhi. Nanak worked at his job diligently,

but his mind was mostly preoccupied with spiritual matters, and he spent long hours in meditation on the divine Name (*nām*) and devotional singing (*kīrtan*). Early one morning, while he was bathing in the Vein River, he disappeared without a trace. Family members gave him up for dead, but three days later he stepped out of the water and proclaimed: 'There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim'. The significance of this statement becomes clear in the context of a religious culture divided between the conflicting truth claims of the Islamic and Hindu traditions. Nanak pointed the way towards the common humanity underlying the external divisions. After his three-day immersion in the waters—a metaphor of dissolution, transformation, and spiritual perfection—Nanak was ready to proclaim a new vision (P. Singh 2017, p. 52). This transforming event was "an authentic tradition concerning a personally decisive and perhaps ecstatic experience, a climactic culmination of years of searching in illumination and in the conviction that he had been called upon to proclaim divine truth to the world" (McLeod 1968, p. 107).

Thirdly, Guru Nanak's autobiographical hymn in his *Vār Mājh* marked the beginning of his spiritual reign to preach the message of the divine Name (*nām*) to his audience (GGS, p. 150). He was then 30 years of age, had been married to Sulakhaṇi for more than a decade, and was the father of two young sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das. Yet he left his family behind in 1499 to set out on a series of journeys to both Hindu and Muslim places of pilgrimage in India and abroad along with his lifelong companion, Mardana, the Muslim bard. He proclaimed: "I have seen places of pilgrimage on riverbanks, including shops, cities, and market squares. I have seen all nine regions of the world, weighing as a merchant the merits and demerits of each place in the scale of my heart" (GGS, p. 156). During his travels, he visited the whole of India, Sri Lanka, the Central Asia and the Middle East. He reminisced later that his foreign travels took place in accordance with the divine will: "When it pleases You, we go out to foreign lands; hearing news of home, we come back again" (GGS, p. 145). On his journeys, Guru Nanak encountered the leaders of different religious persuasions and tested the veracity of his own ideas through dialogue with them. His travels exposed him to diverse cultures and societies that helped him evolve his unique lifeworld (P. Singh 2017, p. 52). Before Babur's invasions, Guru Nanak had settled at Kartarpur ("Creator's Abode"), a town he himself founded on the right bank of River Ravi in 1519. Approximately a year after Guru Nanak had left his job for his preaching tours, Sultan Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489–1517) appointed Dawlat Khan Lodi as governor of Lahore after the incumbent governor, Sa'īd Khān Sarwānī, was exiled in 1500 for his part in a conspiracy against the Delhi Sultanate (McLeod 1968, p. 108). Thus, Dawlat Khan Lodi occupied a position of considerable importance during the later years of Sikandar Lodi and during the reign of Sikandar's successor, Ibrahim Lodi, although he became alienated from the latter when he conspired along with Alam Khan by inviting Babur to invade Hindustan.

Finally, the title of this essay makes sense only when we recognize that Guru Nanak kindled the fire of autonomy and courage in those who claimed to be his disciples (*Sikhs*). He inspired them to stand up against any kind of injustice and tyranny. For them, he set an example to raise one's voice at the right moment from the standpoint of truth and justice: "Nanak speaks the Word of Truth; he will always proclaim the Truth at the most appropriate moment of time" (*sach kī bāṇī nānaku ākhai sachu suṇāisī sach kī belā*, GGS, p. 723). This proclamation was made in the historical context of Babur's invasion of India when Guru Nanak was standing in "the city of corpses" at Saidpur in the period 1520–1521 CE. For the sake of Truth, as Bruce Lincoln remarks, it is essential for the "right speaker" to deliver the "right speech" at the "right time and place" before an audience, the historically and culturally conditioned expectations of which establish the parameters of what is judged "right" in all these instances. Thus, an authoritative speech has to be "much more supple, dynamic, and situationally adaptable" (Lincoln 1994, pp. 116–17). Accordingly, there is no use of raising one's voice afterwards when the appropriate moment is lost. Thus, Guru Nanak laid down the foundation of a fundamental Sikh principle of "Speaking Truth to Power" for his disciples through his bold response to the political events of Babur's invasions.

2. The Context of the *Baburnama*

We need to look at the text of *Baburnama* more closely to understand the historical context of Guru Nanak's hymns related to Babur's invasions. Let us begin with four significant points emerging from Babur's memoirs. First, historians claim that Babur entered North India on the invitation of Dawlat Khan Lodi, the governor of the province, and Alam Khan, the uncle of Sultan Ibrahim Lodi (G. Singh 1987, p. 79). It is true that on behalf of Dawlat Khan's son Ali Khan, the notables of Bhera paid homage to Babur on his first entry into Hindustan in 1519: "When we approached Bhera, Deva Hindu, one of the servants of Dawlat Khan Yusuf-Khel's son Ali Khan, and Siktu's son came with the notables of Bhera to present a horse and pay homage" (Thackston 1996, p. 277). Six years later, however, the text of *Baburnama* portrays an entirely different picture of the fluid situation in which Dawlat Khan Lodi had strapped two swords to his waist despite his advanced age to defend the fort at Lahore in 1525. After defeating the army led by Bihar Khan Lodi, Babur exercised his power to dictate the terms to Dawlat Khan Lodi when he came forward to submit himself. The text in this context reads: "When it was time for the interview, he (Dawlat Khan) was slow to kneel, so I ordered his leg pulled to make him kneel. When I had him seated before me, I said to someone who knew Hindustani, "Tell him these words one by one and make him understand. Say, 'I called you father, I honored and respected you more than you could have wanted. I saved you and your sons from wandering like the Baluch [leading a nomadic existence]. I rescued your clan and women from Ibrahim's sequestration. I awarded you with Tatar Khan's three-crore estates. Did I do you ill that you strapped two swords to your waist and led your army against our domains and caused such strife and turmoil?'" (Thackston 1996, p. 318). This conversation clearly indicates that Babur did not know Hindustani language at all. Babur further writes: "We had Dawlat Khan, Ali Khan, Isma'il Khan, and a few of their grandees put in chains and turned over to Kata to be taken to the Malot fort in Bhera and held under guard . . . Dawlat Khan died upon reaching Sultanpur" (Thackston 1996, p. 319). Thus, the person who had invited Babur to India died in his custody in 1526. Guru Nanak must have heard the story of how cruelly the Mughals had treated Dawlat Khan and his family whom he had known personally from his Sultanpur days. That is why he proclaimed: "Lahore city, poison, violence, a watch and a quarter" (*Lahore saharu jaharu kaharu savā paharu*//, GGS, p. 1412). He did not even complete the couplet during that moment of shock.

Second, the only native people of Punjab who offered some resistance to Babur's army were the Jats and Gujjars of Sialkot in 1525. They attacked the rear of his army to take their cattle and oxen back that were snatched forcibly in early raids. In his description of the raids of the region of Bahar and Panjgram to Kira Su, for instance, Babur explicitly writes: "Most of their animals and small children fell prey to the soldiers. A few of them withdrew in safety to the nearby mountains" (Thackston 1996, p. 299). In his report of the Sialkot incidence, however, Babur describes the Jats and Gujjars as "wretches who acted intractably and tyrannically" by plundering the cattle and oxen attached to the army. He further narrates that some of the instigators were located and later "hacked into pieces" as punishment for what they had done (Thackston 1996, p. 315). Notably, the location of Kartarpur was in the vicinity of Narowal and Sialkot, and the Jats of the neighboring areas were simply reclaiming their "rightful property" (*haq halāl*) under the influence of Baba Nanak's teachings to stand up against injustice and tyranny (Mann 2017a, p. 11). Their livelihood depended on their cattle and oxen and they were ready to confront a mighty army at the cost of their lives.

The last two points of Babur's interest in music and drinking are interconnected. The contemporary author of *Tārīkh-i-Rāshīdī*, Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat, testifies that Babur excelled in music and Turki poetry in his formative years (Elilias [1895] 2008, pp. 173–74). He was very fond of listening to the playing of a rebec (*rubāb*, a lute like musical instrument). In his memoirs Babur writes: "We also invited a wandering dervish named Shahi and a couple of *karez* men who played the *rubab*. We sat drinking on the hill behind the karez drinking until nightfall" (Thackston 1996, p. 302). The text of *Baburnama* is full of references of Babur's drinking parties. In fact, there is not a single page when he does not mention it. In addition, Babur used to eat *ma'jun*, a mild narcotic concoction made into a chewable pellet. This was equivalent to *bhaṅg*, the Punjabi word for marijuana. The earliest

narrative *Sākhī Mahalu Pahile Kī* describes how Mir Babur offered a pouch of *bhaṅg* to Baba Nanak to eat after he had listened to a hymn sung by the Guru accompanied by the *rubāb* played by Mardana (Padam 2014, pp. 210–11). In response, the Guru recited a second hymn in *Tilaṅg* raga: "The fear of God is my marijuana; my consciousness is the pouch which holds it. I have become an intoxicated hermit" (*bhau terā bhāṅg khalaṛī merā chītu//mai devānā bhaiā atītu//*, GGS, p. 721). The usage of the word *bhāṅg* in Guru Nanak's *bāṇī* can be explained only in the historical context of his encounter with Babur.

3. Rethinking the *Bābar-vāṇī*

Traditionally, four hymns of Guru Nanak are collectively known as the *Bābar-vāṇī*. These are as follows: *Āsā* 39, *Āsā Aṣṭapadī* 11, *Āsā Aṣṭapadī* 12, and *Tilaṅg 5* (GGS, pp. 360, 417–18, 722–23). Both Sikh and non-Sikh scholars have thus far focused on these four works to understand Guru Nanak's response to the political events related to Babur's invasions of India (McLeod 1968, p. 135; Grewal 2011, p. 23; P. Singh 2012, p. 203; Fenech and McLeod 2014, p. 52; N.-G.K. Singh 2017, pp. 6–14). There is an urgent need to rethink the actual number of works in this list, and I am offering its revision by including the following nine hymns, consisting of four *shabads* ("hymns for musical performance"), three *shaloks* ("couplets" or "stanzas") and two *aṣṭapadīs* ("hymns of eight stanzas"). Guru Nanak composed these hymns in response to four different historical situations related to Babur's invasions:

3.1. Four Hymns Are Related to Babur's Saidpur Invasion (1520-21 CE)

1. *Tilaṅg 1: yak araz guftam pesh tau dargosh kun kartār* … (GGS, p. 721);
2. *Tilaṅg 2: bhau terā bhāṅg khalaṛī merā chītu* … (GGS, p. 721);
3. *Tilaṅg 5: jaisī mai āvai khasam kī bāṇī taisaṛā karīn giānu ve lālo* … (GGS, pp. 722–23);
4. *Āsā 39: khurāsān khasamānā kīā hindustān ḍarāiā* … (GGS, p. 360).

These four hymns provide us with evidence of how Guru Nanak personally witnessed the devastation caused by Babur's army during the sack of Saidpur. There is vividness and depth of feeling in his descriptions of agony and destruction in his *Tilaṅg 5* and *Āsā 39* hymns that can be explained only as expressions of a direct, personal experience. Guru Nanak made a proclamation that "the Mughals have come in seventy-eight and will go in ninety-seven, and another disciple of a warrior will arise" (*āvani aṭhatarai jāṇi satānavai horu bhī uṭhasī marad kā chelā*, GGS, p. 722). The usual exegesis of this statement refers to Babur's entry into India in 1521 CE and to Humayun's departure in 1540 CE. The "disciple of a warrior" is said to refer to Sher Shah Sur who defeated Humayun in 1540 CE in the Battle of Khanua (or Khanwa). Although this event followed Guru Nanak's death in 1539 CE (which is why McLeod regarded the Guru's statement in the *Tilaṅg 5* hymn as "an enigmatic" line; see McLeod 1968, p. 137, n. 2), it must be understood in the context of his prophetic statement made in the future tense. With his mystic insight, Guru Nanak forewarned the people of India of imminent destruction: "The body-fabric will be torn apart into shreds, and then Hindustan will remember these words" (GGS, p. 723).

The opening Persian hymn of *Tilaṅg* raga reflects Guru Nanak's encounter with Babur. We have already noted that Babur did not know Hindustani language at all. For this reason, Guru Nanak employed Persian language and Islamic concepts to appeal to his conscience in this unique instance. Instead of referring to Babur invading Hindustan as a "god of death" (*jamu kari mughalu chaṛhāiā*, GGS, p. 360) in Hindustani language, here he is likened to the "angel of death" (*azrā'īl*) by using Islamic terminology. The scene of death and destruction caused by his army reminded Guru Nanak of the final prayer (*taqbīr*) offered in a Muslim ritual: "Spouse, children, parents and siblings—none of them will be there to hold your hand. And when at last I fall, and the time of my last prayer (*taqbīr*) has come, there shall be no one to rescue me" (GGS, p. 721). By addressing himself, Guru Nanak exposed the greedy tendencies of the aggressor in a most powerful way: "Night and day, I wandered around in greed, contemplating evil schemes. I never did good deeds; this is my condition" (*shab roz gashtam dar havā kardem badī khiāl//gāhe na nekī kār kardam mam īīn chinī ahavāl//*, GGS, p. 721). It is instructive to note that

the melody of *Tilaṅg* in which Guru Nanak sang with the accompaniment of *rubāb* played by Mardana is linked with the "sharpening of the sword" to prepare for the battlefield (S. Singh 1985, p. 61). This raga is quite famous among the Muslims, particularly Sufis in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Curtis 1996, p. 173). As already stated, the second hymn in this raga provides us with Guru Nanak's response to Babur's offering of a pouch of *bhaṅg* at the meeting.

During his early morning devotions, Guru Nanak addressed *Akāl Purakh* ("Eternal One," God) in *Āsā* melody. He was pained to see the suffering of the innocent who had little to do with politics and war. In his anguish, he complained to God: "You spared Khurasan but yet spread fear in Hindustan. Creator, you did this, but to avoid the blame you sent the Mughal as the messenger of death. Receiving such chastisement, the people cry out in agony and yet no anguish touches you. Creator, you belong to all. If the mighty destroy only one another, one is not grieved" (GGS, p. 360). The principal theme in *Āsā* hymn is related to the question of why the weak and innocent should suffer unmerited torment at the hands of the strong and, in this respect, this hymn has obvious affinities with the Book of Job in the Hebrew Bible. God is called into account, just as Job summons him. Guru Nanak made it quite explicit that it was the Creator who sent Babur as the messenger of death to destroy the Lodi Sultanate through successive invasions. He underscored the point that if any mighty person attacks "the weak and unarmed" person, then it is a violation of an ethical norm of warfare.

Guru Nanak was responding to an actual life situation with his profound inner experience and outer observation. In tune with Akal Purakh, he deeply reflected on the situation at hand and placed the responsibility on the shoulders of various human actors from both sides. In this context, J.S. Grewal argues that there is a moral dimension which restrains Guru Nanak from an outright condemnation of either the conqueror or the conquered (Grewal 1969, p. 163). Balbinder Singh Bhogal, on the other hand, underlines Guru Nanak's "powerlessness" and "blunt tone of abject resignation" in response to the devastation caused by Babur's army (Bhogal 2007, p. 119). This was certainly not the case. A careful examination of Guru Nanak's hymns reveals a powerful denunciation of both the invaders and the rulers. In his *Āsā* hymn, for instance, Guru Nanak described the Lodis as "wretched dogs" for their moral failure to protect their sovereignty and the jewel-like (*rattan*) innocent people (GGS, p. 360). They had acted in a manner contrary to the divine intention and were responsible for the ultimate overthrow of their dynasty. In the *Tilaṅg* hymn, on the other hand, Guru Nanak referred to Babur's army as the "marriage-party of evil" (*pāp kī jañj*), charging them for their moral failure to forcibly demand a "dowry" (*dān*) from the suffering people (P. Singh 2012, pp. 204–5). The "dowry" referred to heavy taxes collected by the Mughal army from the conquered subjects.

3.2. Two Shaloks Are Related to Babur's Invasion of Lahore (1525 CE)

5. *Salok Vārān Te Vadhīk: Lahore saharu zaharu kaharu savā paharu.* (GGS, p. 1412);
6. *Mājh Salok: kali kātī rāje kasāī dharamu paṅkh kari uḍḍariā . . .* (GGS, p. 145).

These two *shaloks* are related because both have received direct comments from Guru Amar Das. As noted earlier, Guru Nanak uttered the first aphoristic saying against the ravages caused by Babur's army at Lahore: "The city of Lahore suffered terrible destruction for four hours" (GGS, p. 1412). This is a single line *shalok*, whereas we find *shaloks* of varying lines from 2 to 20 in the Guru Granth Sahib. Traditionally, Valmiki was India's first Sanskrit poet who spontaneously uttered words that turned to have measures in two equal parts. As he uttered his feelings of sadness (*śoka*) at the spectacle of a hunter shooting down two birds, his couplet came to be called *śloka* [*shalok* in Punjabi] (Diwana 1975, p. 67). Guru Nanak uttered this unique *shalok* in a traumatic situation arising from the destruction of the city of Lahore caused by the Mughal army. He was stunned to know the ill treatment of Dawlat Khan Lodi and his family, because he had presumed from the Saidpur meeting that Dawlat Khan was an ally of Babur. Here, it is instructive to note that when Dawlat Khan Lodi fell out with Sultan Ibrahim Lodi, he had conspired with the latter's uncle, Alam Khan, to invite Babur to attack India. As Babur led his armies strategically in a series of invasions, Dawlat Khan realized that "he had come more like a conqueror and new master than like an ally, and turned against him, but was no match for

Babur and suffered a defeat at his hands" (G. Singh 1992, p. 536). Guru Nanak's aphoristic saying, originating in a catastrophic situation, received a direct comment from Guru Amar Das: "The city of Lahore is a pool of ambrosial nectar, the home of praise" (GGS, p. 1412). These words reflect the changed historical context of the peaceful days of Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), whose liberal policy encouraged religious pluralism and co-existence of different communities at Lahore. Being the birthplace of the fourth Guru, there came into being a Sikh congregation (*saṅgat*), making Lahore the "home of devotional singing of the praises of Akal Purakh" (*siftī dā ghar*).

Guru Nanak continued to express his angst and perplexity in the second *shalok* in *Vār Mājh* as follows:

The dark age (*kali*) wields the knife, and the kings have become butchers; righteousness has sprouted wings and flown away. In this dark night (*amāvas*) of falsehood, the moon of truth is not visible anywhere. I have searched in vain, and I am so confused. In this darkness I cannot find the path. In self-centeredness (*haumai*) people cry out in pain. Say O Nanak, how will they be saved? (GGS, p. 145).

The phrase "righteousness has sprouted wings and flown away" (*dharam paṅkh kari uḍḍariā*) is parallel to the following expression in *Tilaṅg* hymn: "Modesty and righteousness both have vanished and falsehood struts around like a leader, O Lalo!" (*saram dharam dui chhappi khalote kūṛ phirai pardhān ve lālo*, GGS, p. 722). This desperate situation had arisen from the chaotic circumstances of Babur's conquest of Lahore in the beginning of January 1526. Dawlat Khan Lodi made a plea to Babur for forgiveness because he had joined hands with Ghazi Khan to defend the Lahore fortress: "Ghazi Khan has fled to the hills. If you would pardon my offense, I will turn over the fortress" (Thackston 1996, p. 318). Instead, Babur confiscated all of Dawlat Khan's possessions and incarcerated him along with his entire family. Soon after, Dawlat Khan died in Mughal custody at Sultanpur. The news of these events had deeply affected the sensibilities of Guru Nanak because of his close connection with Dawlat Khan Lodi. In a different historical context of Akbar's peaceful rule, Guru Amar Das once again responded to Guru Nanak's above *shalok* with an optimistic note: "In this dark age (*kali*) devotional singing (*kīrat*) has appeared as Light in the world. How rare are those few who swim across the other side through the teachings of the Guru! The Lord bestows the glance of grace on the one who receives the gift. [Such a one] is the *Gurmukh*, O Nanak, who receives the jewel [of the divine Name]" (GGS, p. 145). In this intertextual dialogue, the third Guru paid tribute to Guru Nanak by reiterating exuberantly that the performance of his teachings in devotional singing had become "a beacon of light" (*chānaṇ*) for the congregation at Lahore.

3.3. Two Aṣṭapadīs Were Written after the Battle of Panipat (1526 CE)

7. *Āsā Aṣṭapadī 11: jin siri sohani paṭṭīān māṅgīn pāi sandhūru* . . . (GGS, p. 417);
8. *Āsā Aṣṭapadī 12: kahān su khel tabelā ghoṛe kahān bherī sahanāī* . . . (GGS, pp. 417–18).

These two *aṣṭapadīs* provide extended comments on Babur's previous invasions and his final victory over the Lodis in the battle of Panipat on April 20, 1526 CE. Guru Nanak's response to war and suffering was not limited to his personal anguish. He censured the Lodis for acting in a manner contrary to the divine intention and finally losing their sovereignty: "If someone focuses on the Divine beforehand, then why should he be punished? The rulers have lost all sense, reveling in pleasure and sensuality. Since Babur's rule has been proclaimed, even the [Lodi] princes have no food to eat" (GGS, p. 417). Elsewhere, Guru Nanak holds the heedlessness of Akal Purakh on the part of the general public responsible for bringing about this retribution. In the case of the rape of women, for instance, the Guru makes the following comment: "The wealth and sensual beauty which intoxicated them became their enemies. The messengers of Death, under orders to persecute, strip them of their honor and carry them off" (GGS, p. 417). Here, Guru Nanak is not blaming women's own behavior for being raped but rather describing the obduracy of human nature. All the violence in war and rape was caused by the senseless pursuit of worldly pleasures and the heedlessness of Akal Purakh. Some other verses represent a terrible portrait of women being raped by soldiers who did not bother

to discriminate between Hindus and Muslims who were in their path: "Some lost their five times of prayer, some the time of *pūjā*" (GGS, p. 417). Thus, Guru Nanak was deeply anguished over the horrible situation of women. He employed the Punjabi phrase "stripping of one's honor" to describe the rape of women by the Mughal army. In fact, rape is regarded as a violation of women's honor in Punjabi culture to the extent that it can affect a family's social standing. For all his sympathy with the suffering people, Guru Nanak was cognizant of the situation of poor women and their agony reminded him of a religious truth that unrighteousness would be punished according to divine justice (P. Singh 2019, p. 4). In this context, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh has skillfully argued that "Guru Nanak makes no distinction between Muslim and Hindu women, or women of different castes in the Hindu world. His compassion for them during the terrible period of Indian history comes out most touchingly throughout *Babarvani*" (N.-G.K. Singh 2017, pp. 14–15).

Guru Nanak was fully aware of the relationship between the two existing domains of temporal and spiritual sovereignties (*mīrī-pīrī*) in contemporary India. He employed the key words *pīr* (saint) and *mīr* (sovereign), representing religious and secular powers in early sixteenth century. In his second *aṣṭapadī*, Guru Nanak claimed that the religious leaders (*pīrs*) miserably failed to halt the invader with their miraculous tricks, by falsely claiming that the Mughals will be blinded when they arrive (GGS, pp. 417–18). Riding on their fast-running horses, the Mughals fired their guns on the army of Pathans on their elephants (*onhī tupak tāṇi chalāī onhī hasti chiṛhāī*, GGS, p. 418). The text of *Baburnama* testifies that Sultan Ibrahim's "standing army was estimated at one hundred thousand" and that his commanders "were said to have one thousand elephants" (Thackston 1996, p. 329). In this context, Mirza Muhammad Haidar Douglat's contemporary testimony is instructive: "Ibrahim's army numbered more than 100,000 men, but the Emperor [Babur] utterly defeated him with 10,000 men" (Elilias [1895] 2008, pp. 357–58). On the whole, Guru Nanak's description of the Panipat battle was to the point, although it was largely based upon secondhand reports. He admitted the enormity of violence caused by Babur's army as part of Mughal invasions of India, but he rendered it small from the perspective of a larger metaphysic of divine Order (*hukam*). Most instructively, Guru Nanak fully realized that unchecked political power could easily crush the religious authority of saintly people. It is no wonder that he sowed the seeds of *mīrī-pīrī* tradition in his bold resistance against the power structures of his times (P. Singh 2019, p. 4).

Finally, the opening graphic description of "the beautiful braids of young women adorned with auspicious vermillion in the parting of the hair being shorn of with scissors" (GGS, p. 417) reminded Guru Nanak of his Sultanpur days, when he had witnessed the luxuriant lifestyles of the princesses/queens of the Lodi household. He also knew what had happened to them after the sack of Lahore in late December 1525. These two *aṣṭapadīs* contain a universal warning for earthly kings like the fallen Lodis after the battle of Panipat: one can be "consumed by wealth and ultimately wasted by wealth," and so even the greatest of riches will not save you when God decides it is time for your departure (N.-G.K. Singh 2017, p. 11). For Guru Nanak, such is the sport of the Creator to make new kings and replace old ones, and the power of any worldly ruler can do nothing to stop this, no matter how much pride such figures might have in their treasure chests, armies or personal strength (Atwal 2020, p. 14).

3.4. One Shalok Was Written after Much Reflection on State Violence

9. *Malār Salok: haraṇā bājjān tai shiqdārān enāh paṛhiā nāu* . . . (p. 1288).

The most poignant analysis of the complexity of state violence is given in Guru Nanak's *Malār* hymn. Here, the Guru employs the metaphors of deer (*haraṇ*), hawks (*bāj*) and state officials (*shiqdār*) who act as trained agents to push a community on the path of self-destruction. For instance, if a hunter wants to catch the herd of deer's in the forest, he will pick up a 'baby deer'. He will then feed him to raise him in a particular way so that the deer becomes fully dependent upon the hunter. After the deer is fully trained, the hunter will let him loose in the forest where he becomes the leader of other deer's. Eventually, the trained deer will bring the herd of deer's into the trap of the hunter. Similarly, a trained

hawk will lead other hawks into the snare of the hunter (P. Singh 2019, p. 5). In modern parlance, this is known as a 'penetration strategy': "you stand for separation of religion and politics; encourage use of religion in a certain community for political purposes; and then take action against the community for mixing religion and politics" (Grewal 1998, p. 101). The original hymn reads as follows:

Mahalā 1 (Guru Nanak)

Deer, hawks, and government officials are known to be trained and clever. When the trap is set, they trap *their own kind*; hereafter, they will find no place of rest. He alone is learned and wise, and he alone is a visionary scholar who practices the divine Name. First, the tree puts down its roots, and then it spreads out its shade above [to protect *people* from sun]. The kings become tigers—[*beasts of prey*]—and their officials become *greedy dogs*; they go out and awaken the sleeping *people* to terrorize them. The public servants inflict wounds with their nails: O dogs! Lick the blood and marrow of *the poor*. Behold, where creatures will be judged [according to their deeds]; there, the noses of these tyrants will be chopped off [in disgrace] and they will be branded as untrustworthy [in the divine court]. (GGS, p. 1288).

Most of the time, Sikh scholars have a tendency to pick up a few lines of this hymn to show Guru Nanak's powerful critique of the rulers and the invaders alike, which is partially true (Grewal 1969, p. 157; G. Singh 1987, p. 43). There is a need to maintain the structural unity of this hymn in exegesis so that we can appreciate its true import. In addition to the condemnation of despotic rulers, Guru Nanak offers a severe critique of the agency of various human actors from within the community who are actually responsible for much of its agony. In the Sikh scripture, for instance, a 'deer' appears as the symbol of 'illusion' without the knowledge that the real 'musk' (*kastūrī*) lies in his own body but looks outside in bewilderment. A large majority of any community belongs to this category. A 'hawkish' person employs his 'surrogate power' to bring oppression to his own people. Similarly, government agents act as 'extended arms' of state machinery to carry out its evil designs (P. Singh 2019, p. 5). These officials "act as the sharp claws of the ruler to draw out blood and marrow of the victims for him" (Hans 1988, p. 8).

In the *Malār* hymn, Guru Nanak presents his own take on violence as politically motivated. He strongly condemns the rulers and the agents of state structures for being ultimately responsible for mass killings. The three categories of people described in this hymn as deer, hawks and agents-provocateurs are actually responsible for creating a situation for state repression. The fourth category consists of 'visionary intellectuals' (*paṇḍit bīnā*) who maintain their integrity in all circumstances without shifting their positions. By practicing the discipline of the divine Name (*nām-simaran*), they protect the interests of their community much in the same way as a shady tree protects people during a hot summer. Here, the metaphor of a 'tree' is significant because it is rooted, grounded, unwavering, and does not get distracted from the present moment. Therefore, the ideal persons in Guru Nanak's view are taught to persist similarly rooted, grounded, and unwavering in their meditation on the divine Name. They live and die for protecting the honor and dignity of their faith and community (P. Singh 2019, p. 5). Such people are the backbone of a community.

Finally, Guru Nanak was fully cognizant of the dubious role played by Dawlat Khan Lodi and Alam Khan Lodi in inviting Babur to India in the first place. He became aware of the complexity of the situation as the events unfolded sequentially after the Saidpur invasion. After deep reflection on state violence, he proclaimed that those tyrants and their greedy agents who had committed unpardonable crimes of terrorizing the innocent people by "awakening them in their sleep by coercion" (*jāi jaggāian baiṭhe sutte*) would certainly receive punishment in the divine court. Here, we have a rationale for the normalization of violence from a moral dimension, a process that stresses both free will and retributive themes. Nevertheless, these themes cohere into the higher purpose of divine will, order and command (*hukam*) in such a way that neither divine justice can be ignored, nor divine order can be defied, and that unrighteousness will certainly be punished.

4. Narrativizing Guru Nanak's Encounter with Babur

Guru Nanak's spiritual reputation had already spread far and wide during his lifetime. His charismatic personality won him many disciples who formed the nucleus of the first Sikh community (Panth) at Kartarpur. Unsurprisingly, stories about him started circulating orally during the last decades of his life. These stories must have multiplied only one or two generations from Guru Nanak's death in 1539. Legends became an integral part of these stories because they reflected "the piety engendered by great religious figures and as such serve[d] to communicate, in some measure, an impression of their power to attract and inspire" (McLeod 1968, p. 68). Listeners could learn lessons from these stories to spur on moral improvement in their own lives. We can see this theme of pedagogy in the retellings of narratives in the available *Janam-sākhis* of Guru Nanak's life (Johnson 2015). In this context, Guru Amar Das specifically described the worth and purpose of these narratives as follows: "The narratives of great ancestors' lives transform ordinary people into truly noble persons. They accept what is pleasing to the will of the True Guru, and act accordingly" (GGS, p. 951). Interestingly, the earliest and the shortest version of Guru Nanak's life-narrative appeared during the period of the third Guru. Its manuscript appears to be an "incomplete draft" (*adhūrī rahī hoī rachanā*). S.S. Padam has aptly made the case for *Sākhī Mahalu Pahile Kī* (1570–1574), written by Sīhāṅ Uppal, to be the source of later extended versions of various *Janam-sākhīs* (Padam 2014, pp. 123–59, 171–214, and 246–47). It should, however, be emphasized that diverse *Janam-sākhīs* were produced by different groups, with different theological and political agenda, within the Sikh Panth. Our main concern here is to look at the evolution of the specific narrative concerning the meeting between Guru Nanak and Babur at Saidpur.

The earliest narrative begins with Baba Nanak and Mardana, reaching Saidpur at a time when its Paṭhān inhabitants were celebrating numerous marriages. Both of them were accompanied by a group of *faqīrs* ("saintly people") who were weak with hunger. They asked for food but were overlooked at every household. This so enraged Baba Nanak that he asked Mardana to play the *rubāb* to the tune in which he recited a hymn in *Tilaṅg* melody (GGS, p. 722). A Brahmin who had heard the hymn recognized it as a summons to Babur to punish the ungenerous town. He begged Baba Nanak to retract his curse. The Guru refused to oblige him, but he promised the Brahmin that he and his family would be spared if they took refuge at a certain pool some distance outside the town. Babur then descended upon the town of Saidpur, sacked it, put all of its inhabitants to the sword and ravaged the surrounding countryside. All this had happened because the rude Paṭhāns had failed to show proper hospitality towards faqīrs: "Such was the destruction which Baba (Nanak's) *śabad* brought upon the Paṭhāns. A Great Soul was filled with wrath and because faqīrs believe in God He hears their prayers. God hears the petition of faqīrs and whatever is in faqīr's mind He performs" (McLeod 1968, p. 234). This earliest narrative of *Sākhī Mahalu Pahile Kī* became the template for the various *Janam-sākhī* traditions to add detail and color in different historical contexts.

As a historian, W.H. McLeod dismissed this story on "rational grounds," providing us with the reason that "it is completely out of character as far as Gurū Nānak is concerned." He further remarked: "Nothing in his works, including the verse [*Tilaṅg* 5] which is interpreted as a curse, offer the remotest sign that he could be capable of such vindictive behaviour" (McLeod 1968, p. 134). While we agree with McLeod's assessment to a certain extent, there is an urgent need to contextualize this narrative in the historical situation of its origins. It is instructive to note that during the period of Guru Amar Das, the Mughal–Sikh relations had become amicable due to the liberal policy of Emperor Akbar. In the changed circumstances, it may have become essential for the author of this narrative to put the entire responsibility of the destruction of the city of Saidpur on the shoulders of the *Paṭhāns* who were so engrossed in revelry at the wedding parties that they completely forgot to show proper consideration towards saintly people. In this manner, this narrative would absolve the Mughals.

The concluding part of the narrative in *Sākhi Mahalu Pahile Kī* deals with Baba Nanak's personal meeting with Babur as follows:

> Babur then greeted [Baba Nanak] with [a Muslim greeting] *salām[-a-lekam]*, saying, "Please be merciful." Then Baba said: "Mīr Jī, if you desire mercy from God, release the prisoners." Babur then said: "I have one request to make if you allow me to do so." Baba said: "Yes, please go ahead and say it." "[Faqīr] Jī, if you give me your word then I will release the prisoners." Baba said: "Ask what you desire." Then Babur said: "I am asking for this boon that my kingdom should continue from throne to throne among my descendants." Then Baba said: "Your kingdom will continue for a long time." Babur then clothed all the captives and set them free. Thereafter, Baba Nanak took leave of Babur. (Padam 2014, p. 213)

Obviously, this narrative indicates that Baba Nanak had the power to grant and take away kingship from earthly rulers. This power highlighted the Guru as a spiritual guide, "with interest and ability to alter the temporal world; his intervention helped free the slaves in Babur's possession" (Syan 2013, p. 82). In this context, Louis E. Fenech has made a crucial point that "the worldly authority of the Islamicate rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and the later Mughal empire derived principally from the blessings of the revered master who was the object of the hagiographer's attention" (Fenech 2008, p. 57). In his arguments, he has cited Simon Digby, saying, "In the opinion of their followers [Sufi pirs] held powers for making and unmaking of kings and kingdoms" (Digby 1986, p. 62). Fenech continues to relate this Sufi theme to the awareness of Guru Nanak as the force behind Babur's victories over the Lodi Sultanate in the Persian text, *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib* (1640s), depicting the contemporary Sikh belief in mid-seventeenth century: "One [of the miracles] attributed to [Baba] Nanak [by his disciples] is as follows: having been afflicted by the Afghans [Baba] Nanak delivered them over to the Mughals so that in the year [Hijra] 932 [1526 CE] Hazrat Firdaus Makani [He whose place is Paradise (Babur's posthumous title)] Babur Padishah defeated Ibrahim [Lodi] the Afghan" (Isfandyar 1983, p. 198).

Here, it is crucial to underline the point that diverse *Janam-sākhī* narratives present alternative readings of Guru Nanak's encounter with Babur. The narrative in the *Adi Sākhīs* (P. Singh [1969] 1983, pp. 194–99; Syan 2013, pp. 79–82) is basically an extension of *Sākhī Mahalu Pahile Kī*. Again, the original name of *Purātan Janam-sākhī* was *Sākhī Bābe Nānak Jī Kī: Ādi Ant Kī*, written by Saido Jaṭ (Mann 2017b, p. 174; Padam 2014, p. 246). This version added the story of Baba Nanak and Mardana being captured as prisoners during the Saidpur sack. Like all prisoners, both were made to do forced labor, Baba Nanak as a collie and Mardana as a horse attendant. A certain Mir Khan who was responsible for watching the prisoners was startled to observe that the Guru's load remained suspended a full cubit above his head and that the horse followed Mardana without a halter. When this information was conveyed to Babur, he declared, "Had I known there were such faqīrs here I should not have destroyed the town" (McLeod 1968, p. 44). Babur accompanied Mir Khan to where prisoners were working and observed that a hand-mill (*chakkī*) that had been issued to Baba Nanak turned without any assistance. He approached the Guru who uttered two hymns. Hearing these, Babur fell and kissed his feet and offered him a favor. Baba Nanak asked for all the prisoners to be released, and Babur at once issued orders to free them and restore their property (ibid.). Iqbal Qaiser has given the photograph of Gurdwara Chakki Sahib at Saidpur (Eminabad) in Gujranwala District in his major study of historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan, commemorating the site "where Guru Ji turned grinding wheel in captivity" (Qaiser 1998, p. 56). Notably, all these *Janam-sākhī* narratives discussed so far record a discourse between Guru Nanak and Babur. They belong to the normative Sikh tradition since they maintain the assertion that Guru Nanak's authority is greater than Babur's.

The most significant narrative in this context appears in Bhai Gurdas's stanza in *Vār* 26: 21. Strangely, this stanza escaped W.H. McLeod's attention in his analysis based solely upon *Vār* 1: 23–45 (McLeod 1968, pp. 14–15, 34–36). The relevant stanza about a meeting with Babur reads as follows:

> Debating frequently with the saints (*siddh*), master yogis (*nāth*), and incarnations (*avatār*) [Baba Nanak] made them feel disconcerted (*kann pharāiā*). Babur and his entourage (*bābar ke*) met with Baba [Nanak], and they all humbly submitted to him along with the *Nabāb* (Persian, *Nawāb*). Leaving temporal kings (*patishāh*) aside and abandoning both austerity (*jog*) and

> prosperity (*bhog*), he commenced a wonderful new way. Becoming a carefree (*bemuhatāju*) Lord of spiritual and temporal domains (*dīn dunī dā pātishāhu*), he brought sovereignty to the life of the householder. As the Creator (*qādar*) is in the creation (*qudrat*), so Nanak too is one with creation. Some are united to be separated eventually; whereas others are brought together who were long separated. In the holy congregation (*sādh saṅgat*) the unknowable (*alakh*) is luminously known (*lakhāiā*). (VBG 26:21; V. Singh [1911] 1977, pp. 434–35 and also see Gill 2017, pp. 225–26, 231–32)

Here, Bhai Gurdas's stanza provides us with little more than eloquent panegyric by describing the personal meeting of Babur and his retinue with Baba Nanak (*bābar ke bābe mille*). The usage of the word 'Nawāb' in the text basically points towards Dawalt Khan Lodi who had arranged a personal meeting between Babur and Baba Nanak. At the time of the Saidpur expedition, Babur had good relations with this very Nawāb of Lahore who had invited him to visit India. He had not yet established the Mughal rule over India; therefore, the only Nawāb accompanying him would be Dawlat Khan Lodi. The testimony of the *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib* (1640s) is equally instructive to underscore Guru Nanak's relationship with Dawlat Khan: "Before the victory of the late Emperor [Babur] he (Nanak) was a *Modi* to Daulat Khan Lodhi, who was one of the high officials of Ibrahim Khan Emperor of Delhi. And, Modi is an official in charge of the granary" (G. Singh 1969, p. 45). Interestingly, Dawalt Khan's high reputation within the early Sikh community (Panth) may be seen from Bhai Gurdas's list of prominent followers of the first Guru: "Dawlat Khan Lodi was a good (*bhalā*) person who achieved the status of a living Pīr" (*VBG* 11:13). This was indeed a glowing tribute to him because the tradition of a "living Pīr" enjoyed the exalted status among contemporary Sufis.

Bhai Gurdas specifically referred to Guru Nanak as a "king of both spiritual and temporal realms" (*dīn dunī dā pātishāhu*) who brought sovereignty to the life of the householder. He was writing at a time when Guru Hargobind had donned two swords, symbolizing temporal and spiritual (*mīrī-pīrī*) authority. Militancy had become an integral part of the evolving Sikh tradition when Sikhs took up arms under the guidance of the sixth Guru in order to protect themselves from Mughal hostility. By contrast, the Miharvan *Janam-sākhī* de-emphasized the militant aspect completely. It did not claim that Guru Nanak ever met Babur or had any discourse with him. It gave the same explanation for the sack of Saidpur that "those who do not heed the request made by faqīrs are tormented in hell. Behold their condition!" (K. Singh 1962, p. 465). However, the Miharvan narrative then added that afterwards Babur assaulted Ṭillā Bālgundāī, the major center of Nath-yogi ascetics:

> Seizing the yogis, he [Babur] began hacking their ears off and looting all their possessions. Even if some yogis resisted by using their steel discs to fight, they were eventually killed. They all died with the prophesy [*shabad*, "Word"] of Baba Nanak. Neither was any Mughal horse killed nor any Mughal soldier blinded. None of the yogis' miraculous powers of turning death on its heels came to any avail. These master ascetics' ability to turn death had no substance in the end. Say Waheguru. (Syan 2013, p. 78, *translation slightly amended*; K. Singh 1962, p. 469)

Hardip Singh Syan has competently examined the Miharvan narrative in detail. He draws the following conclusion:

> Miharvan's anecdote focuses on Guru Nanak as the spiritual guide. Guru Nanak does not engage with kings like Babur but guides foolish ascetics to the truth. Significantly, Miharvan stresses Guru Nanak's humbleness by repeating his identity as a simple Khatri householder. Moreover, Nanak appears like a renouncer with 'inactive' militancy, because he knew the ascetics would be murdered by Babur. Despite the claims of the ascetics about their miraculous powers, they could not foresee their impending doom and due to his occult powers, Nanak did not need any temporal powers. (Syan 2013, p. 78)

The changed historical situation after the execution of Guru Arjan in 1606 by the orders of Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) brought a fundamental shift in Mughal–Sikh relations. The Mughals intensified their interference in Sikh affairs. They encouraged the Miharvan group (called *Mīṇā* sect) to downplay

'militancy' advocated by Guru Hargobind in the mainline Sikh tradition. It is no wonder that Miharvan offered a strained interpretation of certain verses of the *Bābar-vāṇī* that "neither was any Mughal horse killed nor any Mughal soldier blinded" due to the miraculous powers of the Nath-yogis. In the original context, Guru Nanak had referred to the failure of the Sufi *pīrs* to forestall Babur's invasions.

The Bala *Janam-sākhī* offered an entirely different version of Guru Nanak's discourse with Babur. It originated in the circle of heretical Hindalis who subverted the Sikh tradition by making Guru Nanak subservient to Baba Hindal's authority. According to this narrative, Guru Nanak was captured and brought to Babur by his soldiers who told him that he was a saint. However, the conversation between the two was full of disrespect towards Baba Nanak; for instance, Babur accused him of being a liar when Nanak spoke of his intoxication (Syan 2013, p. 82). Some excerpts of the concluding paragraph of this discourse read:

> Then Babur spoke, "Listen Nanak dervish. You are a follower of Kabir." Then Guru Nanak replied "Listen Babur Qalandar, Kabir was such a devotee who was blessed by God. There was no duality between him and God . . . Then Babur said, "Nanak dervish, you accept this gift, you take some stipend. You are a good faqīr." Then Nanak said: "God has given me one gift [of the divine Name]. All people partake this gift." Babur said, "Go Nanak dervish whichever direction you want to go that route is open to you". (K. Singh 1969, p. 313; Syan 2013, p. 83, *translation amended*)

In this narrative, Guru Nanak is made the disciple of Kabir who "occupies a position of spiritual authority in the Hindali pantheon of saints" (Syan 2013, p. 83). The usage of the word *qalandar* ("Sufi mystic") for Babur in the *Janam-sākhīs* was actually based upon a popular legend preserved in *Tārīkh-i-Daudī*, written by Abdullah in 983 AH/1575–1576 CE, depicting Babur as a clandestine *qalandar* (Roy 1958, p. 123; Siddiqi 1954). The earliest *Sākhī Mahalu Pahile* Kī, written in the period 1570–1574 CE during the same time period, explicitly recorded that "Mir Babur was a *qalandar*" (*mīr bābar jo thā so qalandar thā*, Padam 2014, p. 209). This legend relates how a *qalandar* once visited Sultan Sikandar Lodi in Delhi. The Sultan accorded him due reverence and hospitality, and later learned, to his great dismay, that he had missed an opportunity of capturing Babur (McLeod 1968, p. 134, n. 4). This legend simply shows that in the garb of a *qalandar* Babur had been gathering intelligence about the Lodi Sultanate much before his actual invasions of India. Although the Bala tradition achieved popularity as a mainstream *Janam-sākhī* from the nineteenth century onwards, its prominence was eventually replaced by the *Purātan* tradition due to the discovery of Colebrooke and Hafizabad manuscripts (McLeod 1980, pp. 15–30).

Further, the phrase *bābe ke bābar ke* became popular during the period of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708) to describe the relationship between the descendants of Baba Nanak and those of Babur: "Baba Nanak's descendants (*bābe ke*) and those of Babur (*bābar ke*) are two separate entities but both were given power by the Supreme Lord. Recognize Nanak as the King of Spirituality (*dīn shāh*); acknowledge Babur's descendants as Kings of Temporality" (R. Singh 1973, p. 89). For Guru Gobind Singh, Baba Nanak's power was greater than Babur's power, though both had divine mandate to rule in their respective realms. The tenth Guru further remarked that those people who did not offer their wealth and service to the saintly people like Baba Nanak were then robbed by men like Babur and his descendants. Thus, Mughal kings were shown in the Dasam Granth as being selfish and hoarders of wealth, while Baba Nanak was shown as selfless and a re-distributor of wealth among the poor. According to Guru Gobind Singh, as Syan argues, "those who remain with the spiritual kings are forever safe, but those who go with temporal kings ultimately become impoverished" (Syan 2013, pp. 224–25). The verses of the *Bābar-vāṇī* certainly inspired Guru Gobind Singh to write his epistle of moral victory called *Zafar-nāmā* to Emperor Aurangzeb (1618–1707), inserting "a discursive blade in the heart of the Mughal Empire" (Fenech 2013).

Furthermore, the Bhai Gurdas tradition became the source for the narrative produced by the late eighteenth-century author, Rattan Singh Bhangu, suggesting that Guru Nanak and Babur had a

personal meeting at the instance of Dawlat Khan Lodi: "Babur asked the question from Dawlat [Khan]. What should I offer to the Pīr? Dawlat [Khan] told him that he does not accept anything from anyone. All people go to him for his blessings. All temporal and spiritual powers (*mīrī pīrī*) are deferential to him. You will see for yourself when you go near him" (Dhillon 2004, p. 265). Most interestingly, Bhangu narrates in a unique way that Guru Nanak was the supreme spiritual sovereign of Hindustan, over and above the Prophet of Islam, whose powers were supposedly limited to Khurasan alone:

> Babur pleaded to be blessed with sovereignty over India, so that his writ might run over twenty-two Indian provinces. Instantly did prophet Muhammad reject Babur's plea with a remark, that he had no divine sanction for granting sovereignty over India. (76) . . .
>
> . . . [This] being the sole prerogative of Guru Nanak, Babur should have no expectations from his Prophet about it. (77) (K. Singh 2008, p. 271)

For Bhangu, Guru Nanak was the sole representative of God on earth who had the power to sanctify Mughal rule over India.

Finally, Bhangu's extended narrative implies that in his grace, Baba Nanak gave the political power to Mir Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, with a time limit of seven generations. However, three generations later, Babur's descendants began to misuse their power (exemplified by the execution of Guru Arjan and later that of Guru Tegh Bahadur and his four grandsons) and forfeited their right to rule as a result of their misdeeds. As already noted, Bhai Gurdas specifically mentioned that the descendants of Baba Nanak had separated themselves from the temporal rulers (*VBG* 26:21). In this context, Priya Atwal aptly remarks that Bhangu's account "completely subverts eighteenth century Mughal-centric perspective of the relationship between the imperial state/dynasty with the Sikh *panth*, where the Gurus and the *misls* ["Sikh confederations"] were portrayed as deviant upstarts who threatened Mughal sovereignty. Instead, Guru Nanak is here presented as the original fount of honour for Mughal rulership" (Atwal 2020, p. 15). As soon as Babur's dynasty turned against the house of Baba Nanak, in Bhangu's eyes, only Sikh rule could be the rightful replacement to Mughal political hegemony in the Punjab—specifically, the Khalsa Sikhs were collectively designed to be the heir of the royal standing that Guru Gobind Singh wrenched back from the unworthy Mughals (ibid.). Therefore, Bhangu offered an early modern interpretation of the narrative in which Guru Nanak and Babur discourse on religion and politics. He used it as a template to explain Mughal moral decline and Sikh political triumph. Hardip Singh Syan rightly contends that "in these narratives, early Mughal history was embedded in a Sikh narrative of sovereignty and state formation" (Syan 2013, p. 76). In his conversations with Captain Murray, who was charged with preparing the history of the Sikhs, Bhangu underscored the point that the Sikh Panth had always "preserved the right to sovereignty" (*ham rākhat pātishāhī dāavā*, Dhillon 2004, p. 207), a right to self-determination promised by the Eternal Sovereign (Satguru).

5. Conclusions

In this study, we have explored Guru Nanak's own works concerning Babur's invasions, and looked at different historical narratives produced much later about the Guru's encounter with Babur, originating at different times from diverse circles and reflecting their ideological and political agenda. These narratives offered different interpretations of the verses of the *Bābar-vāṇī*, reflecting the historical contexts and motives of their authors. In our analysis, we have drawn supporting evidence from the text of the *Baburnama* to extend the number of works in the *Bābar-vāṇī* from a 'fixed' assemblage of 'four' to 'nine,' making it an open collection that dynamically responds to specific questions raised by historians from time to time. The new framework created by our revision offers us a fresh analytical gaze into the critical events related to Babur's invasions and helps the novel readings of Guru Nanak's verses shine through. One can raise the issue of the *Bābar-vāṇī* being the 'exception' in the context of the overall emphasis of Guru Nanak's teachings of 'interior devotion'. This is a simplistic assertion, since Guru Nanak's critique of political structures of his times may be seen in other works, particularly in his celebrated *Japjī* (GGS, pp. 4, 6–8), *Vār Mājh* (GGS, p. 145), *Vār Āsā* (GGS, pp. 468–9), *Vār*

Malār (GGS, pp. 1287–88) and the opening hymn of the very first melody of *Sirī Rāgu* in the Sikh scripture (GGS, p. 14). The three categories of people referred to in Guru Nanak's *Malār* hymn actually provide us with a lens to deconstruct the Punjab crisis of 1984 (P. Singh 2016, pp. 173–90) from a fresh perspective. The present study challenges the reductionist approach that confines Guru Nanak's teachings to "interior devotion" limited essentially to the private sphere without taking into account its relevance in political, economic and social arenas of public sphere (P. Singh 2019, p. 3).

The most significant impact of the *Bābar-vāṇī* has been on the evolving Sikh conceptions of the relationship between spiritual and political powers. Guru Nanak sowed the seeds of *mīrī-pīrī* tradition in his bold response to Babur's invasions because he maintained that unchecked political power could easily crush the religious authority of saintly people. In central Asia, the relationship between the Sufi shaykhs and political elites was well established in Islamicate dynasties. For instance, Omid Safi points out that "the *baraka* ["blessing"] of the saint legitimizes the military conquest of the warlord in exchange for promise of justice for the people" (Safi 2006, pp. 133–34). The baraka-legitimizing narratives may be seen in connection with Timurid and Ottoman dynasties. In particular, Babur was connected to Naqshbandi Sufi order: 'Ubaydullah Ahrar granted victory in taking Samarqand (Eaton 2019, p. 205). Babur later patronized the Shattari order, as did Humayun (ibid., p. 241). Humayun "re-confirmed" tax-free land for the Naqshbandis to "consolidate his grip" on Kabul (ibid., pp. 212–13). For Akbar, however, the Chisti Sufi order was an "indigenizing force", whose shrines in India "made India itself the spiritual home of Chisti Sufism" (ibid., p. 75). Thus, Akbar signaled a shift away from the Central Asian Sufi shaykhs toward the "Indianized Chistis" (ibid., p. 221). Azfar Moin has argued that the Indo-Timuri empire was based on such ideas of sacred kingship gleaned from the Safavids: "the Sufi practice of inculcating loyalty and marking fealty that had been inflicted upon Babur by Shah Isma'il had, over the course of a century, become an institutional scaffolding of the Mughal imperial system . . . Babur had witnessed how the Safavids acted as both kings and saints, first absorbing his Timurid cousins and then him as their subordinates and disciples" (Moin 2014, p. 177). Unsurprisingly, after his victory in the battle of Khanua in 1527, Babur added the title of "Ghazi" ("Holy Warrior") to his official seal to claim authority in both temporal and spiritual realms: "For the sake of Islam I became a wanderer; I battled infidels and Hindus. I determined to become a martyr. Thank God I became a holy warrior" (Thackston 1996, p. 387). In light of this background, we can safely say that the Saidpur invasion of Babur was of an exploratory nature where he came across Baba Nanak through the courtesy of Dawlat Khan Lodi. It must have been difficult for him to accept an Indian saint in preference to Sufi shaykhs. This may have been another reason for his silence over his meeting with the Guru in his memoirs.

This study has revealed how Guru Nanak was moved by the ill treatment of Dawlat Khan Lodi and his family at the capture of Lahore by Babur in the period 1525–1526. As a matter of fact, Dawalt Khan was an important political figure in the Punjab, whom Babur mentioned in his memoirs frequently: "Dawlat Khan's father Tatar Khan was one of the seven or eight commanders who had rebelled, taken over Hindustan, and set up Bahlol as padishah ["emperor"]. All the areas to the north of Sirhind and the Sutlej River belonged to Tatar Khan, and these districts had a revenue of more than three crores [/thirty million]. After Tatar Khan's death, Sultan Sikandar in his capacity as padishah seized the territory from Tatar Khan's sons. A year or two before I came to Kabul, he gave Lahore to Dawlat Khan" (Thackston 1996, p. 278). This early reference shows the esteem in which Babur held Dawlat Khan. In order to use diplomacy, Babur handed Mula Murshad letters he had written to Dawlat Khan and Sultan Ibrahim along with a hawk to lay claim to the territories that had belonged to the Turk: "Dawlat Khan kept our man in Lahore for a few days without seeing him or sending him to Ibrahim. A few months later he went back to Kabul without having received a reply" (ibid., p. 279). This incidence irked Babur immensely, because he considered himself the rightful heir of Amir Temur (1336–1405), who invaded northern India in 1398. The territories he conquered came to be known as Turkish. In 1524, however, Dawlat Khan revolted against Sultan Ibrahim to become an independent ruler, and he reached out to Babur to come to his aid in Punjab. At the same time, the Afghan

nobles at Lahore had decided to send Alam Khan Lodi and Dilawar Khan, Dawlat Khan's son, to persuade Babur to help them in removing Ibrahim Lodi and placing his uncle Alam Khan on the throne (G. Singh 1987, p. 80). Babur was watching these developments of rebellion in Hindustan carefully, and he strategically camped at Sialkot on 29 December 1525 (Thackston 1996, p. 315). There, he learned of Alam Khan's defeat by Sultan Ibrahim, and later on Babur defeated the forces led by Bihar Khan Lodi to capture Lahore. As already noted, Dawlat Khan surrendered with the hope to be forgiven but Babur had him and his family members, along with few of their grandees, put in chains. On Monday, 8 January 1526, Babur "entered the fortress for an inspection and went into Ghazi Khan's library, which held a few valuable books. I gave some of them to Humayun and sent others to Kamran" (ibid., p. 319). Babur further noticed that the troops were raising a ruckus at the gate of the Lahore fortress: "as peremptory punishment I shot a few of them. All at once a fateful arrow hit Humayun's storyteller, and he died on the spot" (ibid., p. 319). Guru Nanak referred to this destruction poignantly: "Lahore city, poison, violence, a watch and a quarter" (GGS, p. 1412; also see SGPC [1941] 1979, *Shabadārath*, p. 1412, n. 15). The defeat of Sultan Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat in 1526 was ingrained in his memory when he sang the opening hymn in *Sirī Rāgu*: "If I were to become a Sultan and raise a huge army, and sit on a throne, issuing commands and collecting taxes, O Nanak, all of this could pass away like a puff of wind" (GGS, p. 14). In this context, J.S Grewal adroitly argues that Guru Nanak continued to exhort his audience at Kartarpur "to turn to God, the true king, the king of kings", [whose] "service alone is true service" (Grewal 1990, p. 29).

As already noted in the introduction, the text of the *Baburnama* breaks off at the events of year [Hijra] 926 (1519–1520 CE) and picks up again nearly six years later in [Hijra] 932 (1525 CE). The gaps in the text are likely the result of loss of quires during storm (see fol. 376b in Thackston). Several comments show that Babur was working on parts of his memoirs in [Hijra] 935 (1528–1529 CE)—the last year for which there is an entry—and he died in the following year, in 1530. It is possible that Babur himself removed some portions from his memoirs at this time of final editing. Babur's son Humayun (1508–1556) knew Chaughatay, the Timurids' spoken Turkish language, well and he read his father's memoirs frequently. Babar's grandson, Akbar (1542–1605), also knew Chaughatay, for he was only fourteen years when his father Humayun died in 1556 (Thackston 1996, pp. 11, 440). The memory of Babur's meeting with Baba Nanak at Saidpur may have been alive in Humayun's mind, and that is why he went to see Guru Angad after his defeat at the hands of the Afghan general Sher Shah Suri in 1540. Worldly rulers normally turn to spiritual leaders in their moment of distress. Similarly, Akbar officially visited the Sikh Darbār at Goindval on 4 November 1598. He was pleased to listen to "the recitation of Hindi verses that had been composed by Baba Nanak for expounding the knowledge of God" (P. Singh 2006, pp. 19–21). This strong tradition was suppressed by later Mughal rulers. The invasion of Saidpur in the period 1520–1521 may not have carried much importance in Babur's eyes; hence it did not find a place in his memoirs. For Guru Nanak, however, it was the most significant event, because he had first-hand experience of violence at Saidpur. Its impact may be seen in his later works. While appreciating the beauty and wonder of goodness in the world in his *Japjī*, Guru Nanak praises "countless heroic warriors who bear the brunt of attack in battle" (GGS, p. 4). He simultaneously admits the existence of evil and tyranny in the following stanza: "Countless the fools, the thieves, the swindlers; countless those who rule by force. Countless are the cutthroats and violent murderers; countless those who live evil lives" (GGS, p. 4). Again, violence is divinely sanctioned: "When it pleases You [O divine Sovereign!], some wield swords cutting off heads [of their enemies] as they move" (GGS, p. 145). In the *Mārū* hymn, the Divine is represented as both violent and benevolent: "He himself kills and rejuvenates" (GGS, p. 1034). Not surprisingly, love and violence, pains and pleasures, good and evil, matter and spirit are intrinsic to human condition. In Guru Nanak's spiritual vision, therefore, both good and evil exist in the divine plan (P. Singh 2012, p. 203). The *Bābar-vāṇī* highlights this fact: "The Creator himself acts and causes others to act. Unto whom should we complain? Pain and pleasure come by Your will, unto whom should we go and cry?

The divine Commander is pleased by issuing the command, O Nanak, we receive what is written in our destiny" (GGS, p. 418).

For a deeper understanding of the impact of the *Bābar-vāṇī* we need to understand the human actors who participate in warfare or sporadic acts of violence. One must comprehend the motivation of those warriors who fight in the battlefield, resulting in the shedding of blood in violent encounters. The invaders are always triggered by the motivation of conquering new lands. The text of *Baburnama* explicitly records Babur's motivation of the conquest of Hindustan in January 1505: "In consultation we decided on a campaign to Hindustan . . . I had never seen a hot climate or any of Hindustan before. When we reached Nangarhar, a new world came into view—different plants, different trees, different animals and birds, different tribes and people, different manners and customs. It was astonishing, truly astonishing" (Thackston 1996, p. 186; also see G. Singh 1987, p. 78). The opponents of invaders may be inspired by the patriotic spirit to defend their country from the aggressors. This is what Sultan Ibrahim Lodi was doing at Panipat, although he was defeated in the battle. Still others may die fighting for "heroic values" and their death may be constructed as the ideal of a martyrdom. For Guru Nanak, a heroic death must be based upon the true "honor" obtained before the divine court of Akal Purakh: "Blessed is the death of heroic persons if their dying is approved of [by the immortal Lord]. Only those people may be called heroes who obtain true honor before the divine Court" (GGS, pp. 579–80). Such spiritual heroes who practice the discipline of meditation on the divine Name (*nām simaran*) during their lifetime receive true honor at the final moment of death. In fact, the fourth stage on the mystic path described in the *Japjī* is the "Realm of Grace" (*karam khaṇḍ*), which is the abode of "divine heroes and mighty warriors" who pass beyond error and transmigration. They are the 'real martyrs' in Guru Nanak's eyes. They are in full control of themselves, since they have conquered their 'self,' an achievement that goes beyond the conquest of nations and people (GGS, p. 8; P. Singh 2014, p. 233). By contrast, "the noses of tyrants [who terrorize innocent people] are chopped off in disgrace and they are branded as untrustworthy in the divine court" (GGS, p. 1288). Gurinder Singh Mann compellingly argues that it was Babur's invasions that "impelled Bābā Nānak to found a new *panth*, thereby creating a world that would stand apart from the senseless carnage he had observed" (Mann 2018, p. 177). He continues to demonstrate that Guru Nanak's immediate response to the political violence generated by these invasions set him far apart from the contemporary poet-saints (*bhagats*) of North India.

In sum, the *Bābar-vāṇī* verses elucidate how Guru Nanak encountered Babur at Saidpur, singing a hymn in Persian language to the tune of a wartime melody, and exposing the greedy tendencies of the aggressor in a most intimate way. These verses further reveal how he invoked the Creator of the universe with awe and anger to complain that the Divine had been unjust in wreaking havoc upon innocent people who had nothing to do with war and politics. The "very powerful verses," to use historian J.S. Grewal's illuminating phrase, have cultivated the spirit of speaking Truth to Power among the Sikhs at most critical junctures. They have provided a radical new reading of the traumatic events of Indian history and have become the source of multiple interpretations for later generations. The novel readings of these verses and their subsequent Sikh exegesis can illuminate evolving Sikh conceptions of the relationship between spiritual and political powers. The framework of this study will offer a counter perspective to the most popular narrative among traditional scholars. It will certainly challenge the Mughal-centric imperial perspective.

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Dedication: I dedicate this article to Jagtar Singh Grewal who taught me at the University of Toronto in 1988 as a visiting professor.

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The Image of Guru Nanak in Dadu-Panthi Sources

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Abstract: This essay examines the issue of Guru Nanak's inclusion in the mid-to-late seventeenth-century devotional text prepared by the Dadu-panthi savant, Raghavdas, the *Bhakt-māl* or *Garland of Devotees*. This text follows by some decades the similarly titled *Bhakt-māl* of Nabha Das. However, while Nabha Das excludes Guru Nanak, Raghavdas' *Bhakt-māl* embraces him and includes a much more diverse seventeenth- and pre-seventeenth-century saintly clientele that was particular to both northern and southern India. The essay is one of the first to examine this text in Sikh studies and tease out the reasons which may have prompted Raghavdas to include Guru Nanak. In the process, it attempts to understand early non-Sikh bhakti views of the Sikh Gurus while also providing fresh looks at Sikh numbers in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and at the diverse and multi-ideological environment of northern India from the early 1600s onward. It also suggests Raghavadas' familiarity with the poetry of his near contemporary ideologue, the great Sikh scholar Bhai Gurdas Bhalla.

Keywords: Sikh; Guru Nanak; Raghavdas; Dadu; Kabir; Bhai Gurdas; *Bhakt-māl*; Nabhadas; Udasi

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Nānak sūraj rūp bhūp sārai parakāse

Nanak's true form is that of the sun, the sovereign whose light is diffused throughout the entire world.

Bhakt-māl 342:2 (Nahta 1965, p. 175)

1. Introduction

On this, the 550th birth anniversary of the first Sikh Master, Guru Nanak (1469–1539 CE), it is fitting that we recognize and celebrate the centuries-constant Sikh commitment to the teachings of the son of Kalu Bedi and Mata Tripta, especially given the solid foundation for Sikhi or Sikhism that these teachings have constructed. This Sikh focus on the First Guru and his doctrines has provided both encouragement and solace to Sikhs and others in times both difficult and those less so.

Scholarship on the Sikh tradition over the last century has done a fine job of excavating the ground of these teachings.[1] Such study has underscored the originality of the way that Guru Nanak refracted his cultural and intellectual inheritance through the lens of his own charismatic personality and understandings, transforming what were a relatively loose collection of ideas conveyed in poetry and song by some of his similarly minded contemporaries into lucid and systematic doctrines—doctrines which, in conjunction with the First Master's specific *sādhāna* or discipline of *nām simran* allowed one to achieve the knowledge that secured liberation from the cycle of existence. These principles eventually took on a communal form and were compiled and organized into Guru Arjan's masterpiece, the Adi Granth also known as the Guru Granth or Guru Granth Sahib. These studies on Sikh history and scripture have also demonstrated the effects of these, the first Guru's principles on the long progression

[1] Such studies include (McLeod 1968; Grewal 1979) among others.

of the Sikh Panth and the length to which these ideas had shaped Sikh scripture (McLeod 1968; Grewal 1979).

In detailing these developments contemporary Sikh scholarship has followed the lead set by even earlier Sikh authors dating back to the very mid sixteenth-century origins of the religious biographies of Guru Nanak, the *janam-sākhī*s (lit., 'birth-evidence'). It is worth noting that today's popular narratives of Guru Nanak's life are almost solely derived from janam-sakhi accounts. These first authors, too, in their devotion to the First Guru, attempted to provide a thorough exegesis of the First Master's ideas though in the context of his life narratives, and in the process of so doing have constructed a future-oriented community based on reverence for both the man and his message. Grounded on the stories within the janam-sakhis it is quite clear that the most meagre of connections to Guru Nanak was enough to obtain liberation: in one *sākhi*, for example, Guru Nanak's mere glance towards the smoke of a murderer's funeral pyre was enough for the latter to secure paradise (McLeod 1980b, pp. 201–3).

However, these very same earlier writers, as too those who came afterwards, have neglected acknowledging almost all sixteenth- to eighteenth-century material referencing Guru Nanak and Sikh teachings that was produced by those who embraced the First Master or were sympathetic towards his teachings, but did not identify as Sikh or Nanak-panthi. This disregard on the part of those Sikh authors is understandable for a number of reasons. First, the janam-sakhis are lovingly written hagiographies of Baba Nanak which attempt to do far more than merely convey the life of the First Guru. They endeavor to persuade others—non-Sikhs—as to the truth that Nanak manifested, simultaneously aiming to establish a relationship between Guru Nanak and those identifying as his Sikhs, to aid in understanding the First Master's teachings through anecdotes of Guru Nanak's life; through this, listeners and readers may themselves obtain liberation. In this way, the janam-sakhis serve a soteriological purpose (McLeod 1968; McLeod 1980a). Second, Sikh authors appear to have simply demonstrated no interest in this regard. After all, most of the frameworks through which they view Guru Nanak and his panth, although bearing certain features in common with those of both Hindu and Islamic traditions, are nevertheless uniquely Sikh if only for their focus on he whom they identify as the founder of their tradition, a man who 'defeats' all challengers, Sufi, Nath, and yogi alike, to demonstrate the superiority of his *mat* or doctrine (a telos to be sure). Third, the size of the Sikh community in its first 100 or so years of existence was quite small although growing—as many scholars have noted (for one, McLeod 1975) by, for example, pointing to the creation of pilgrimage centers such as Goindwal or bustling towns such as Amritsar and nearby Tarn Taran in the late sixteenth century, the latter two of which, in particular, had recognizable groups of those who were part of the growing Nanak-panth—but nevertheless, these numbers were relatively slight when compared to northern India's overall population. As such, Sikhs, non-Sikh writers, and Mughal officials in administrative centers of the empire for that matter may have only rarely crossed paths which would, in turn, have ensured that non-Sikh accounts of the First Guru and his doctrines were few. But few, of course, is not none.

The fact that such sources exist should elicit surprise for those of us in Sikh studies because, for the most part, they are simply never mentioned explicitly, in either contemporary literature or that of today. These quite early non-Sikh observations are, however, important. On the one hand, they add a fascinating dimension to the study of both early Sikh history and the motivations on the part of these non-Sikh authors behind excluding or including references to the Sikhs and their Gurus. On the other hand, the examination of these sources, which emerge from within a clearly mid-to-late seventeenth-century Vaishnava bhakti milieu, will also help us chart out a more accurate history of the context in which the Sikh tradition grew and thrived,[2] the areas to which it travelled, and the groups with which it was in competition and to which it was responding. These implicit responses,

[2] That is to say, a history that goes beyond simply demonstrating the Panth's multiple responses to the whims of the Mughal emperors and their administrations.

furthermore, lay bare at least some of the motivations behind the creation of the more celebrated works of Sikh literature. For, while there are no explicit references to these bhakti texts in Sikh works, I will argue that, generally, there are implicit ones.

Indeed, Sikh writers would later encounter these sources and react to them, albeit tacitly, contesting both the exclusion of the Gurus in certain texts and the way that the Gurus were depicted in others. Sikh works such as the famous *vārān* of Bhai Gurdas (mid seventeenth century) and the *Sikkhān dī Bhagat-māl* of Bhai Mani Singh (mid eighteenth century)—which is also known as the *Bhagat Ratnāvalī*—have these bhakti works in mind as they advocate, quite forcefully, on the behalf of a separate and unique Sikh identity. It is this unique identity that the Hindu works implicitly reject by circumscribing the Gurus within the redemptive sphere of bhakti, Vaishnava or otherwise.

This paper will endeavor to attend to these long-neglected works within Sikh studies and address the points noted above. We have already mentioned the question of Sikh numbers, and will expand upon those references in part two of this essay, which concludes with a short discussion of the languages in which early non-Sikh accounts of the Sikhs were presented. All this to suggest the reasons why, firstly, the Sikhs were not generally noticed by non-Sikhs such as Nabhadas and secondly, why these few non-Sikh texts like that of Raghavdas were ignored by Sikhs. The third section will introduce more generally the textual source whose analysis forms the bulk of this paper, the *Bhakt-māl* of the Dadupanthi Bhakt, Raghavdas, with a rather extended discussion of this text's dating for reasons which will become obvious in part three. Sections four to six will focus on the specific *chhappais* or poems in which Guru Nanak is mentioned and situate these within the mid-to-late seventeenth-century literary context in which Raghavdas is writing, suggesting the Sikh sources that Raghavdas is engaging, whose views he is attempting to circumvent in his portrayal of Guru Nanak and the Sikhs. I will end with a brief afterword.

2. Engagement: A Question of Numbers and Languages

The existence at this time of a relatively limited number of Sikhs may help explain a few of the conundrums which emerge from surveys of early Sikh tradition and history. Some of these include the earliest interactions between Sikhs and Mughal administrators. Such small numbers, for example, explain why the famous chronicler of the emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605 CE) the 'worldly' (*Āllamī*) Abul Fazl who does mention the emperor's visit to Guru Arjan in 1598 as the emperor is returning to Agra from Lahore, says nothing about the first Master (or his successors) and his teachings in his *Ain-i Akbārī* (Blochmann 1997). This text is a compendium that Abul Fazl prepared of the more well-known South Asian religio-cultural traditions (among other things) as seen and understood from the perspective of the late sixteenth-century Mughal court (Singh 1949, p. 19; Grewal and Habib 2001, p. 55). This lack is especially telling since the esteemed son of Shaikh Mubarak both includes so many contemporary non-Muslim traditions in what is surely his tour de force and, perhaps more importantly, even met the Guru of the Sikhs—and, as an aside, such an omission compels one to ask whether certain traditions claiming that Bhai Gurdas Bhalla (of whom more later) may have been present within the emperor's *Ibādat-khānah* (House of Worship) in Fatehpur Sikri are unfounded as a consequence (Singh 2006, p. 68). Abu l Fazl's failure should not indicate that the ignorance of the Sikhs was widespread though as there is a singular mention of the community in various iterations of the *Razm-nāmah*, the Persian interpretation of the Sanskrit Mahabharata of Vyasa which was prepared for Akbar (Truschke 2016, p. 112).

The situation is not much changed a near decade later by the time of Guru Arjan's execution in 1606 under the orders of Akbar's son and successor the emperor Jahangir. Regarding the Sikhs, the only comments we discover in Mughal sources are found in the emperor's memoir, the *Jahāngīr-nāmah*. Jahangir describes Guru Arjan as a Hindu and make us privy to the fact that Guru Arjan's was a religious tradition which originated in India, had attracted both Hindus and Muslims, been growing for some generations—although the extent of its growth is left unsaid—and that it differed from that variety of Islam to which the emperor subscribed (Thackston 1999, p. 59). Mughal poets who wrote

within the *darbār*s of both Jahangir and Shah Jahan, moreover, also failed to name the Sikhs in the occasional poem in which various social groups within the empire were identified. The poet laureate of Shah Jahan, for example, Abu Talib Kalim (d. 1651 CE) did not include the Sikhs in his encomium lauding the virtues of the city of Agra (Sharma 2017, pp. 116–17).

The Panth's slight numbers at this time may have played a part in the neglect shown towards Guru Nanak and his teachings by those earliest of non-Sikh hagiographers of the Bhakts (Hindi)/Bhagats (Punjabi), the saints of the Vaishnava tradition. This would include the pioneering Bhakt writer Nabhadas whose *Bhakt-māl* or *Garland of Saints* is the first of what will afterwards become a very popular seventeenth- and eighteenth-century genre, mimicked to an extent by later Sikh authors such as, apparently, the famous Bhai Mani Singh to whom is attributed the somewhat similarly titled *Sikhān dī Bhagat-māl* (*Garland of Sikh Saints*), which augments the well-known eleventh *vār* of Bhai Gurdas dedicated to the earliest followers of the Sikh Gurus, all of whom, for the author, stood spiritually above the best of Hindu Bhakts (Jha 1978).

The devotional flowers strung together on these garlands were highly condensed narratives of the Sants and Bhagats[3] which formed *aides de mémoire* and were constructed in part to form a new public, a bhakti public (Williams 2014), and were also likely used by pious listeners in conjunction with their own gurus who would explain the pithy stories in detail to their audience, likely as *kathā* (Pinch 1999, pp. 371–72; Horstmann 2015, p. 37). Nabhadas, as has been well documented (Hare 2011; Burchett 2012), fails to include Guru Nanak in his prodigious list of Bhakts. Additionally—although scholars have claimed that Nabhadas may have chosen to purposefully omit Guru Nanak and the Nanak Panth because of competition for patronage, or for the fact that Guru Nanak most often spoke of the *nṛgun* divine, a deity beyond all qualities, while Nabhadas advocated on behalf of a variety of Vaishnavism which privileged the *sagun* (also *trigun*) or qualified divine (Burchett 2012, pp. 236–45)—it is worth emphasizing that, during Nabhadas' period, Sikh numbers were tiny in comparison to those who identified as Vaishnava. To this we may note furthermore that there were, as well, few (if any) Sikhs present near the Galta area of present-day Jaipur in which Nabhadas' Vaishnav Bhakts primarily congregated—a location lauded in traditions surrounding Nabhadas as particularly noted by Priyadas (Hawley 2015, p. 111). The likely early date of Nabhadas' *Bhakt-māl*, which scholars situate between the years 1585 and 1623 CE (Hare 2011, pp. 44–45), suggests that our famous Bhakt may have simply not come into contact with the Sikhs or those familiar with the hymns of the first Gurus despite the fact that Nabhadas' famous disciple Krishandas Payahari is claimed to have commissioned his Punjabi follower Bhagvan ji to spread Vaishnav doctrines throughout the Punjab Hills (Goswamy and Grewal 1969, p. 7). I would, therefore, and with all due respect, question Professor Hawley's claim in his otherwise excellent book chapter that "the political and anthologizing activities of Nanak's *panth* make it unlikely that he [Guru Nanak] would have been unknown to Nabhadas" (Hawley 2015, p. 136).

Even if we assume that the latest date of 1623 CE is the most accurate, this would still place Nabhadas' *Bhakt-māl* around a quarter century before the appearance of the Persian *Dabistān-i Maẕāhib* or *The School of Religious Traditions* in the early-to-mid 1640s to which we will return. It is quite likely that Mobad Shah, the author of the *Dabistān*, was familiar with Nabhadas' text perhaps having been made privy to certain features of Nabhadas' rubrics from reading the text itself or from one of his many informants and interlocutors (Hawley 2013, pp. 24–25). It is quite clear, for example, that in regard to the many Vaishnav traditions which our Zoroastrian author describes, Mobad Shah follows the template set by Nabhadas, something that J.S. Hawley had earlier noted especially regarding what was by that time the well-known fourfold classification of Vaishnav teaching traditions, the four *sampradāy*s

[3] The difference between Sants and Bhakts, at least since the mid twentieth century, is summed up in the sentence above. Namely, the nature of the deity to which/whom they address their hymns, one with qualities or one beyond qualities.

or teaching traditions of Ramanuja, Vishnuswami, Nimbarka, and Madhva so eagerly embraced by Maharaja Jai Singh II Kacchvaha in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries (Bahuguna 2013).

Mobad Shah includes the Sikhs within his Hindu category, the latter being one of the twelve such classifications he puts forward, devoting an entire subsection of that category to Guru Nanak and the Nanak-panthis thereby asserting their independent sectarian identity (Behl 2010). This strongly suggests that the mid seventeenth century was a time when Sikhs were more widespread and that this spread reflected larger numbers, a claim that the traditions surrounding Guru Hargobind and Guru Hari Rai, the Sixth and Seventh Sikh Gurus respectively, make clear (Singh 1985; Esfandyar 1983).

Mobad Shah's Persian account of the Nanak-panthis, our Zoroastrian author notes, was produced in part through conversations with both Guru Hargobind and Guru Hari Rai, which makes the Sikh failure to reference his observations in seventeenth-century Sikh literature all the more surprising. The account itself focuses on those elements of the Sikh tradition and teachings that align with the variety of Zoroastrianism that Mobad Shah was attempting to promote, an analysis which draws at least some of its information from the poetry of Bhai Gurdas based on a side-by-side reading of both. In 1689 CE, some four decades after the appearance of the *Dabistān*, moreover, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1618–1707 CE) himself would include in his conversations a *śabad* of Guru Nanak demonstrating that knowledge about the First Sikh Master and his panth had become more widespread by this point, a pervasiveness seconded, again, by the *hukam-nāmā*s or "written instructions" of the Ninth and Tenth Gurus (Ali 1871, p. 334; Chatterji 1979). It is by this time certainly that Bhai Gurdas' poetic claim in his first *vār* seems less like exaggeration. To wit,

> *ghari ghari andari dharamsāl hovai kīrtanu sadā visoā*
>
> Each and every home has become a dharamsala in which the performance of *kīrtan* is an everyday event.
>
> *BG* 1:27:6 (Singh 1997, p. 22)

The failure on the part of later seventeenth-century Sikh writers to explicitly engage non-Sikh references to the Sikh Gurus continues throughout the eighteenth century. It is only by the 1800s that Sikh authors begin to occupy themselves with those who convey interpretations of the teachings of the Gurus in different languages and through uncommon lenses. However, even in these cases, the engagements were between those who understood themselves as Sikh but expressed different ways of being so. Here, I particularly have in mind both Udasi and Nirmala Sikh expressions. Perhaps most famous in this regard is the interpretation of Guru Nanak's Japji penned by the famous Nirmala Sikh Santokh Singh, the 1829 CE *Garb Gañjanī Ṭīkā* or *The Pride-Humbling Commentary* (Pradhan 1986). In this case, the pride that Santokh Singh was attempting to chasten was that of the Udasi Sikh scholar Anandghan who was at one time Santokh Singh's teacher and who prepared an interpretation of Guru Nanak's Japji Sahib in 1795 CE that followed an understanding of Sikh tradition and teachings aligned with the Indic-period *dharmaśastras*. In this, virtually any reference to Hindu deities in Guru Nanak's hymns was interpreted as the First Master's acceptance of the salvific power of said deities (Singh 2000, pp. 249–53).

One could perhaps argue that a part of the reason for the oversight by early Sikh authors noted in the previous paragraphs was the difficulty of language. In regard to early Persian accounts, for example, some Sikhs clearly knew Persian at least at a rudimentary level, in order to deal with representatives of the Mughal administration as the eleventh *vār* of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla implies (*BG* 11:2:1; Singh 1997, p. 194). None of these Sikhs, however, appear to have been familiar with the *Bhakt-māl* prepared by the Afghani poet Ram Soni 'Navanit' in 1682 CE in which Guru Nanak is mentioned (Hawley 2015, pp. 138–39, 225). Nor did they know of the aforementioned *Dabistān-i Mazāhib*. This was, again, the most sustained early Persian account of Guru Nanak and the Sikhs. Additionally, as stated, the unfamiliarity is striking, especially in the light of the many conversations that Mobad Shah had had with both Guru Hargobind and those within the Sixth Master's entourage (Behl 2010). Finally, let us note that there were also no Sikhs fluent enough to prepare Persian texts on the Gurus and their teachings on their own.

This situation would change dramatically by the time of the Anandpur Darbar in the later seventeenth century during which Bhai Nand Lal Goya (d. 1713?) wrote what would become his own Persian explorations of Sikh doctrines, which have been allocated the status of bāṇī or scripture since at least the nineteenth century, his well-known *Divān-i Goyā* and *Zindagī-nāmah* (Fenech 2008).

The early encounter with officers of the British East India Company may also be relegated to this unfamiliarity with language, moreover, English in this case of course, a situation that was only remedied in the 1960s and 1970s with the appearance of Ganda Singh's *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs* which brought together a number of articles he had earlier penned (Singh 1974). Here, Ganda Singh's approach became the standard with which all such seventeenth- and eighteenth-century non-Sikh views would be confronted in future scholarship, adopting as a measuring stick the modern interpretation of Sikh history and doctrine forged in the early twentieth century by the Singh Sabha/Tat Khalsa. In this reading, those elements in early European accounts that steer away from more recent emic interpretations are deemed incorrect, a discussion which occurs throughout Ganda Singh's lengthy footnotes in his *Early European Accounts*. This forms a way of reading these early texts that our esteemed author also brought to bear in his English translation of the respective portions of the *Dabistān-i Maẓāhib* in 1940 (Singh 1940). This style of exegesis of course was established well before Ganda Singh and may be clearly witnessed, for example, in the writings of the famous Max Arthur Macauliffe, especially his six-volume *The Sikh Religion*. Macauliffe's own interpretations of the Sikhs and Sikh history and religion as he tells us in his Introduction was scrutinized and ultimately amended by those very ideologues of the Singh Sabha/Tat Khalsa whose bias Ganda Singh clearly shared (Oberoi 1994).

3. Raghavdas, the Dadu-Panth, and the *Bhakt-māl*

If language may be put forward as an excuse for the disregard of early non-Sikh accounts of Guru Nanak and interpretations of his doctrines, then such an explanation can in no way account for the neglect of those non-Sikh works in the same general language as those written by Sikhs about their Gurus, that is works in Brajbhasha. By the eighteenth century, Sikh authors wrote almost exclusively in Brajbhasha, a language spoken throughout the Indo-Gangetic plains. It is in Brajbhasha that the vast majority of Guru Gobind Singh's works are conveyed, those of the poets within his literary darbar, and, too, it is in Brajbhasha that the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *gur-bilās*, literature highlighting the mighty battles of Guru Hargobind and the Tenth Guru, was prepared. Reasons for this linguistic choice are many, one of which has to do with the fact that this language was embraced by both the Mughal court and those literary courts surrounding the Tenth Guru in Pahari Punjab while he resided in Anandpur (Fenech 2008). While Nabhadas' pioneering *Bhakt-māl* in Brajbhasha may make no mention of Guru Nanak and the Sikhs for the conjectured reasons noted in the first section of this paper the next most famous entry within the *Bhakt-māl* tradition, one whose author self-consciously fashioned his text with that of Nabhadas in mind (as he often relays), remedies that situation quite adequately. I am speaking of the *Bhakt-māl* of the Dadu-panthi Raghavdas.

Both the Dadu-panthis and the Sikhs share a number of features though few within the Sikh sphere would mention the saint Dadu (1554–1603 CE) in the same breath as the Gurus of the Sikh tradition, perhaps because none of the many compositions attributed to Dadu were included in the Guru Granth Sahib's Bhagat Bani (Singh 2003). Such notwithstanding, though, one would be hard pressed to ignore the keen similarities between Sikh *saṅgat*s and those communities dedicated to Dadu in the light of Raghavdas' description of the Dadu-panth which appears in his *Bhakt-māl*. Let me reproduce one example here:

dādū kerā panth mai chain chatur chit charaṇ hari

kathā kīrtan prīti het sauṃ hari jas gāyā

sathi ra rahai samāj prem parbraham lagāyā

> Contentment and intelligence both preside within the Dadu-panth alongside a focus on the blessed feet of Hari.
>
> [Uplifting] homilies (*kathā*), congregational singing (*kīrtan*) and love, all here reign; all here are performed for the sake of singing the grandeur of God.
>
> The society [of Dadu] remains bound together, all of which engenders love for the transcendent divine (*parbraham*).
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 509:1–3 (Nahta 1965, p. 235)

Indeed, by the late eighteenth century Dadu-panthi and Khalsa Sikhs both possessed extensive and systematically arranged anthologies of poetry, both expressed martial dimensions within their respective traditions while simultaneously embracing both a general Sant emphasis on the transcendent and unqualified divine; both enjoyed, as well, an interior discipline by which one could attune oneself to that divine which reverberates throughout the universe, as demonstrated above (Pinch 2006). At a much more mundane level, too, both communities were generally prospering economically by the late eighteenth century, benefitting from the many changes precipitated by the various transformations of the Mughal empire after the sack of Delhi by Nadir Shah in 1739, and were composed of those who embraced more ascetic lifestyles (Sikh Udasis and Dadu-panthi sadhus and sadhvis) as well as those who did not, particularly lay followers and householders (Dhavan 2011). As Raghavdas intones, *dādū jī ke panth maiṃ mahant sant surbīr*, "within the Panth of the revered Dadu are found *mahants* (deputies), Sants, and brave warriors" (Nahta 1965, p. 187). Assuming that stories of Khalsa Sikh-Dadu-panthi interactions were apocryphal one may surmise that it was such alignments that prompted the very few interactions between Khalsa Sikhs and Dadu-panthis recorded within Sikh tradition. We witness episodes in Sikh literature, for example, in which Guru Gobind Singh passes by the shrine of Dadu and tips his arrow towards it as a sign of respect. To this, we may add a fascinating anecdote in which the Tenth Guru converses with the famous contemporary early eighteenth-century mahant of the Dadu-panth, Jaitram. Although it may be as well that in his travels southward Guru Gobind Singh could certainly have stopped at Dadu's dharmsala at Naraina as he made his way southwards to Nanded in the first decade of the eighteenth century, a point noted by J.S. Hawley, and mentioned by Macauliffe (Hawley 2015; Macauliffe 1990).

Despite such interactions imagined or otherwise, we hear no references at all in Sikh sources to who is perhaps the most famous of Dadu's disciples, Raghavdas, a fame that was launched in large part because of his *Bhakt-māl* (Callewaert 1994). This ignorance is surprising given the facts that Raghavdas' text is apart from the *Dabistān* the earliest of the non-Sikh texts that speak lovingly of the First Master, his family, and his successors, and that Raghavdas was familiar with the janam-sakhis (one story of which he summarises in his *Bhakt-māl*) and (as I will later argue) with the writings of Bhai Gurdas. It may have been Raghavdas' disposition towards Guru Nanak and his Panth that prompted the authors of the nineteenth-century *Gurū kīān Sākhīān* and the earlier *Parchīān Sewādās* in which we find these Dadu-panthi references to introduce such characters from the domain of the Dadu-panthis to interact with the Gurus of Sikh history and Sikh memory (Padam 2003, p. 192; Singh and Singh 1995, pp. 157–58). Since the time of this early Brajbhasha bhakti work, Guru Nanak has been effortlessly situated within a bhakti environment, a fact that continues today as the abundant number of images of the First Sikh Master for sale along the many streets around the Durgiana Temple in Amritsar testify (Chopra 2018, p. 59).

Although Raghavdas' *Bhakt-māl* is the earliest non-Sikh Brajbhasha reference to the Sikh Gurus, exactly how early this text appeared is a matter of ongoing debate. Of all the present issues surrounding Raghavdas' fascinating text, the most tenacious is its dating, whether it was written in late June of *samvat* 1717, 1770, or 1777 which correspond to 1660, 1713, and 1720 CE, respectively. These dates result from the confusion engendered by the word *satrahauṃtarā* in the line that begins *sākhī* 19:555, which has been interpreted as 17, 70, or 77. The line is reproduced immediately below:

> *sambat satrah sai satrahauṃtarā sukal pakṣ sanivār*
>
> *tithi tritīyā āṣāḍ kī rāgho kīyau vichār*
>
> [This text was completed in the year] *sambat* 1717 [or 1770 or 1777], on Saturday the third lunar day of the bright half of the month of *Āṣāḍ[h]*. [It was at this time that] Ragho's thought was made manifest.
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 19:555 (Nahta 1965, p. 246)

Such dating controversies would not be worth mentioning in this paper except for the fact that the text's date does not easily accommodate a claim made within Raghavdas' description of the Sikhs. In his depiction of the Nanak-panth, what Raghavdas titles *Śrī Nanak ji kau panth varnan*, we have a very problematic clue as to this dating. The passage in question mentions all of the Sikh Gurus in their capacity as Guru in *chhappai* 348 (A *chhappai* is a six-verse stanza with the first verse generally appearing at the end as well) except for Guru Tegh Bahadar and Guru Gobind Singh. At first glance, the date thus seems straightforward, indicating that the earliest date of 1660 is the most likely since Guru Tegh Bahadar became Guru in August 1664 CE. The issue is complicated, however, because Raghavdas also mentions Hari Krishan as Guru. As far as I am aware, this discrepancy was first pointed out by Winand Callewaert some years ago, namely that the young Hari Krishan did not become Guru until 1661, a year after the alleged early date of Raghavdas' *Bhakt-māl* (Callewaert 1994, p. 96; Singh 1977, p. 113). Now, all of this suggests that the Raghavdas text appears after 1660 and, therefore, scholars like Callewaert claim the more accurate dates are the later ones. Callewaert, for example, sets his sights on S. 1777/1720 CE (Callewaert 1987, p. 186).

Although most scholars today (but not all) simply mention the controversial nature of the dates and forgo involvement in the text-dating controversy, in large part because of this Sikh-related evidence (most nevertheless imply that they are sympathetic to the later dates), the editor of the 1965 edition of the *Bhakt-māl* on which most scholars rely, Agarchand Nahta and, too, the Dadu-panthi scholar Monica Horstmann, both support the S. 1717/1660 CE claim. Horstmann in particular bases this on certain chronological and astronomical evidence among other points: for example, S. 1717/1660 CE was the only year in which the specific Saturday mentioned aligns perfectly with the description at *sākhī* 19:555 (Horstmann 2000, p. 515, n. 9). While both Nahta and Horstmann seem to simply ignore the problem engendered by the Guru Hari Krishan reference, those who accept the later eighteenth-century dates make no attempt to explain the absence of the Ninth and Tenth Gurus. One could perhaps argue that Raghavdas uses the term *sāhib-zādā* to refer to 'householder' Lakshmi Das one of Guru Nanak's sons in *chhappai* 347:2 (Nahta 1965, p. 176), a term that did appear in Sikh literature by the early eighteenth century to describe the sons of Guru Gobind Singh, and that this could, therefore, be a veiled reference to this later period and the *chār sāhib-zāde* of Sikh tradition (the same may be said for Raghavdas' reference to *ammrit* at 342:5 (*amī* in the text)). Or one could also conjecture that Raghavdas, with his penchant for categorizing groups into sets of four (an inclination to which he readily succumbs in his passages on Guru Nanak as we will see), would have neatened up the lineage of Sikh Gurus in his reckoning by reducing them to a tidy eight rather than focus on a less neat 10 (although there are instances when Raghavdas does point out a group of five) (Nahta 1965, p. 239).

However, both of these claims (and, too, that of the *ammrit/amī*) are rather flimsy to me and the former still fails to explain the absence of the two last human Sikh Gurus. Could Raghavdas have understood the Khalsa—which he may have extended backward to the time of Guru Gobind Singh's father Guru Tegh Bahadar—as a group that was distinct from those Sikhs committed to Nanak, the Nanak-panth and thus have purposefully ignored the Ninth and Tenth Gurus? Mughal documents, for example, certainly note a difference between those whom they refer to as the *Nānak-parastān* and the Khalsa Sikhs of Gobind Singh, perhaps indicating the differences between urban Khatri Sikhs who were generally integrated into the Mughal economy and administration and did not embrace the Rahit of the Khalsa and rural Jats who formed the bulk of the Khalsa (Alam 1986, pp. 169–75).

Whatever the case may be, what seems to make sense to me as a way of suggesting a path beyond this impasse is to propose that the date at *sākhī* 19:555 indicating the absolute completion of the text is simply incorrect as surely as it must be—perhaps appropriated to fit the meter of the poetry by Raghavdas or simply convoluted by later copyists; after all, the earliest extant manuscript of this *Bhakt-māl* is 1804 CE. The circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that the text was prepared sometime after the Eighth Guru ascended the *gur-gaddī* in 1661 but before the death of Guru Hari Krishan in 1664. This would most certainly explain why Raghavdas fails to mention both the last Sikh Gurus as well as the Dadu-panthi reformer Jaitram to whom we were earlier introduced as Guru Gobind Singh's conversation partner, who flourished between 1693 and 1732 CE an absence which, Horstmann notes, "would have been simply unthinkable" if the text was composed during the later dates proposed by various scholars (Horstmann 2000, pp. 515–16). Although this cannot yet be proven without a doubt, the incidental evidence at our disposal adds more weight to the earlier period than to the others without specifying the exact date that 19:555 lays bare. Put simply, this *Bhakt-māl* appears to most likely be a mid-to-late seventeenth-century product.

With that out of the way for now, let us focus specifically on the portion of Raghavdas' text that deals with Guru Nanak for the rest of this paper.

4. Introducing Nanak: *Gurū, Bhakt, Mahant*

Certainly the Lion's Share of the portion of Raghavdas' *Bhakt-māl* in which Guru Nanak is situated focuses upon Dadu Dayal and his disciples, significantly numbering 52 (which is, I should note, divisible by four), amongst whom are included Garibdas, Sundardas, Rajjab and a host of others (Horstmann 2015, p. 38). This is of course completely understandable given the fact that Raghavdas' own guru is Dadu and glorifying his teacher and the latter's panth are among the stated goals of the text. Although the first portion of Guru Nanak's description does not name the First Master or any of his fellow Sants/Bhakts specifically (the following *chhappai* will make Guru Nanak's identity in the preceding *chhappai* abundantly clear), Raghavdas ,we will soon discover, nevertheless implies Guru Nanak in his statements and includes him within this relevant segment, in two sets of four evenly apportioned *chhappais* in the *Bhakt-māl*, both sets of which have additional internal symmetries. These two sets comprise the only references to *Nānak* (implicit and explicit) throughout the text of the *Bhakt-māl*, the only figure in this particular collection of eight *chhappais* who is able to don many hats—or, better yet, tie multiple turbans upon his head—in this case, that of *mahant*, Bhakt, and Guru, all of which appear equated in the description of Baba Nanak.

This first quartet of *chhappais* begins by aligning two foursomes, an earlier *sagunī* group and a later *nṛgunī* set of four *mahants* (341)—as Raghavdas calls them—in a pattern that is somewhat recreated at the end of this first arrangement of four *chhappais* (344). The middle two *chhappais*, then, first describe the *nṛgun* teachers who are Nanak's fellow Bhakts and very briefly note their understandings of God (342), after which attention is turned towards the *sagun* claims of the former preceptors (343) which sound in many ways like those of their later *nṛgun* incarnations.

It is in the first (*chhappais* 341–44) that our Dadu-panthi author accommodates Guru Nanak, lodging him within the easily recognizable Vaishnava framework mentioned above, that of the four *sampradāys* or four teaching traditions which we earlier encountered in the *Bhakt-māl* of Nabhadas who is among the earliest writers to appropriate this scheme as his point of departure (Hawley 2015, pp. 119, 127). This should not provoke amazement since Raghavdas, like others before him, "depicts [the fourfold scheme] as providing the key to religious order in the Kaliyuga", as Hawley has noted (Hawley 2013, p. 30). Additionally, this is despite the fact that our Dadu-panthi author—for whom the fourfold scheme is quite central let us reiterate—nevertheless appears to occasionally push against this classification (Hawley's golf metaphor that "a certain amount of rough persists" is especially appropriate here) (Ibid), perhaps most transparently when the fourth of this tetrad is identified as *Jagan* (also *jagat*) (Nahta 1965, p. 21). Jagan is used to denote not only one other *nṛgunī* Bhakt, but we may infer all others who speak of the divine as Niranjan, the *Hari-Niranjanī*, the descriptions of which

end at *chhappai* 444 in the Nahta edition (Nahta 1965, p. 206; Williams 2014, pp. 143–56). It is within this four-square rubric that Guru Nanak is connected to (and, from my Sikh-centered perspective, limited by) Dadu, Kabir, and Jagan, as we shall see, as well as to the previous progenitors of the earlier *sampradāys* of southern India and beyond (Nahta 1965, p. 48 ff.). Much has been written about these original four traditions, at this point focusing on both the *sampradāy*-ness of the construct and its foursomeness (Hawley 2015, pp. 99–147), the latter of which Hawley insightfully notes adds an immovability to a situation which is far less stable in reality. The "panthicness" of their later incarnations, however, has yet to be explored thoroughly (Khan 2004, p. 22; McLeod 1978).

In the second set of four *chhappais*, which comprises *chhappais* 345–8, we are treated to a discussion of Guru Nanak himself who was, we are told, born into a family of Kshatriyas (345), yet spent his time in fields grazing his buffaloes (a non-Kshatriya past time) where eventually he meets with the Eternal Brahman. After this a few words are spared to discuss the First Master's *nṛgunī* understanding of the divine (346) and this brief account is then concluded by making us privy to the First Master's double lineages, biological and spiritual: one being his immediate family, particularly his sons (347), and the other, the next seven successors to the guruship (348). The *joti* or divine light of Guru Nanak, Sikhs note, was passed on to all of these individual successors on their accession to the *gur-gaddī* thus transforming them into Guru Nanaks, if you will, an understanding instantiated into both the poetry of the Guru Granth Sahib itself and its very structure and likely implied in Raghavdas' *chhappai* 348 (Guru Granth, p. 966; Hawley 2013, p. 31)[4] (perhaps the line which appears as our epigraph suggests as much). In the biological lineage, moreover, we are also introduced to the spiritual descendants of Guru Nanak's celibate Udasi son, Siri Chand, who is counterpoised by Guru Nanak's householder son Lakshmi Das although both, Raghavdas intones, are *ubhai brāt bhakt hari ye* "great Bhakts of Hari" [347:1], drawing attention to a binary which Hawley discusses in the context of both Mobad Shah and Nabhadas as well as Raghavdas (Hawley 2013, pp. 24–25), all of whom also total four and all of whom occupied the four principle directions thus adding a further symmetrical dimension to the entire two sets of four *chhappais*: Guru Nanak as part of four in the first quartet and Guru Nanak giving rise to a further four through his offspring in the second, the Master whose substance spreads throughout the four cardinal directions through these latter four, thus suggesting the universal coverage Hawley notes and which we see relatively frequently in the first *vār* of Bhai Gurdas. Much of this *vār* carries the spirit of the janam-sakhis, a point to which we will turn momentarily (Hawley 2013, p. 30). Let us now, though, take each one of Raghavdas' sections (341–4 and 345–8) in turn.

5. Nanak and the *Chaturpanth*

In the first, Raghavdas introduces us to the *chaturpanth*, the Four Panths of the four traditions. This construction was something novel in the Vaishnava understandings of Raghavdas' day, shifting to one side but not displacing what were previously described by Raghavdas and earlier Nabhadas as *sampradāys* or teaching traditions (Nahta 1965, p. 48). Here, in the first *chhappai*, it is upon the shared teachings of the collective four that he focuses rather than on the *chaturpanth*'s individual components. Raghavdas will see Guru Nanak (without naming him at this point) as the foremost of the *chaturpanth*'s four equal constituents a point we will attempt to explain momentarily. As Hawley has noted the appropriation of the term *panth* rather than *sampradāy* is here significant (Hawley 2013, p. 30) and appears to draw upon a taxonomy commonly used among the Sikhs who were more well known in this period as Nanak-panthis.

Put simply, Raghavdas was aware of the fact that Guru Nanak's teachings were never referred to as a *sampradāy* in early Sikh literature even though technically they do form one. This choice of *panth* rather than *sampradāy* demonstrates Raghavdas' cognizance that these were not limited teaching traditions, but more inclusive communities, publics which include all people, religious practitioners

[4] All references to the Adi Granth/Guru Granth are drawn from the standard printed edition of 1430 pages.

and specialists, and lay people alike, a construction with which Raghavdas would have been mightily familiar given his place in the Dadu-panth which was likewise composed of all types of people, including women (of course), as well as many converts from Islam (Nahta 1965, p. 201; Bangha 2015). The understanding Raghavdas appears to communicate through his appropriation of the term panth suggests a transition from the orthodox to the vernacular, from the scriptural to the level of everyday lived religious life—the quotidian. The use of this descriptive, moreover, could be perhaps the reason why Guru Nanak is placed in the primary position in this construct as we shall note in a moment, a testament to the growth of the Sikh or Nanak-panthi community in the later seventeenth century. Although it should be added that Raghavdas' use of the term panth, a word so commonly used to describe groups of disciples which surrounded Nanak, Kabir, and Dadu in the late seventeenth century would have allowed Raghavdas' audience to take for granted the identities of the four.

Simultaneously Raghavdas uses descriptives in his introductory line that further connect his text to the *Bhakt-māl* of Nabhadas—something he regularly does (Hawley 2013, p. 45, n. 27). In the process of so doing he stretches the lineage of the four new mahants to those of their legendary predecessors, that is the earlier-mentioned Ramanuja, Vishnuswami, Nimbarka, and Madhva, respectively—teachers now turned mahants by Raghavdas. Such a stretch connects both sets of panths, structurally and temporally, as Hawley has speculated, bringing order to what was surely an incredibly diverse and vibrant socio-religious environment—despite the stereotypes that surround the rule of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1618–1707 CE)—engendered in part by the generous policies of the emperor Akbar (1542–1605) almost a century earlier. These were policies that helped give rise to the type of "Vaishnava catholicism" to which, Vijay Pinch mentions, Nabhadas and later Raghavdas gave voice (Pinch 1999, pp. 369, 394 ff). This in turn ultimately traces the lineages of Guru Nanak and his three co-mahants back even further to the pre-eternal, beyond the apparently southern progenitors of bhakti to the latter's very "primordial anchors" (Hawley 2013, p. 21) which include Shiva (Shankar), Lakshmi, the Kumara Sanaka (one of the four Kumaras) and the latter's father Brahma (noted at *chhappai* 343:2–5). In the first line of *chhappai* 341, this connection and all that it implies is immediately noted:

> *vai chyāri mahant jyūṃ chatur vyūh tyuṃ chatur mahant nṛgunī pragaṭ*
>
> Truly, in the same way that the four [earlier] mahants appeared as four flanks of the divine army [in ages past] so too did the *nṛgunī* mahants [of the present age] become apparent.
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 341:1 (Nahta 1965, p. 175)

This correlation between the two sets of mahants is further elaborated in *chhappais* 342–43: in the first, Raghavdas describes the four *nṛgunī* mahants while in the latter we are treated to a description of the four *sagunī*/*trigunī* masters. As we read through these poetic descriptions, a cumulative effect emerges in which an equivalency is drawn between the two sets of mahants. This parallel is sustained throughout the first quartet of *chhappais* ending at 344. Here, in 344, the mahant lineage is extended to the pre-eternal. Just prior to this, though, we see that this correspondence is manifestly proclaimed in the single line which bookends *chhappai* 343 regarding the *sagunī* mahants:

> *in chyāri mahant trigunīn kī padhit sūṃ nirañjan milī*
>
> These four were mahants of the qualified Divine of the three constituent qualities of all matter. Through their path one is led to the Purest One, the Lord who is Niranjan.
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 343:1 (Nahta 1965, p. 175)

In describing the *sagunī*/*trigunī* goal as the Niranjan, the Most Pure [divine], Raghavdas connects this ultimate end to the shared characteristics and terminal goal of the *nṛgunī* mahants implied in *chhappai* 341 and described in 342. Simultaneously, any kind of distinction between those who preach of the *nṛgun* deity and those of the *sagun* divine is blurred. The division between these two sets, therefore, may not be as explicit as, for example, J.S. Hawley suggests, though even his proposition is tempered as he continues his insightful discussion (Hawley 2013, p. 30). As many scholars have noted,

this difference is more likely a distinction that is situated within academic discourse rather than in the understandings of the Sants and Bhagats themselves, although a more sustained study of Raghavdas' *Bhakt-māl* will likely allow that claim further nuance (Hawley 2005). Outwardly different, it appears that the two sets of four are, nevertheless, connected for Raghavdas, as both sets of teachings lead towards the ineffable Lord, the object of both *sagunī* and *nṛgunī* mahants. Indeed, my translation of 341:2—which differs from Hawley's (Hawley 2015, p. 130)—underscores this point a little more clearly.

> *sagun rūp gun nām dhyān un bibidhi batāyau*
>
> The form of the *sagun* is the quality (*gun*) of the *nām*, which people have contemplated and described in all sorts of myriad forms.
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 341:2 (Nahta 1965, p. 175)

It is this *nām* which forms a significant facet of the divine self-expression in the *bāṇī* of the Sikh Gurus, through which Baba Nanak will become "dyed in the love of Hari" (346:1). The totality within the singular is certainly a theme we regularly discover in Guru Arjan's description of the divine as both *sagun* and *nṛgun*:

> *nirguṇu āpi sargunu bhī ohī/kalā dhāri jinni sagalī mohī*
>
> The divine is beyond qualities (*nirgunu*) while simultaneously with qualities (*sargunu*). Infusing the entire world with energy, the divine enraptures all.
>
> (Guru Granth, p. 287)

Within the same *chhappai* 341, Raghavdas then goes on to explain the shared characteristics of these *nṛgun* teaching traditions by focusing upon the transcendent and unknowable nature of the divine each privileges, a divine which is characterized by the *nām* as above which is both *agun* or outside of the three constituent qualities of all matter as well as *arūp*, beyond all form. He continues:

> *nirlep nirañjan bhajan kauṃ sampradāi thāpī sughaṭ*
>
> These teaching traditions were well established and firmly constructed to praise That One who is unsoiled, That One who is immaculate (*nirañjan*).
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 341:5 (Nahta 1965, p. 175)

This is That One, "the knowledge of whom", we were previously told, allows all people "to conquer the world" (*aql jag sakal jitāyau*) [341:3], which continues the martial metaphors used throughout Raghavdas' descriptions, perhaps suggestive of the type of armed ascetic militancy both Dadu-panthis and Khalsa Sikhs of the Gurus shared in the later seventeenth century.

The nature of the divine discussed here appears to mirror the type of transcendent language we discover within the Sikh *mūl mantar* that begins the Adi Granth. It is only fitting, then (given the similar goal to which all eight masters point), that within the final of the first set of four *chhappais* (344), Raghavdas further establishes the connection between the four southern mahants and their northern successors, between the *nṛgun* and the *sagun*, that we recognize at the very beginning of 341 more firmly by bookending the last canto of our first quartet, *chhappai* 344, with the same line glorifying both Guru Nanak and Dadu in much the same way that the bookending line of *chhappai* 341 first connects the two sets of four mahants by allusions to Nabhadas' own description of the southern four mahants:

> *jan nānak dādūdayāl rāgho ravi sasi jyūṃ dipai*
>
> Both the beloved Nanak and Dadu Dayal, O Ragho, shine together as the sun and moon.
>
> (*Bhakt-māl* 344:1 Nahta 1965, p. 175)

Between this repeated line are five others for a total of seven: two connecting the *sagunī* four to their godly anchors (344:2–3); two describing these same four as being the divinized human embodiments of well-known miraculous items such as the Philosopher's Stone and the Wish-fulfilling Cow (4–5) among others, and a fifth which ties the two sets of traditions—four *sampradāys* and four *mats*—together:

> *ye chyāri sampradā chyāri mat kṣat ūpari katahuṃ na chhipai*
>
> As a raised, trusty umbrella (*kṣat*) under which nothing can hide these four teaching traditions and these four doctrines offer protection that is all encompassing.
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 344:6 (Nahta 1965, p. 175)

However, while the nature of the divine is discussed in the first *chhappai*, as too are established connections between southern and northern exponents of bhakti, the identities of those who advocate these understandings of the divine have yet to be divulged. It is in the opening line of the following *chhappai* that we are finally introduced to the names of the *nṛgunī* mahants, in which, as noted, Nanak appears as *primus inter pares*:

> *nānak kabīr dādu jagan rāgho paramātmā jape*
>
> Nanak, Kabir, Dadu, and Jagan, o Ragho, all praise (*jape*) the Supreme Being!
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 342:1 (Nahta 1965, p. 175)

This is the *chaturpanth* the final three of which are metaphorically likened throughout the respective *chhappai* to facets of nature that refer to liquid, all of which focus on nurturing and nourishment. We began this paper with the epigraph likening the light of the kingly Guru Nanak to that of the sun. The next three lines in which his fellow mahants are praised similarly follow:

> *madhvā dās kabīr ūsar sūsar barakā se*
>
> *dādū chand sarūp amī kari sab kauṃ poṣe*
>
> *karan nirañjanī manauṃ triṣā hari jīv santoṣe*
>
> Like Indra, *Dās* Kabir, drenched the cracked and parched world in rain while Dadu's true form is that of the moon, nourishing everyone with the nectar of immortality (*amī*). And [Jagan] the follower of the Purest One, who is like Varuna quenching the thirst of all with the elixir that is Hari.
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 342:3–5 (Nahta 1965, p. 175)

These are easily among the most common literary conceits by the mid seventeenth century, alignments which Raghavdas also established with the many other Bhakts that populate his text. What is intriguing in this regard, too, is the potential association with the legendary lineages from which the Rajput patrons of the Vaishnav *sampradāys* proclaimed themselves to be descended. In their traditional pedigrees, various Rajput clans boast of their descent from either the *chandrabaṁsī* and the *suryavaṁsī*, the sun and the moon lineages which trace their origins to Ramchandra or the Pandavas. It is no surprise that a few decades later Guru Gobind Singh will likewise establish such connections between these lineages and those of the Sikh Gurus in the fifth chapter of his *Bachitar Nāṭak*.

6. *Śrī Nanak Ji Kau Panth Varnan*: Bhai Gurdas Bhalla and Raghavdas

There are still facets of the first quartet of *chhappais* that require examination (the specific ordering of Bhakts we note at 344:1, for example), but it is time to turn attention to the next set of four in order to situate these considerations in the context of the first and explain them more thoroughly. By doing so, we can more systematically answer these lingering questions.

In the article which engendered my interest in Raghavdas, that insightfully examines the foursomeness of the four-*sampradāy* construct, Professor Hawley indirectly asks a pertinent question about Dadu's position in this later *nṛgunī* quartet: why would a devout Dadu-panthi like Raghavdas place his own beloved guru in the third position here rather than in the first? (Hawley 2013, p. 31). Since the grandeur of Dadu is described throughout Raghavdas' *Bhakt-māl* as we note, for example, a few *chhappais* within the *chaturpanth* segment after the discussion of Nanak and the Nanak-panth, I think that the key to answering this question lies not in an examination of Raghavdas' attitude towards

Dadu or Dadu's immediate precursor in the *Bhakt-māl* portion under discussion, Kabir, but rather to Guru Nanak specifically, and this, too, is something that Hawley implies in his attempts to answer his own question.

Of course, as a scholar of Sikh tradition I would pose the query a little differently: why does Raghavdas place Guru Nanak first? I think, as does Hawley, that the context in which Raghavdas is writing supplies the key to this answer. However, while Professor Hawley rightfully reasons, among other things in his article, that perhaps the prestige of the Adi Granth (in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries) or the fact that Nanak preceded Dadu chronologically awarded the revered First Guru the primary position, I would like to veer the discussion into other, though clearly related, matters and texts.

Raghavdas is certainly aware of the recognition of Guru Nanak in the late seventeenth century. The line which both begins and ends the first *chhappai* (345) in this new set of four is a testament to the popularity of the First Sikh Master, the mahant who is both Guru and Bhakt:

> *uttar dis utm bhayo nṛgun bhakt nānak gurū*
>
> The northern country became exalted because of the *nṛgun* Bhakt, Nanak Guru.
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 345:1, 7 (Nahta 1965, p. 176)

Raghavdas includes the *uttar dis* or northern country here because, let us recall, for many writers like Raghavdas and those who were identified as Bhakts or Bhagats, the format of the four *sampradāys* moved from southern to northern India, giving the construct a certain gravitas in seventeenth-century northern India, despite the fact that the apparent geographical movement from south to north was likely a product of northerners themselves, failing to altogether animate the imaginations of their south Indian predecessors or contemporaries (Hawley 2015, pp. 59–98, 99–100, 116). It also appears to add another dimension to Raghavdas understanding of the Sikh tradition, in this case regarding the First Guru's son, Siri Chand, whom we will encounter momentarily. Here, though, is the first line which speaks of Nanak in his capacity as teacher or *gurū* an illustrious description which should rightfully be reserved for the portion of the *Bhakt-māl*, which more systematically singles out Guru Nanak and which is repeated within three of the four *chhappais* of quartet two—*chhappai* 346 forming the sole exception. (Interestingly, Raghavdas only refers to Nanak as Guru in lines in which he appears without his Bhakt companions.) Immediately before the final line of 345, moreover, we have another reference to north India situated within an allusion to what is today a well-known *śabad* of Guru Nanak, *ślok vārān te vadhīk* 20 (Guru Granth, p. 1420). Here is Raghavdas' *chhappai* 345:6:

> *sīs hāth dhari yauṃ kahayau nṛgun bhakti vistār kurū*
>
> Having placed his head on [the palm of] his hand he preached and spread the doctrine of *nṛgun* bhakti [throughout the land of the] Kuru.
>
> *Bhakt-māl* 345:6 (Nahta 1965, p. 176)

The [Land of the] Kuru refers to the northern India which forms the northern area between the Ganga and Jumna Rivers in which the events of the great Sanskrit epic, the Mahabharata, take place. This allusion to Nanak's hymn of total commitment while travelling along the path which leads to the divine and, too, the exalted designation as guru in the line immediately afterwards bring to mind the writings of one of Raghavdas' close predecessors to whom we have already been introduced, the famous Bhai Gurdas Bhalla, whose magnificent poetry forms the related texts I noted above, which are germane to my discussion.

Bhai Gurdas, easily one of the most important early writers of the Sikh tradition, makes proclamations quite similar to those we see above in Raghavdas and ones even more lofty in his first *vār*, an ode which bears much resemblance to the early janam-sakhis and which was likely added to the collection of *vārān* much later than the bulk of the collection's contents (McLeod 1980a, pp. 43–45). Note, for example, a line from the 23rd *pauṛī* of said first *vār* which resonates at a pitch remarkably similar to Raghavdas' *chhappai* 345:1 above:

> *pārbraham pūran brahamu kaliyugi andari iku dikhāiā*
>
> [Guru Nanak] preached during this ultimate age of degeneracy in the cosmic cycle, demonstrating that the Eternal Brahman beyond conceptualisations (*pārbraham*) is [the same as that] perfect Brahman confined by the intellect.
>
> (*BG* 1:23:3; Singh 1997, p. 318)

Certainly, as Gurdas likely intended, one could effortlessly substitute *nirguṇ* (*nṛgun*) for *pārbraham* and *saguṇ* for *brahamu* in this line and conclude that the sentiment Gurdas' *vār* evokes is that same one we discover within Raghavdas' *Bhakt-māl*. Should it, therefore, occasion any wonder that Gurdas' *vārs* would eventually form the structure on which eighteenth-century Sikh writers would hang the uniquely Sikh *Bhakt-māl*, the *Sikkhān dī Bhagat-mālā*? (Bedi 1994) The creation of this text in and of itself suggests an engagement with Raghavdas, further underscoring the independent sectarian nature of the Sikhs that Raghavdas was attempting to compromise.

I single Bhai Gurdas out at this point, therefore, for good reason. We mentioned our Bhalla author earlier in regard to Nabhadas; I would like to continue to draw on this connection for the next few paragraphs with the opening suggestion that it was perhaps Nabhadas' *Bhakt-māl* or the traditions which gave rise to Nabha's *Garland of Saints* that prompted Gurdas to craft and arrange certain *vārs* in his collection in a very specific way. This would include, as I have implied above, the first *vār*.

As we have seen recent scholarship on the *vārs* of Bhai Gurdas has argued quite persuasively that Gurdas' collection was originally composed of 34 *vārs* which would, sometime later, in the early 1620s, be bookended by two sets of three odes on either side for a total of 40 (Gill 2017). A number of reasons have been put forward as to why Gurdas chose to revisit and augment his collection of *vārs*. One such posits that in doing so Gurdas was attempting to contest the implicit claims to legitimacy put forward with the production of the Miharban Janam-sakhi (finalized 1618–19), Miharban being an exponent of a variety of Sikh tradition considered heterodox by Gurdas (Gill 2017). This is a credible argument. Given the fact that Nabhadas' text was composed much before or just prior to the time when these later *vārs* were added, however, it is very tempting to suggest another: that Gurdas' first *vār* and its almost janam-sakhi-like focus on Guru Nanak may have been prepared in order to rectify that which was ignored by Nabhadas, to elevate Guru Nanak to the level (and indeed beyond that) of the Bhakts Nabhadas so lauded in his collection. Gurdas does this in such a way as to ensure that the distinct sectarian identity of Guru Nanak and his Sikhs or Nanak-panthis is not blurred in the way that Nabhadas mashes together all those saints strung along his garland. Indeed, unlike Nabhadas, who may have simply ignored those Pirs, Bhakts, and others from whom his position differed, Gurdas is apparently not shy in identifying those with whose positions he disagrees, most infamously the *mīṇās*, those "scoundrels" who claimed the Sikh guruship for themselves without having had it legitimately bestowed upon them (Grewal 2007, pp. 35–36; Singh 2006, pp. 35–36).

Thus, although Bhai Gurdas' poetic explication of Sikh doctrine shares many affinities with those bhakti traditions championed by Nabhadas and later Raghavdas and their commentators, Gurdas' is a tradition, we see from his poetry, that nevertheless significantly differs. For example, Bhai Gurdas underscores this variance by pointing to the inverted Sikh ritual of incorporation into the Nanak-panth, *charanamrit* or "foot-nectar", whereby members of the gathered *saṅgat* would drink the footwash of the newly initiated, a clear demonstration of the type of humility to which both the Sikh Gurus and Bhai Gurdas enjoined all Nanak-panthis to aspire (Gill 2017, pp. 56–66). This inducting ritual stands in marked contrast to the far more common ceremony in which the Guru's toe-wash would be imbibed by that person seeking initiation. There is, too, the fact that Gurdas chose to convey his thoughts predominantly in the *vār* format rather than in the *chhappais* so loved by Nabhadas and other authors of the *Bhakt-māl* genre, *vārs* being, apparently, the preferred genre for Punjabi poetry which attempted to evoke the "heroic sentiment" or *bīr ras* (Gill 2017, pp. 41–55). Finally, Gurdas, unlike Nabhadas and Raghavdas, subsequently is not willing to allow any other Sant/Bhakt/Bhagat to occupy the same stage as Guru Nanak or any of the other Sikh Gurus.

Gurdas may have personally cultivated such heroism and humility through his journeys. We must recall that Bhai Gurdas was, it appears, very well travelled and a likely consequence of that travel was a cognizance of the *saṅgat*s scattered throughout northern India, something to which the *vārs* readily testify. This would certainly have augmented Gurdas' keen familiarity with Indic and Islamicate traditions as well as the relatively new bhakti traditions enshrined within much of the Brajbhasha literature which emerged in his period, which, once again, was a time marked by a generousness of religio-cultural ideas and ideals prompted by the Akbari Constitution of *ṣulḥulkul*, which here may be translated as "hospitality and civility to all", a policy which was continued during the reigns of both Jahangir and Shah Jahan, as well as that of the emperor Aurangzeb, as recent scholarship has made abundantly clear (Kinra 2015). This awareness is demonstrated within Gurdas' *vārs* and *kabbits* despite the fact that there is little historical evidence of Bhai Gurdas' life.

One of the other *vārs* that I have in mind as having been prompted at least in part by the *Bhakt-māl* of Nabhadas includes *vār* 10. In regard to various bhakti traditions Gurdas' *vār* 10 conveys the well-known stories of a number of popular Bhakts/Bhagats such as Namdev (10:11), Trilochan (10:12), Dhanna (10:13), Sain/Sen (10:16), and Kabir (10:15) among others, saints who preceded Guru Nanak and many of whose hymns are found in the Adi Granth and, too, the stories of all of whom are also discovered within the *Bhakt-māl*s. One could consider *vār* 10 a "mini *Bhakt-māl*" since such a *vār* on its own would, like the Bhagat Bani of the Sikh scripture, indicate a reverence for such Bhakts and lead to the conclusion that Gurdas and the Sikhs who formed his general audience would have embraced the Vaishnava bhakti traditions that so many of these Bhakts conveyed through their very lives and teachings. However, it is highly likely that in the same way that the Bhagat Bani is strategically placed in the Sikh scripture to prompt dialogue from the Sikh Gurus and highlight both similarities and differences between the teachings of the Gurus and the Bhagats so, too, is it likely that Gurdas did not mean for *vār* 10 to be isolated, but rather that it form a dialogic binary of sorts with the succeeding ode, *vār* 11 (Gill 2017, pp. 46–47).

Indeed, Guru Arjan's amanuensis reserves this next *vār* for the glorification of the disciples of the Gurus and in the process clearly demonstrates the independent sectarian identity of the Sikhs, an exhibition which very much forms the heart of Gurdas' Punjabi *vārs* and Brajbhasha *kabbits* (Singh 1993). As I have said elsewhere here we recognize Gurdas' understandings of the true grandeur of both the individual faithful and the congregations of said faithful, the Sikh *sādhsaṅgat* as opposed to the *māl* of the Bhakts: the Sikhs of the Guru, it is implied, both succeed and are greater than the Bhagats in much the same way that the number 11 both succeeds and is greater than the number 10. The Nanak-panthi Sikhs who are named and singled out in *vār* 11 are, on the one hand, amazingly heroic disciples as, Gurdas tells us in *pauṛī* five of *vār* 11, they walk *gursikhī bārīk hai khaṇḍe dhār galī ati bhīṛī* "the path of *gursikhī*, which is as narrow and sharp as the edge of a double-edged sword" (*BG* 11:5:1; Singh 1997, p. 177). On the other hand, they are quite ordinary too—musicians, barbers, cooks, all regular disciples of Guru Nanak and the subsequent Sikh Gurus, all of whom have achieved lofty status simply through their love, devotion, and service to the Sikh Gurus and humanity. This sets them above all others including the revered saints of the many bhakti traditions. The *saṅgats* as well as their individual components, one may also infer, are greater in the estimation of Gurdas than the *sampradāy*s. This inference is derived in part from an earlier *vār* which alludes to Gurmukhs like those referenced in *vār* 11; but in this case the allusion is far more general. One of these *vārs* is the seventh in the collection of 40 to which I shall turn in just a moment.

Certainly Bhai Gurdas, like Nabhadas and Raghavdas afterwards, does occasionally ruminate on foursomes. His take on these is often similar to those of our revered Vaishnavas. Among the iconic quartets peppered throughout the *vārs* and *kabbits* are the usual suspects, the four directions, castes, ages, Vedas, and the Dharmashastric *puruṣāratha* or four aims of life among others. What is altogether and perhaps conspicuously absent is the four *sampradāy*s. It is highly unlikely that Gurdas was not familiar with the fourfold construct given that the structure had even been recorded in the Persian *Dabistān-i Maẓāhib* to which we earlier alluded (Hawley 2015, p. 140). Gurdas consistently

demonstrates his knowledge of the "world religions" that Mobad Shah effectively delineates in his *Dabistān*. This absence of the four *sampradāys* is most noticeable in the context of his seventh *vār*, in which Bhai Gurdas reduces all the manifold elements of existence that can be counted and are noted by numbers to the all-important number of one, collapsing in many ways everything into the singular divine which is in Sikh imaginings *Ik Oaṅkār*, the ligature with which the Adi Granth begins. The *pauṛīs* of *vār* seven follow sequentially in this regard: the first glorifying the number one, the second the number two, etc., until we arrive at the 15th, which refers to those facets of Indic tradition that number between 18 to 34. In the fourth of these *pauṛī*s all foursomes become dissolved not solely into the form of the One divine but rather in the person of the Gurmukh, the faithful disciple whose face is turned towards the Guru. To perhaps cancel the foursome equation in a uniquely Sikh way, Gurdas ends his *vār* 7:4 by ultimately referencing the *sādhsaṅgat*.

> *gurmukhi sādhi saṅgati nirbāṇī*
>
> The one who faces the Guru achieves liberation (*nirbāṇī*) within the community of the faithful.
>
> (*BG* 7:4; Singh 1997, p. 113)

The "raised umbrella" of which Raghavdas speaks above is in Gurdas' *vārs* the congregation of faithful Nanak-panthis.

While what is made explicit in this *vār* is the collapse of all foursomes, what is implied in this final line of 7:4 is something to which we will become far more privy in *vār* 13: the elevation of the quintet of disciples. It is the number five on which Gurdas most effectively focuses in what is perhaps one of his most famous pronouncements which, like just about everything Gurdas writes, is shadowed by the *bāṇī* of the Sikh Gurus, likely in this case Guru Nanak's *Japjī* 16 (Guru Granth, p. 3). The hint of five appears in Gurdas' reference to the *sādhsaṅgat*, whose core component, once again, is five Sikhs whose faces are turned towards the Guru. This idea is one that ultimately develops in the eighteenth century into the Khalsa Sikh Panj Piare, the Cherished Five, the group of Sikhs who were the first to volunteer their lives to the Tenth Guru:

> *iku sikkh dui saṅg panjīn paramesaru*
>
> One is a Sikh; two are the true congregation; and five, the Highest Lord.
>
> (*BG* 13:19; Singh 1997, p. 225)

This stress on five is well in line with Gurdas' endeavor to chart out a terrain for Sikhs that is, put simply, unique, neither Hindu/Vaishnava nor Muslim (to make reference to the adage made popular in Guru Nanak's janam-sakhis), the former of which in the context of the *Bhakt-māls* lays most of its emphasis on groups of four.

Gurdas recognizes the ambivalence that our *Bhakt-māl* author exhibits towards the four-*sampradāy* model (it would be Nabhadas' eighteenth-century commentator, the Gaudiya Priyadas who would more firmly situate the idea of the four *sampradāys* in the popular imagination) (Hawley 2015, p. 143) and simply wished to demonstrate that essence into which all mystics wished to dissolve, the singular divine, like the many individual delectable components which ultimately merge into the Indian delicacy, paan, a common metaphor in Sikh literature which illustrates the reduction of all castes into one. It could be, too, that Gurdas having written eloquently upon the execution of Guru Arjan throughout a number of his most heartfelt *vārs*, particularly the fourth which originally appeared as the first, wished to disassociate himself and the Sikhs of Guru Hargobind from those forms of religio-cultural organization which were ordered under the aegis of the Mughal state—which, let us recall, had executed his beloved Guru. This would include the model of the four *sampradāys*, embraced as it would be some decades after the death of Gurdas by one of the most formidable proponents of the Mughal state, the Kacchvaha Rajput court. The Kacchvaha relationship to the Mughal darbar dates back to 1562 CE when in February of that year the emperor Akbar consented to marry the eldest daughter of Raja Bharmal Kacchvaha, the woman who would later become the mother of the emperor's

son, Salim/Jahangir. I am tempted as well to read the final line of this *vār*-scale collapse of all foursomes that is 7:4 as a sly rebuttal to Nabhadas who in a *dohā* that appears after the twenty-seventh *chhappai* of his *Bhakt-māl* tacitly refers to the very founders of the four *sampradāy*s as *guru mukh*s:

> *ramā paddhati rāmānuj rājai viṣṇsvāmi tripurāri*
>
> *nimbādity sanakādikā madhukar guru mukh chāri*
>
> Ramanuja walks the path of Ramā [who is the consort of Ram, Shri], while Vishnusvami treads that of Shiva. Nimbarka's journey is along the road travelled by Sanaka and that of Madhva is the four-faced Brahma's.
>
> Nabhadas *Bhakt-māl* 28 (Jha 1978, p. 10)

It is within the final portion of the *dohā* that this understanding becomes apparent: *madhukar guru mukhu chāri* a phrasing which may have been interpreted by Bhai Gurdas as likening the four southern Acharyas to those whose faces are turned towards the Guru thus implying that the four teachers are *guru mukh*s, leaders whose faces are so turned—although this wording is likely accidental on Nabhadas' part. Even men as illustrious as our earlier *guru mukhs* are outshone by the true Gurmukhs, the extraordinary but simultaneously ordinary Sikhs of the Guru.

As we can see from our above foray into the *vārs* of Bhai Gurdas, a persistent theme which reverberates throughout his compositions is the uniqueness of the Sikhs and their Gurus, particularly Guru Nanak whose spirit for Gurdas is lodged within all of his successors. It is difficult to know just how widespread Gurdas' poetry was in the later part of the seventeenth century, but as mentioned earlier a side by side comparison with the *Dabistān-i Maẓāhib*'s Sikh narrative suggests that Mobad Shah may have been well familiar with the collection of our esteemed Sikh savant (Fenech 2017). However, widespread or not, the poetry of Gurdas was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is not really the point I care to explore. What is far more significant to me is if Raghavdas was familiar with it. I think that the answer to this is yes because, from my Sikh-centered perspective, a thorough reading of the portion of Raghavdas' *Bhakt-māl* assessing Guru Nanak strongly suggests that Raghavdas is here in dialogue with Bhai Gurdas. This offers, I think, a novel approach to understanding Raghavdas' Guru Nanak *chhappais* (and, too, a new lens through which to read the poetry of Gurdas), as the few scholars who have approached the Sikh verses of Raghavdas have relied primarily on the Guru Granth Sahib in arguing their claims, perhaps (as Hawley has suggested) the Granth's apparent ubiquity as the reason why Guru Nanak is placed in the first position in the refrain of *chhappai* 341:2. This is, as we have seen, a very reasonable stance to take, made more so given the apparent echo of Guru Nanak's (and perhaps Guru Amar Das') *śabads* that we can discern in the *Bhakt-māl*, notes of which we catch in the reading of our Dadu-panthi saint and poet.

Positing Raghavdas' *chhappais* on Guru Nanak as a dialogue with Bhai Gurdas helps make sense of Raghavdas' choices in portraying Guru Nanak and both sets of the First Master's descendants, biological and spiritual, the way he does. With this in mind, it becomes quite clear that Raghavdas is also in opposition to Bhai Gurdas. Both authors of course show a similar reverence for Guru Nanak with Raghavdas likely here drawing upon some of Bhai Gurdas' descriptions of the First Master. Raghavdas it seems may be purposeful in his description of Guru Nanak as "kingly" or "sovereign" (*bhūp*) in the epigraph with which this lengthy paper begins, for example, a common understanding scattered throughout Gurdas' poetry. But while Bhai Gurdas' descriptions are exclusive, Raghavdas' are inclusive. And this inclusivity comes at a cost, and it is one that is paid almost exclusively by the Sikhs. Raghavdas' process of including Guru Nanak within the redemptive sphere of bhakti nevertheless limits the First Master in a number of ways—tames him, as it were—to accord with the fourfold *sampradāy*, and by doing so diminishes perhaps completely in the eyes of his contemporaries the uniqueness of the Sikh Panth that Bhai Gurdas so passionately champions.

It is worth repeating that such limitations are clearly noted in the way that Raghavdas contains Guru Nanak through his incorporation into the four-*sampradāy* model. Raghavdas, I would like to suggest, places Nanak first in this construct for the very reason that Guru Nanak was unique among all

of the other garlanded flowers. Were the Sikhs not as distinct and widely spread throughout northern India and beyond as they likely were in the later part of the seventeenth century, it would not have really mattered in which order the four were situated (poetically, the names mentioned are all two syllables and so any of these names could technically appear in any order for Raghavdas without disturbing the meter of the line). Nanak's panth one may note was quite distinctive, with its own set of rituals and places of pilgrimage, its own principal text: all of this is noted in the poetry of Bhai Gurdas for whom, of course, Nanak's message transcends that of all others as the First Master is the both the true emperor *sachā patiśāh* (and so Raghavdas' *bhūp*) and the sole teacher of the entire world, the *jagat-gurū* (*BG* 24:1, 2; Singh 1997, pp. 372–73). Unlike the later Rahit literature, Bhai Gurdas' poetry is descriptive of what Sikhs hold dear rather than prescriptive.

Additionally, we may explain why Kabir follows Nanak by noting that Kabir's panth was not quite as individual; a panth, yes, but nevertheless acknowledged as it was as very much ensconced within the ambit of the *sampradāys* by far more writers than Raghavdas because of Kabir's very strong association with Ramanand, through whom the particular *sampradāy* associated with Ramanuja makes its way from southern to northern India, and this is despite the fact that—as James Hare notes in his study of Nabhadas' *Bhakt-māl*—"The Kabīr Panth can be understood as Vaishnava only in the broadest possible sense" (Hare 2011, p. 154). Nowhere is Nanak associated with past saints in the same ways as Kabir nor with the predecessors of either of the two other constituents in the quartet in which we find Nanak, Dadu and Jagan.

Apparently to Raghavdas Nanak was (to put it rather crudely) the most misshapen of the threaded marigolds upon the garland of saints: that a particular care beyond that of his fellow Bhakts would be granted to the illustrious Guru thus seems logical given Raghavdas aims to be as inclusive as possible, in a way which "seeks to discipline [Nanak] within the norms of the *sampradāy*", (Hare 2011, p. 127) and thus within the realm of Vaishnavism. Since Kabir, too, was likely a strong force with which to be reckoned in the late seventeenth century—although Kabir had already been subjected to the incorporating hand of Nabhadas—it is not surprising that he would take second place. Such positioning, therefore, aimed to bring Guru Nanak in line, in other words, with the harmony and stability that Raghavdas was attempting to draw out by draping India with his glorious garland, the *Bhakt-māl*. No wonder in this light that Raghavdas bookends the final *chhappai* of our first quartet of cantos with both Nanak and Dadu and not Kabir and/or Jagan: the most prominent of the Bhakts as it were and Raghavdas' own master. Not only does this *chhappai* further connect the two to the earlier mahants of the southern *sampradāys* but, with Dadu's taming presence succeeding Nanak, it was another way to help iron out the distinctiveness of the Sikhs perhaps to "Vaishnavise" the Sikhs as Hawley notes but to most certainly "Dadu-ise" Guru Nanak and thus by extension the Sikhs. One may indeed go so far as to argue that Raghavdas is attempting to rescue Baba Nanak from, in one sense, the less universalistic understandings of Gurdas.

It is with this in mind that we should approach one of the most intriguing segments of the *Bhakt-māl*: Guru Nanak's biological lineage. I single this one out since the list of successive Gurus noted by Raghavdas in the subsequent *chhappai* (348) is very much in line with that of which we read in Gurdas' *vārs*, especially *vār* 24 which notes the line of succession from the First to the Sixth Guru, drawing in part upon both Bhai Gurdas' own experiences with the Sikh Gurus as well as the famous hymn in *vār rāmkalī* by the musicians Satta and Balwand in the Guru Granth Sahib, in which the idea of the similarity of all the Sikh Gurus as Nanak is made clear (*BG* 24; Guru Granth, p. 966). Even within Persian Sikh literature this lineage is elaborated, most notably within the Persian *Joti Bigās* (*The Divine Light Effulgent*) of Guru Gobind Singh's most prominent court poet, Bhai Nand Lal Goya which appears a few decades after Raghavdas' *Bhakt-māl* (Singh 1963, pp. 159–69). Of course, Raghavdas as we have noted takes the lineage two Gurus further than Bhai Gurdas for obvious reasons, to Guru Hari Krishan. The description of Nanak's children offered by Raghavdas in *chhappai* 347 is provided below in full:

śrī nānak gur taiṃ ūpaj ubhai bhrāt hari bhakt ye
lakṣmīdās grah bās tās ke sāhib-zādā
śrī chand kai vairāg udāsī jā parasādā
śrī chand kai chatur siṣ chauṃ disā pujāye
uttar purab dakhin pachhim asthān banāye
alamast phul sāhib bhagat bhagavant hasan bāllū priye
śrī nānak gur taiṃ ūpaj ubhai bhrāt hari bhakt ye

From Sri Nanak Guru had been born two sons, both of whom were great Bhakts of Hari. One of these sons (*sāhib-zādā*) was Lakshmi Das, a householder. The second, Siri Chand, was through the grace of God a renouncer (*vairāg*) who travelled in a detached manner (*udāsī*). Siri Chand had four disciples (*siṣ*) who went out to the four directions and caused many to worship the divine. In the north, west, south, and east they established houses of veneration (*asthāṅn*). Almast, Phul, and Sahib were bhagats who along with Hasna Balu, were immersed in divine love. From Sri Nanak Guru had been born two sons, both of whom were great Bhakts of Hari.

Bhakt-māl 347 (Nahta 1965, p. 176)

Once again, the two sons of Guru Nanak are nicely counterpoised along the lines of the celibate ascetic/householder divide we see in Mobad Shah's work. However, rather than spend further time on Lakshmi Das who, based on this binary, would have aligned better with the Sikh tradition as advocated by Bhai Gurdas, a tradition in which the householder living truthfully could accumulate the knowledge that leads to liberation, he focusses on Siri Chand as *vairāgī* and the community which is inaugurated by him, the Udasis, a term he notes as we can see, in all of its ambiguity as both wanderer and wanderings. As we see, the bulk of this *chhappai* (four of six lines) is devoted to this ascetic dimension of the Sikh tradition. Perhaps Raghavdas may have been able to easily encompass the Udasi lineages in his scheme since Sikh tradition, too, remembers the four as having established four *dhūāns* or "fireplaces" all of which are named after these appointees. Surprisingly, or perhaps not, Raghavdas fails to include the six sub-classifications of the Udasi tradition.

It seems unlikely to me that Sikhs whose opinions about their tradition were aligned with those of Bhai Gurdas would not have noticed the use of the word *siṣ* (*sikkh*) to describe these Udasi mahants. However, while Gurdas and like-minded pious Sikhs may have ignored and even condemned the Udasis, regular Sikhs most likely would have not. As noted by other scholars both Nabhadas and Raghavdas likely pay more attention to the quotidian in their poetic accounts than what was discovered in texts despite the fact that texts still retained significance for our bhakti authors (Hare 2011). Here, in this light, one notices that Raghavdas' information does not perfectly tally with what we discover in Sikh records as, in the latter, these four last disciples who establish *dhūāns* throughout India are the devotees not of Siri Chand but rather of the son of Guru Hargobind, Baba Gurditta, who, according to Sikh tradition, is inducted into the Udasi order by Siri Chand himself (Nara 1975). It is also worth noting that Sikh tradition claims that the four Udasi mahants assigned by Gurditta were named Almast, Phul, Gond (or Gondā) and Hasan Balu while Raghavdas' list has Sahib in the place of Gond.

This could suggest of course that the Udasi Sikhs who Raghavdas is here referencing were a considerable presence within the Sikh Panth by the time Raghavdas was preparing his text, which likely seems the case given the more "ascetic theme" in the janam-sakhis about which Hew McLeod has written (McLeod 1980a, pp. 57–58). This was a prestige derived in part from their associations with the Sikh Guru. Such a reputation may be discerned, furthermore, from the sources within the Maratha polity. A detailed account from the city of Burhanpur dating to the 1760s, for example, notes the grant of "monthly wages" to a *Nānak-putrā* or an Udasi sadhu (Gordon 2000, p. 329). Now this report is removed from Raghavdas' text by almost a century, but tradition claims that the Udasis were a presence in south India quite early in the history of the Sikh tradition, a tradition which suggests that

Udasis were seen as representatives of the Sikh tradition, at least in the south, a belief that appears to account for Raghavdas' curious reference to Guru Nanak's northern origin in the opening and closing lines of *chhappai* 345 above.[5]

The praise of the Udasis, their apparent southern stature notwithstanding, may be situated in the context of Raghavdas's dialogue with Bhai Gurdas, the latter of who has very little to say about the sons of Guru Nanak. Gurdas reserves his comments to one solitary line about Siri Chand, discovered in 33rd *pauṛī* of *vār* 26:

> *bāl jatī hai sirichandu bābāṇā dehurā baṇāiā*
>
> Siri Chand who was ascetically inclined since childhood erected a monument to honour his elder.
>
> (*BG* 26:33:1; Singh 1997, p. 425)

This statement may seem innocuous on its own but, situated as it is within this particular *pauṛī*, the meaning and the intent becomes clear as we read on. The theme around which Gurdas constructs this particular *pauṛī* regards the person who is enmeshed by *māiā* (delusion) and self-centeredness (*haumai*), and prompted by these nefarious forces accords to oneself the greatness that is guruship. All of the descendants of the legitimate Sikh Gurus mentioned in the *pauṛī* are likened to the arch nemesis of the Sikhs in Gurdas' poetry, the *mīṇās*. In this light, therefore, all that Siri Chand became was the Other against which Gurdas constructed his understanding of both the Gurmukh and the type of Sikhism that such Gurmukhs embraced and embodied, a tradition that categorically rejected asceticism. Gurdas ends the *pauṛī* by noting that people such as Siri Chand are *chandan vasu na vās bohāiā*, "like bamboo, which despite its proximity to sweet-smelling sandalwood nevertheless remains malodorous" (*BG* 26:33:7; Singh 1997, p. 425).

7. Afterword

As one can easily see throughout this paper, I have relied quite heavily on the work of bhakti scholar Jack Hawley, especially his focus on the four *sampradāys* in situating my discussion of Raghavdas and Guru Nanak. Hawley's work on the *sampradāys* and Raghavdas has been particularly helpful in exposing this niche in Sikh studies to me—that is, early bhakti attitudes towards the Sikh Gurus. The present paper is offered as an expansion of Hawley's work, though with a focus on the Sikh tradition that is clearly peripheral in Hawley's essays.

This type of collaboration if you will is very good for us in Sikh studies, for it has only been within the last two decades or so that scholars of Sikh history and tradition have begun to engage those Indologists whose work lies predominantly within different though related Indological fields in the hope of understanding the development of both Sikhism and the traditions which were its contemporaries. The goals between we scholars (of Sikhism and of bhakti traditions) are shared but, in so many instances, our perspectives differ. This was made quite explicit to me as I read Professor Hawley's very astute claim that

> The Sikhs developed an intricate system of anthological practice that made it possible to locate the compositions of their own gurus within a wider range of songs ascribed to others.
>
> (Hawley 2015, p. 126)

For me, the phrasing of this claim should in fact be altered given the situationality of the Bhagat Bani to which Hawley refers in this particular quotation. Thus, I would argue that the Sikhs develop a system which allowed the songs of non-Sikhs to be located within the compositions (that is the ideology) of the Gurus. What Professor Hawley's comment fails to note explicitly is that the Bhakt hymns

[5] This South Indian context was brought to my attention by Pashaura Singh who has my thanks.

included in the Adi Granth were incorporated because some agreed with the ideas of the Sikh Gurus while others, more importantly, did not. Those that did not agree are immediately followed by hymns of the Gurus, the aims of which are placing the Bhagats back on course, so to speak, and thus allowing Sikhi to stand in stark contrast to the tradition(s) espoused by the Bhakts/Bhagats. The difference between both my view and that of Professor Hawley is, once again, one of perspective.

This difference, at the same time, also gives rise to the issue of taming and containing. Here is where Raghavdas comes into play. Raghavdas notes enough of Guru Nanak in his *Bhakt-māl* to ensure that the First Master is fairly ensconced within the model of the four *sampradāys*. Put simply, Raghavdas contains the revered Guru and his following within his *chhappais* and goes on his merry bhakti way, turning immediately afterwards to the primary exponent of *nṛgun* bhakti, Kabir without paying the Guru and the Sikhs a second thought.

In many ways, this examination of mine, linked as it is to containment and limitations, brought me again and again to descriptions of the thought of Guru Nanak which generally note that Nanak's doctrine has been, in large part, refracted through the lenses of modern commentators and scholars to form the systematic theology to which we today attach Nanak's name, a theology that has been influenced (inevitably) by "modernist and secular scholarship." There is merit to this claim, but it is one which must nevertheless be tempered. We cannot ignore the modern in the construction of the construct that is Guru Nanak, but such statements we make as scholars are, let us be clear, as confining of the First Master as are those of Raghavdas.

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Religious and Political Dimensions of the Kartarpur Corridor: Exploring the Global Politics Behind the Lost Heritage of the Darbar Sahib

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Abstract: The 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak and the construction of the Kartarpur Corridor has helped the Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur in Pakistan gain global attention. In 2019, thousands of Sikhs embarked on a pilgrimage to Pakistan to take part in this momentous occasion. However, conversations surrounding modern renovations, government control of sacred sites, and the global implications of the corridor have been missing in the larger dialogue. Using historical methods and examining the Darbar Sahib through the context of the 1947 partition and the recent construction of the Kartarpur Corridor, this paper departs from the metanarrative surrounding the Darbar Sahib and explores the impact that Sikhs across the globe had on the "bridge of peace", the politics behind the corridor, and how access to sacred Sikh spaces in Pakistan was only partially regained.

Keywords: Kartarpur Corridor; Guru Nanak; Imran Khan; Navjot Sidhu; diasporic Sikhs

1. Introduction

In November 2018, the decision of the governments of Pakistan and India to open the Kartarpur Corridor across the river Ravi—linking Dera Baba Nanak Sahib (in India) and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur (in Pakistan)—marked the possible beginning of a new era of cooperation and a symbolic movement in the shared cultural history of the Punjab. The two historic gurdwaras are roughly six kilometers apart and share a connection to Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, but the international border created by the partition of India in 1947 separated them, and simultaneously politicized their access. From a global perspective, the Kartarpur Corridor has been celebrated for its ability to become a "bridge of peace" between the two neighboring countries, which have had a history of conflict. Following his visit to the Darbar Sahib in February 2020, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called the Kartarpur Corridor a "corridor of hope" and Darbar Sahib "the best symbol" for peace and "interfaith harmony" (United Nations News 2020). While the Kartarpur Corridor has received much attention from the media, it has failed to gain any traction in the scholarly world outside of one article (Singh 2019a). The author suggests that, while there is certainly an opportunity for the corridor to serve as a gateway for interfaith harmony, the "strategic imperatives" of India and Pakistan "remain the same: to manage, regulate and control access to Sikh sacred shrines, the existence of which radically disrupts the new sacred geographies of post-1947 Indian and Pakistani nationalisms" (Singh 2019a, p. 10). This paper explores the history of, and prospects for, the Kartarpur Corridor. Using primary sources, interviews, and historical methods, the purpose of this essay is to provide an alternative narrative of the Kartarpur Corridor in which historical documents are used to investigate (1) the work done by diasporic Sikhs, (2) the various agendas behind the corridor, and (3) why access to sacred Sikh spaces in Pakistan may have only been momentarily regained. This work uses important sources not available in Singh (2019a), and is, therefore, able to offer a more nuanced and complex analysis in some respects.

First, this paper discusses the social and historical context of the Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur from Guru Nanak's period in the early 16th century to the present day. It is crucial to understand the significance Kartarpur has amongst Sikhs, as it is the site where Guru Nanak established a settled and lasting community of followers. More than four centuries later, the partition of India introduced an international political boundary that had never before existed in that geographic location. Over the years, the political dynamic between India and Pakistan has shaped the development of the Kartarpur Corridor leading to an oscillation between access and lack of access. Second, we analyze the role diasporic Sikhs have had in preserving the heritage of the Darbar Sahib and other Sikh heritage sites in Pakistan, introducing significant new evidence. The typical media narrative accompanying the Kartarpur Corridor places former Punjab Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu (India) and Prime Minister Imran Khan (Pakistan) as the main contributors in preserving and gaining open access to historical Sikh sites in Pakistan. However, this narrative erases the long history of Sikhs, especially diasporic Sikhs since the 1970s, in seeking access to Sikh sacred sites in Pakistan, along with vital efforts to repair and restore neglected sites. Finally, this paper rethinks the "bridge of peace" and investigates the various agendas behind the corridor from multiple perspectives. Since partition, India and Pakistan have had many opportunities to fulfill the Sikh community's demand for open access to Sikh heritage sites, but have repeatedly refused to do so due to ongoing political tensions. A thorough analysis of these key moments in history will demonstrate how the corridor is likely an isolated event in which access to sacred Sikh spaces in Pakistan may have only been *momentarily* regained.

2. Background on Kartarpur and Darbar Sahib/Partition of Punjab

Guru Nanak was born in 1469, had a spiritual revelation about 30 years later, and embarked on extensive travels of spiritual exploration. Following his extensive travels, Guru Nanak settled down near the river Ravi at Kartarpur in 1519. This period in Kartarpur was "the most important period of his life in terms of his posthumous influence" (Grewal 1969, p. 284). It was within Kartarpur that Guru Nanak truly assembled the Sikh "panth" (community) as disciples would visit on a regular basis. There were three daily activities for disciples: (1) devotion, both individual and communal; (2) instruction by Guru Nanak; and (3) daily labor, which coincided with the three features that constituted the ideal person for Guru Nanak—"nam"—Divine Name/relation with the Divine, "dan"—charity/relation with society, and "ishnan" purity/relation with the Self (Singh 2006, p. 177). Not only was Kartarpur a religious site for the Sikh community, but it became the political and social hub as Guru Nanak used his platform in Kartarpur to denounce contemporary politics, society, and religion (Grewal 1990, p. 28). In the last two decades of his life, Guru Nanak settled down at Kartarpur where he imparted regular instruction to his now well-defined community of followers. He preached to not only focus on interior devotion, but to pursue honest occupations for livelihood, and combine piety with worldly activity. Before his death, Guru Nanak appointed Guru Angad as his successor and bowed before him (*Guru Granth Sahib*, pp. 966–67). This proved to be extremely important as Guru Nanak made "a clear statement of the primacy of the message over the messenger", which was the first step in ensuring the formation of the present-day Sikh community (Singh 2006, p. 183).

Although Kartarpur was the site of the first well-established Sikh community, it has always been engulfed in territorial disputes. Shortly after Guru Angad was appointed as Guru Nanak's successor, a new center was established in Khadur. The center was shifted from Kartarpur to Khadur due to the legality of heirs and ownership as Guru Nanak's son, Sri Chand, took control of Kartarpur (Grewal 1990, p. 47). With Sri Chand being the founder of the Udasi sect, Kartarpur remained in Udasi control for several centuries (ibid., p. 117; Oberoi 1994, p. 124). During the Sikh Empire, this group received "revenue-free land-grants" as they established settlements in areas associated with the Sikh Gurus (Oberoi 1994, pp. 123–27). Under the British Raj, the Waqf Act of 1861 allowed the British government to officially transfer the care of gurdwaras to non-Sikhs while allowing Hindus and Muslims to care for their respective places of worship (Petrie 1970). As sacrilegious acts were committed at several gurdwaras, Sikhs ultimately regained control of Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur and

other gurdwaras following the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. Darbar Sahib was severely damaged due to the Ravi River flooding at the beginning of the century and it remained neglected until the Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh, donated Rs. 135,600 to have it restored in the 1920s (Pannu 2019, p. 383). Unfortunately, even after the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 and the restoration by the Maharaja of Patiala, Sikh control of Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur did not survive.

As noted earlier, Kartarpur fell on the Pakistan side of the new international boundary. In addition to the violence of partition, an immediate and still-present dispute over Kashmir, bordering Punjab to the north, guaranteed that the border would not be an open one—in fact, quite the opposite. Later in the paper, specific episodes of this troubled history are described, in the context of how they affected access to Sikh sacred sites now in Pakistan.

Sikhs suffered greatly with the partition of India in 1947—not only were lives and property lost, but they were also deprived of open access to more than 75 percent of their most historically significant gurdwaras, including the birthplace of Guru Nanak and the Sikh faith (Pannu 2019, p. 13). Shortly after the partition and realizing the loss of access to key historic sites, the Akali Dal demanded an "immediate resolution of the dispute between India and Pakistan over the land of gurdwaras at Nankana Sahib and Kartarpur" on 4 January 1948 (Bharti 2018). Several months later, during the annual Diwali gathering in November 1948, Jathedar Mohan Singh Nagoke of Akal Takht Sahib relayed the following message to the Sikh community in Amritsar:

> India, our country, has become free from slavery of the British, and the Sikh community has made tremendous sacrifice for this freedom. In this free India, we are to keep the Sikh community ever in high spirits and lead the country to its acme heights of progress. As such, the Sikh congregations should pay special attention to the following matters during the next year:
>
> (1) To pray to the Almighty for freedom of the Gurdwaras and the Indian women left back there in Pakistan (Singh 2012, p. 79).

Recognizing that the partition resulted in Sikhs losing access to gurdwaras and other historical sites in Pakistan, members of the community began drafting lines to include in "ardas" (prayer). By the beginning of 1952, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) agreed upon lines written by Sardar Joginder Singh (Singh 2019b). On 25 January 1952, the Akal Takht Sahib released the following "hukamnama" (order):

> This Order from Sri Akal Takht Sahib is meant for compliance of the entire Sarbat Khalsa and the Sevadars of all the Gurdwaras that the following words be taken as mandatory for inclusion in the formal Ardas.
>
> *He Akāl Purakha Apne Pantha De Sadā Sahāī Dātāra Jīo, Srī Nankāṇā Sāhiba Te Hora Gurduāriāṁ Gurdhāmāṁ De Jinhāṁ Toṁ Pantha Nūṁ Vichoṛiā Giā Hai, Khulhe Darshana Dīdār Te Sevā Saṁbhāla Dā Dān Khālsā Jī Nūṁ Bakhasho II*
>
> Hey Akal Purakh! You ever being gracious to your Panth! Kindly bestow the boon of your benevolence upon your Khalsa in kindly granting the privilege of free glance, glimpse, service, and security of Sri Nankana Sahib and other Gurdwaras and Guru-shrines which have been separated from the Panth (Singh 2012, p. 80).

As the global Sikh community began doing ardas for open access to historical sites in Pakistan, a secret pact made by India's Minister for Home Affairs, Govind Ballabh Pant, and Pakistan's Prime Minister, Sikandar Mirza, in 1955, known as the Pant–Mirza Agreement to Prevent Border Incidents and Protect Places of Worship, ignored the plight of Sikhs (Lal 2014). This meeting highlights the ignorance of both governments as control of these historical gurdwaras became a negotiable item for them despite attempts made by the SGPC and the Sikh community to retain control of and access

to gurdwaras in Pakistan (Pannu 2019, p. 13). The control and management of the Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur and other historical Sikh sites were officially lost with the pact of 1955—exactly 30 years after gaining control of gurdwaras—as they were considered to be "evacuee properties" (Lal 2014). Realizing the loss Sikhs suffered with the Pant–Mirza Agreement, in 1959, the SGPC and Chief Khalsa Diwan sent a letter to the Indian prime minister demanding that "India should get back the gurdwara land," which the Congress government in Punjab opposed (Bharti 2018). With the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak in 1969, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi promised to fulfill the demand made by Sikhs a decade earlier. The promise included a land swap for the Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur and free visas for Sikh pilgrims wishing to visit Nankana Sahib (ibid., 2018). As hostilities between India and Pakistan were heightened over the years due to the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, hopes of access to historical Sikh sites in Pakistan faded away. However, in September 1974, with new leadership in Pakistan, representatives from both governments met in Islamabad to further discuss pilgrimage to religious sites. The Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines of 1974 not only granted non-discriminatory visits from one country to another for such visits but ensured that sites were properly maintained (Ministry of External Affairs n.d.). Although the Protocol succeeded in including eleven historical Sikh sites—Gurdwara Sri Nankana Sahib (Sheikhupura); Gurdwara Sri Panja Sahib (Rawalpindi); Samadhi of Maharaj Ranjit Singh (Lahore); Gurdwara Sri Dera Sahib (Lahore); Gurdwara Janam Asthan (Lahore); Gurdwara Deewan Khana (Lahore); Gurdwara Shaheed Ganj, Singhanian (Lahore); Gurdwara Bhai Tara Singh (Lahore); Gurdwara of Sixth Guru, Mozang, (Lahore); Birthplace of Sri Guru Ram Das (Lahore); Gurdwara Cheveen Padshahi, Mozang (Lahore)—Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur was excluded because of the sensitivity of the border area controlled by Pakistan Army's Rangers. (Express News Service 2018). While the Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines of 1974 was a minor success for the global Sikh community and gaining access to historical sites in Pakistan, India refused to communicate with Pakistan in regard to Darbar Sahib over the next few decades with the development of transnational Sikh political aspirations and the rise of the Khalistan movement. The impact of the Khalistan movement and lack of cooperation to provide access to Darbar Sahib from the Indian government is discussed in further detail later in subsequent sections. Meanwhile, the Darbar Sahib continued to deteriorate. Based on memories of local people, throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, the abandoned gurdwara was a refuge for drug addicts to escape the "gaze of civilization" (Khalid 2017a). With the establishment of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PSGPC) in April 1999, control and management of several Sikh sites in Pakistan finally returned to Sikhs. However, while the caretakers of the gurdwaras were Sikhs, the first chairman of PSGPC was the former chief of Pakistan's intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Lieutenant-General Javed Nasir (Goyal 2019). Despite this, the majority of Sikhs were still unable to visit the Darbar Sahib. With the tension between the bordering countries and their inability to visit the Darbar Sahib, Sikhs in India resorted to desperate measures to gain "darshan" (glimpse) of the politicized historical site:

> The gurdwara can today be seen through binoculars from across the Indian side of the international border, even though the tall elephant grass on the banks of Ravi sometimes blocks the view. Devotees on the Indian side often step onto a 10-foot platform built in the town of Dera Baba Nanak (Gurdaspur District) to gain a *darshan* (glimpse) of the Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur, where Guru Nanak spent the last 18 years of his life. The Border Security Force guarding the platform kindly provides curious visitors with binoculars to view the site from afar (Pannu 2019, p. 383).

With the Kartarpur Corridor, the times of gazing at the Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur from a distance are gone. The 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak was another milestone in Sikh history as the global Sikh community finally had the opportunity to visit the birthplace of the Sikh community.

3. The Role of Diasporic Sikhs in Reviving the Lost Heritage of Darbar Sahib

The popular understanding of efforts to preserve and maintain Sikh heritage sites in Pakistan is linked with Navjot Sidhu's visit to Pakistan in 2018. Despite this metanarrative of media and current elected officials, the initial efforts to preserve and maintain Sikh heritage sites in Pakistan began much earlier. Throughout the entire process, several key individuals and organizations have remained unrecognized or have been forgotten due to their modesty, putting "seva" (selfless service) above all else. However, the Sikh panth may have never gotten the opportunity to make this pilgrimage if it was not for these unofficial actors. Over the past five decades, the global Sikh community has actively engaged with the government of Pakistan. This section will trace the seva initiated by diasporic Sikhs and their efforts to preserve and maintain these sites. Despite India and Pakistan's unstable relationship since partition, the global Sikh community has been actively opening channels of communication with the government of Pakistan in an attempt to answer the decades-long wish for the preservation of and open access to historical Sikh sites in Pakistan. The rocky relationship between the neighboring countries has always been an obstacle for Sikhs in Punjab and other areas in India to create a meaningful dialogue with Pakistan, which allowed the work done by diasporic Sikhs to be more successful. Four distinct major episodes are described in this section. Due to their dedication to seva, the individuals and groups in these episodes have sometimes been forgotten or unrecognized. To historicize these narratives, ensure their work is recognized, and deepen our historical understanding, this section is largely formed through personal conversations with diasporic Sikhs. Furthermore, this section will show that there are several motivating factors within diasporic Sikhs that draw them to focus on sites in Pakistan including those who wanted Sikhs to gain unfettered access to Sikh heritage sites (such as the Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation and the Guru Nanak Shrine Fellowship) and those that had family connections in the Pakistani Punjab (such as Dr. Dalvir Singh Pannu).

3.1. Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation

The communication between Sikhs and Pakistani government officials to preserve Sikh sites launched in the mid-1970s with the creation of the Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation with a well-connected Washington-based Sikh, Ganga Singh Dhillon. Through his connections, Dhillon was able to form a relationship with President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and his Minister for Political Affairs, Chaudhry Zahoor Elahi (Badhwar 1981). In 1975, Dhillon organized the first "jatha" (group) of 25 Sikhs to visit historical Sikh gurdwaras in Pakistan. He notes that "their condition was deplorable, specially what I saw, in Lahore in Nankana Sahib. These are our holiest of places. Except for Batala where Guru Nanak was married, there is no physical or architectural history of Nanak in India. It is all in Pakistan" (ibid., 1981). After seeing the condition of these sites, Dhillon formed the international Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation "to construct, renovate, repair and maintain Gurdwaras, historical and religious buildings and shrines and affiliated premises of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and the other Nine Sikh Gurus" in Pakistan (Sandhu n.d.). Furthermore, the foundation wanted to ensure that Sikhs across the globe had the opportunity to visit these historical sites that were stripped away during the partition. Charan Singh Sandhu (commonly referred to as Charan Singh "Sangatpura"), a prominent leader amongst the Sikh community in Hong Kong from the 1970s to the early 2000s, joined Dhillon and the Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation during its early stages. Following Charan Singh's lead, several members of the Hong Kong Sikh community became lifetime members of the foundation to ensure open access and the preservation of Pakistani gurdwaras, including Gurmukh Singh Dhillon, Gurbhej Singh, Daljit Singh Gill, Sucha Singh "Chandigarh", and Gurcharan Singh Bhuchar (Sandhu n.d.). Upon joining the foundation, Charan Singh led several jathas on pilgrimages to visit various gurdwaras, including, but not limited to, Gurdwara Panja Sahib Hassanabadal; Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh Peshawar; Gurdwara Janam Asthan Nankana Sahib; Gurdwara Sacha Sauda Farooqabad, once known as Chuhrkhana; Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur; and the house of Bhai Lalo Eminabad (Bhuchar 2020). Not only did the Hong Kong Sikh community make pilgrimages to historic gurdwaras, but also financially supported the efforts to preserve Sikh heritage sites in Pakistan. During their first visit, the Hong Kong sangat raised "6 *lakh*

(600,000) rupees" for various projects in Nankana Sahib—including constructing a school building for the local community (ibid., 2020).

Over the years, Charan Singh made several trips to Pakistan with jathas from across the globe (See Figure 1). While the Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation focused on these trips and assisting in small scale renovation projects in Pakistan from the 1970s through the early 2000s, large-scale renovations for the Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur began in the 1990s.

Figure 1. A Sikh delegation with Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz at the prime minister's house on 29 November 2004. Charan Singh Sangatpura, the third from the left in the orange dastar (turban), has led several delegations since the 1980s.

3.2. Guru Nanak Shrine Fellowship: The Beginning of the Renovation Process

The renovation of the Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur is a story of two men: Dr. Gurcharanjit Singh Attariwala, a Canadian-based ophthalmologist, and Lieutenant General (Retired) Jahandād Khan, a general in the Pakistan army and former governor of Sindh. The two first met when General Khan was traveling across Canada and the United States to raise funds for his first Al-Shifa eye hospital in Rawalpindi in the late 1980s. The hospitals were dedicated to treating millions with the highest level of care, at low to no cost. The purpose of the Al-Shifa hospital motivated Attariwala, South Asian professionals in Calgary, and the Sikh community to help General Khan's efforts. Through Operation Eyesight, a Calgary-based charity dedicated to eliminating avoidable blindness, the three affinity groups mentioned above helped with equipment, and also helped him build a medical lab to produce drugs for eye-related conditions. They raised a substantial amount of money for General Khan and established a relationship with the Al-Shifa Trust. Through the years, Attariwala and General Khan had exchanged many letters and become good friends (Attariwala 2019b).

In 1992, Attariwala went to Pakistan for the first time with his wife, Mrs. Gurdev Kaur Attariwala, since fleeing Rawalpindi as a teenager during partition. The impetus to visit Pakistan came from two events: a conference being held in Karachi that coincided with an invitation to attend the marriage of a friend's son. It was during this trip where he was informed of "Pakistan's Darbar Sahib". In an interview with his daughter, Parmela, Attariwala shares, "We went to attend the wedding of Dr. Mahmood's son and stayed with Mahmood's wife's nephew, Fazal—in Lahore. And [Fazal] asked me if I had been to Darbar Sahib. I said, 'Yes in Amritsar'. He said, 'No, no, no: in Pakistan'" (Attariwala 2019b).

With this, Fazal arranged to take them to visit Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur. As the Attariwalas traveled to Kartarpur from Lahore, they noticed signs which read "Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur" all along the highway. Upon reaching the Darbar Sahib, they saw the gurdwara in ruins. Attariwala recalls:

> It was all damaged. There were no windows, no doors; no, nothing. There was a big slab [inside] with a green sheet. I don't know. I presume the green sheet covered the platform where they held parkash of Guru Granth Sahib. OR this is where Guru Nanak was cremated. We don't know. We had no guidance there. There was no one. No one knew anything; no one to tell us anything. And there was a gas lamp—dried up—and a red rose [on the ground]. So, there was nothing (Attariwala 2019b; See Figure 2).

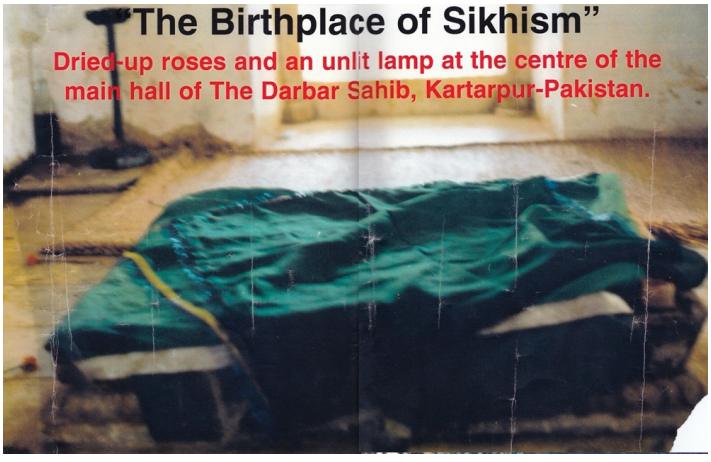

Figure 2. This photo was taken by Dr. Attariwala showing the interior of Darbar Sahib during his visit.

The building was in awful condition, the tombs were destroyed, the ceiling was damaged, and there was no road to get to the Gurdwara building. Fortunately, Attariwala's visit to Pakistan allowed him to form relationships which set into motion a series of events that led to recent discussions to open the border to Sikh pilgrims (Attariwala 2019a). Returning to Canada after his visit to Kartarpur, Attariwala was inspired to restore the gurdwara. He put together a working group through which they gathered funds dedicated to the restoration of the Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur. Mobilizing Sikhs in the diaspora, Attariwala and his colleagues established the Guru Nanak Shrine Fellowship. The organization created brochures with images of the gurdwara in ruins that also highlighted the Pakistani government's willingness to contribute funds to the restoration of the gurdwara. Attariwala acknowledges that the Pakistani government's contribution to the restoration of the historical gurdwara would not have taken place without the influence of General Khan. A letter written by General Khan to the Minister for Religious Affairs, Raja Muhammad Zafar Ul Haq, on 12 February 1998 reads:

> *My dear Raja Sahib,*
>
> *There is a large sized Sikh Community in Calgary (Canada) which I have been visiting every alternative year since 1990, in connection with mobilization of donations to Al-Shifa Trust. During my recent visit to Calgary, the community leaders had expressed their serious concern about (the) state of maintenance and repairs of their Gurdwara in Narowal, which is one of their very sacred shrines.*
>
> *I was specially asked by these community leaders to request authorities to kindly get this Gurdwara repaired as a matter of highest priority because a large number of Sikh devotees from all over the world*

> *visit this Gurdwara every year. I was also told by these Sikh leaders that they would be prepared to contribute some of the cost of the repairs if shortage of funds is the main constraint.*
>
> *I shall be grateful if you could kindly issue instructions to authorities to attend to this genuine request of Sikhs, on a priority basis.*

General Khan proved to be a key partner as he worked tirelessly throughout the entire restoration process of Darbar Sahib. Although it was Attariwala's visit in the early 1990s that eventually led to the restoration, the letters General Khan sent to several ministers marked the official start of conversations regarding renovation. General Khan's influence amongst elected officials in Pakistan was enough to persuade the government to not only agree to the restoration, but also contribute Rs. 7.5 lakhs (750,000) to the project. In a letter from General Khan to Dr. Attariwala dated 26 January 1999, Dād Khan writes:

> *Ever since my return from Calgary in 1997, I have been pursuing the case of Narowal Gurdwara. There are three ministers involved in this case and hence all this delay. However, I am glad to inform you that restoration/renovation process has now started and Chairman Evacuee Trust (Lt Gen Javed Nasir) has assured me that it will be completed at the cost of Rs 7.5 lakhs (Pakistani rupees), which he has sanctioned for this project . . . I understand the 300-year anniversary is due some time at the end of this year, and if you find it possible, please come on this occasion. General Javed will personally accompany you and show you the progress of work and future plan. Please rest assured, we will do everything possible to protect this holy place.*

After roughly 50 years of neglect, the Pakistani government suddenly became interested in Kartarpur and its gurdwara due to Attariwala's friendship with General Khan. By the end of the century, the renovations were complete. On 19 November 1999, the Sikh Panth witnessed the first Parkash since the partition. This momentous occasion was attended by Sikhs in the diaspora (including Attariwala), "gianis" (religious leader) from Nankana Sahib to perform the kirtan, a local member of parliament (Chaudhry Anwar Aziz), and local Muslims and Sikhs (See Figure 3). Many locals wished to be a part of the momentous occasion but settled for standing outside the open doors, which allowed Sikhs from the diaspora and nearby villages to congregate in the main hall. Following the divan, Muslims and Sikhs joined together for langar as the occasion came to an end. By the time of the Gurdwara's reinauguration, the Pakistani government had undertaken the restoration of the outside of the building and superficially cleaned its interior. They had also begun to construct roads to the temple.

The work started by Attariwala and General Khan, in the 1990s, to renovate Darbar Sahib had global significance, leading to a movement to restore a heritage site that represented universal human values and ideals (See Figure 4).

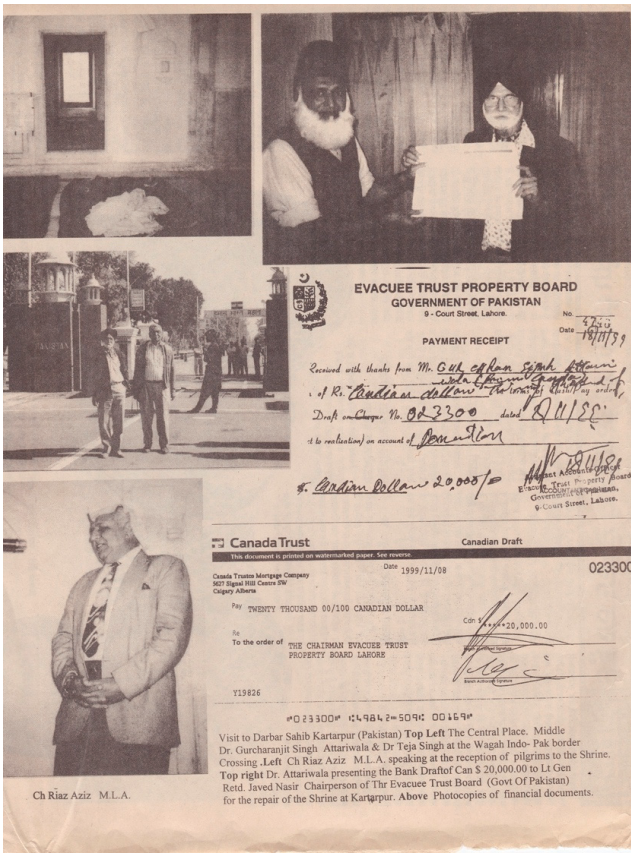

Figure 3. A January 2000 newspaper shared highlights from Dr. Attariwala's visit to the November 1999 occasion. **Top left:** A picture taken by Dr. Attariwala during his initial visit in 1992 of the desolate interior in the abandoned Gurdwara. **Middle left:** Dr. Attariwala and Dr. Teja Singh crossing the Wagah border into Pakistan. **Bottom left:** Local member of parliament who attended the inaugural kirtan and addressed the sangat. **Top right:** Dr. Attariwala presenting a check to the minister in charge of shrines left by Indians in Pakistan, General Naser. **Bottom right:** Receipt and check of $20,000 Canadian dollars raised by the Guru Nanak Shrine Foundation.

Figure 4. Side by side photos of Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur from 1992 (before restoration) and 1999 (post external restoration).

3.3. Digital Preservation of Historical Sikh Sites in Pakistan

Over the years, there have been several gurdwaras that were renovated and preserved, yet the majority of Sikh heritage sites in Pakistan have been neglected. While some Sikhs have been working to physically preserve and ensure open access to historical Sikh sites in Pakistan, others have taken a different approach. This section explores the meticulously documented digital preservation work of historical Sikh sites by two diasporic Sikhs—Amardeep Singh, a former corporate businessman from Singapore, and Dr. Dalvir Singh Pannu, a dentist from the Bay Area region of California. Despite coming from different backgrounds, both diasporic Sikhs shared a passion to unearth the narratives of Sikh heritage sites in Pakistan that has paved the way for preservation projects in recent years.

In 2014, at a time when the knowledge of gurdwaras in East Punjab was extremely limited, Amardeep Singh started documenting the broader Sikh legacy remnants in Pakistan. Singh had hoped to shed light on the subject as "Sikhs and Pakistanis were themselves ignorant about the expanse of the subject" (Singh 2020). With minimal support from community organizations, Singh published his exploration of Sikh heritage sites across 126 cities and villages in Pakistan in the form of two books—*Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan* (Singh 2016a) and *The Quest Continues, Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan* (Singh 2017). The relationship with Pakistani citizens during his journey was fulfilling, but Singh was forced to take risks to accomplish certain goals due to the restrictions of the government of Pakistan. He shared that "if one wants to reach deep, in areas where foreigners are not permitted, then navigating through the establishment is the biggest challenge" (Singh 2020). However, the risks were crucial in order to capture visual documentations of Sikh heritage sites and inform the government of their capability to increase tourism. In 2019, Singh shifted his entire focus to the multi-episode documentary on Guru Nanak's travels across nine countries. Although the majority of the landmass of the nine countries Guru Nanak traveled across was inaccessible to film by a foreigner,

Singh was resilient and successful. While this is a painful and slow process, the "first step to influence change is documentation to arouse curiosity" (Singh 2020). Alongside informing the government of Pakistan, Singh also wanted to educate the broader Sikh community on the Sikh legacy in Pakistan beyond the few functional gurdwaras. With physical sites rapidly deteriorating, Singh views his works as a "chase against time" (Singh 2020). The choice to digitally preserve these sites, including Darbar Sahib, was not only because they influenced change, but the fear that there would be nothing left to preserve without quickly documenting it in print and documentaries. Due to the broader community engaging with Singh's work, abandoned gurdwaras have been announced for maintenance including Chowa Guru Nanak Gurdwara in 2019.

In the same year, Dr. Dalvir Singh Pannu published a book on Sikh heritage sites in Pakistan titled *The Sikh Heritage: Beyond Borders* (Pannu 2019) to commemorate the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak. The motivation to begin the project to digitally preserve the historic sites in Pakistan came from a visit to his ancestral home in Pakistan in 2008 combined with his longstanding passion to research Sikh historical and religious sites and personal conversations with several of his patients who shared a connection to heritage sites in Pakistan (Pannu 2020). In 2010, Pannu published his twelve-episode travelogue to Pakistan in a local newspaper which received an overwhelming response and led to him building a field team in various parts of Pakistan. Over the next 10 years, he was able to create an extensive digital repository, covering more than 270 Sikh heritage sites from the mountains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the deserts of Balochistan (Pannu 2020). Building one of the most extensive bibliographic lists for the Sikh heritage in Pakistan, Pannu's work has received attention at leading academic institutes in Pakistan. The rare artwork, as displayed in the high-resolution photographs, has given Pannu's work exposure in the internationally acclaimed journal *The Architectural Historian*, which will only help raise global awareness about the Sikh art in these abandoned buildings in Pakistan. He has also put particular focus on drawing parallels between Janamsakhis and Sufi traditions in his book, giving an analytical approach to handle the sensitive conversation among the faithful and skeptics. The decision to digitally preserve these sites and publish a book rather than raising funds to preserve the physical structures was intentional as Pannu wanted the local community, the government of Pakistan, and others who share a personal connection to the sites to take interest and the initiative to preserve these sites (Pannu 2020). Pannu views his book as an educational and motivational guide which gives these different stakeholders the sources to accomplish this goal and it has been proven to be successful. Gurdwara Mal Ji Sahib, Kanganpur (Kasur District) is one of many sites that stakeholders have committed to preserve following a conversation with Pannu. The digital preservation of Sikh heritage sites—by Singh and Pannu—allows the global Sikh community to gain a darshan of these sites as many may not be able to visit them for several different reasons.

3.4. Combined Efforts to Promote Sikh Tourism and Preservation in Pakistan

In June 2019, the momentum coming from the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak and the Kartarpur Corridor resulted in UK businesses pledging 500 million pounds for religious tourism projects in Pakistan. In a meeting with the chairman of the Pakistan Tourism Board and special assistant to Prime Minister Imran Khan, Sayed Zulfiqar Bukhari, Peter Singh Virdee, and several other British Sikhs made the financial commitment to establish a trust to help renovate gurdwaras in Pakistan (Shah 2019). In order to ensure the trust had global representation, the group established the Guru Nanak Global Sewa Trust (Sikh Channel 2019). The commitment to invest in religious tourism projects was reciprocated by Bukhari as he assured the Sikh community that the government of Pakistan would take steps to help facilitate religious tourism. These steps included "a special tunnel from Guru Nanak Sahib's *dargah* [shrine] to Gurdwara Janam Asthan, an underground railway to another Gurdwara, and free shuttle services from all main Gurdwaras" (Shah 2019). For Bukhari and the Pakistani government, this was an opportunity to boost their economy through religious tourism as they reach out to communities worldwide and invite them to visit Pakistan. Meanwhile, Virdee stated that "money was not an issue for the Sikh community as they were prepared to lay down their lives

for their Gurdwara" (Rana 2019). The financial commitment continues the trend, similar to diasporic Sikhs from the 1970s to the early 2000s, of Sikhs fulfilling their wish to visit and preserve Kartarpur and other historical sites in Pakistan. From the efforts initiated by Dhillon and the Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation to the recent tourism and preservation fund established by the Peter Virdee and British Sikhs, there has been a continuous effort by the global Sikh community over the past five decades to preserve and access Sikh heritage sites in Pakistan. Although significant, the narrative of Sidhu and Khan singlehandedly constructing the corridor erases the long history of the work done by diasporic Sikhs. Sikh delegations from the United States and the United Kingdom met with Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and Yousaf Raza Gillani in 2004 and 2008, respectively (Maini 2008). The common bond between all of these efforts, from the 1970s to the present day, has been the dream of millions of Sikhs since partition. Unfortunately, the groundwork laid by diasporic Sikhs over the past five decades has largely been ignored by both of the governments of India and Pakistan as the political tension constantly hindered any progress.

4. Rethinking the "Bridge of Peace"

Based on the new evidence of the role that diasporic Sikhs played in preserving and reviving heritage sites in Pakistan, we must also rethink the understanding of the Kartarpur Corridor as a "bridge of peace". For the global Sikh community, the Kartarpur Corridor was not a politically or economically motivated project, but a religiously motivated one. Despite the projection of the Kartarpur Corridor as a "bridge of peace", there is strong evidence of it being nothing more than an isolated and symbolic gesture to sway the Sikh community with no actual plausibility for it to initiate peace talks. Indeed, the corridor highlights the strategic ulterior motives for India and Pakistan, as politicians from both countries attempt to claim "ownership" of the project, further politicizing the sacred site. Since the partition, the global Sikh community has made several attempts to convince both governments to preserve, maintain, and allow open access to Sikh heritage sites in Pakistan. Despite their pleas, India and Pakistan continuously exert control over the Sikh community's sacred and cultural spaces (Singh 2019a, p. 14). While both countries claim to be allies of the Sikh community and value their wishes, neither has truly shown an uninterrupted commitment to the Sikh community and its sacred sites in Pakistan. However, there have been several moments throughout history that painted India as being hostile to the Sikh community and its gurdwaras, while Pakistan was seen as an ally and protector of the community. This section explores four distinct historical episodes as a basis for exposing the "bridge of peace" as a bridge built on exclusivist structures and weak foundations. In each episode discussed here, issues of the Sikh community's access can be seen as subordinate to domestic and international political compulsions and maneuverings by each of the national governments involved.

4.1. Indo-Pakistani War of 1971

Due to the proximity to the border, Darbar Sahib was threatened by the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. Just outside the gurdwara complex is a missile within a glass encasing. A plaque next to it states the missile was dropped at the site by the Indian Air Force during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War. Due to a miracle, it fell inside a nearby well, unable to destroy the gurdwara (Rizwan 2018). While the Pakistani Air Force also made an air attack in Punjab, it did not strike near any gurdwaras. The Pakistani government capitalized on the missile by preserving it in a glass case near the complex and painting themselves as allies and protectors of the Sikh community during the renovation process. Shortly after the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, the Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation began communicating with the Pakistani government to ensure open access and the preservation of gurdwaras in Pakistan. Meanwhile, the Indian government—specifically the Indian Ambassador to the United States at the time, T.N. Kaul—refused to begin a dialogue with Pakistan. Despite the fact that Dhillon used his connections to American politicians to help the U.S.–India relations, Kaul "discouraged Dhillon from visiting Pakistan" and did not want him to engage with Pakistan (Badhwar 1981). Several years later, after ignoring Kaul, Dhillon was able to retain an oral and "detailed written commitment, pledging that

the Pakistan Government would take care of the shrines and facilitate free access to, and freedom of worship at, these holy places" from President Zia-ul-Haq (ibid., 1981). Dhillon wanted the management and maintenance of these gurdwaras to be under a Sikh institution. At the time, the gurdwaras in Pakistan were under the control of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) following the Pant–Mirza Agreement in 1955 (Lal 2014). Despite the commitment by the Pakistani government, nothing came to fruition as President Zia-ul-Haq claimed the Indian government needed to be involved in the process possibly to counteract the secret agreement of 1955. The Indian government refused to participate in any dialogue with Pakistan in regard to the preservation of and open access to historical Sikh sites in Pakistan.

4.2. Delhi–Lahore Bus Service and the Kargil War (1999–2001)

The initial idea of opening access to Kartarpur was proposed by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee of India and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan in February 1999 under the Delhi–Lahore bus diplomacy. While Prime Minister Khan's friendship with Sidhu was the spark that reinvigorated renovations of the corridor, his political rival and former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, was one of the original architects of the corridor in 1999. However, shortly after signing the Lahore Declaration, a bloodless coup led by the Pakistani military overthrew Sharif due to his relationship with India (Shams 2019). The military leadership felt Sharif was too soft with India as the territorial conflict in Kashmir became hostile during the Kargil War. The military takeover of 1999 resulted in General Pervez Musharraf assuming power as the Chief Executive of Pakistan. For a short time, Musharraf honored the proposed corridor as Pakistan constructed a bridge to allow Sikh pilgrims from India to visit Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur without a visa or passport (The Hindu Net Desk 2019). In December 2000, following the approval of a corridor to Kartarpur, the Guru Nanak Shrine Fellowship wrote letters to Prime Minister Vajpayee and Chief Executive Musharraf in appreciation of their efforts (Attariwala 2001). However, Gobind Singh, the caretaker of Darbar Sahib, claimed that half of the road construction was completed during the Musharraf era "but India never responded" (Rizwan 2018). Over the years, as the geopolitical relations between India and Pakistan worsened, the project was terminated. Although the present Kartarpur Corridor has already overcome several bilateral situations, as the past has shown, Kashmir and other political tensions between the two countries have the capability of revoking the access granted to Sikhs.

4.3. Khalistan Movement (1984–Present)

The Pakistani government was eager to avenge the loss of East Pakistan during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh as an independent nation. The same year, Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan visited Pakistan "as part of an effort to set up a Sikh government" (Pandya 2007). Chauhan placed advertisements in The New York Times, on 12 October 1971, proclaiming the formation of Khalistan. Following the June 1984 attack on Darbar Sahib, Amritsar (commonly referred to as the Golden Temple), the Khalistan movement gained more traction. This became a major concern for the Indian government as Sikhs sought a separate nation, Khalistan. The Pakistani government not only supported the movement but turned its attention to Sikh gurdwaras in Pakistan as they had become sites of political gathering for the Khalistan movement (Khalid 2013, p. 247). During religious festivals in the 1980s, Khalistani leaders such as Chauhan and Ganga Singh Dhillion, began addressing groups of Sikh pilgrims at Gurdwara Janamasthan (Nankana Sahib) with banners reading Khalistan Zindabad, or Long Live Khalistan, posted around the gurdwara (ibid., p. 250). With tensions rising between Khalistani activists and the government of India, key individuals from Pakistan firmly supported Khalistan for several decades. For example, in 1988, the Director-General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), General Hamid Gul, supported the Khalistan movement and urged Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to do the same (Aziz 2015). The support for Khalistan from Pakistani officials greatly concerned Indian officials even during the Kartarpur Corridor talks. In November 2018, the same month when the decision to construct the corridor was announced, the Pakistan government allowed Sikhs For Justice

(SFJ) to open an office in Lahore (Rana 2018). SFJ, a pro-Khalistani organization, is leading the "Khalistan Referendum 2020" campaign and declared the corridor to be a "bridge to Khalistan" (Sahni 2019). The opening of the corridor raised many security concerns, especially for Indian officials. To celebrate the momentous occasion of the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor, the government of Pakistan released an official video and shared it on their social media page (Govt. of Pakistan 2019). Within the four-minute video, there are several seconds in which a "Khalistan 2020" poster appears, referring to a referendum planned for a separate Sikh homeland. Whether the Pakistani government purposefully included the short clip in which a "Khalistan 2020" poster appears to propagate secessionist feelings or not, government officials in India have taken serious issue with it, only further fueling Indo-Pakistani tensions. The Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar "condemn(ed) Pakistan's attempt to undermine the spirit under which the pilgrimage [was] supposed to be undertaken" (Scroll Staff 2019a). Furthermore, they demanded to have it removed as any anti-India propaganda was prohibited during the pilgrimage and the inauguration (Scroll Staff 2019a). The video was just a microcosm of a much larger issue surrounding the opening of the corridor. The Chief Minister of Punjab, Amarinder Singh, protested the corridor as he claims it is part of Pakistan's hidden agenda "on using the corridor to woo the Indian Sikhs to promote the ISI-backed 2020 Khalistan Referendum and creating sleeper cells here" (Scroll Staff 2019b). The concern comes after the Pakistan Railway Minister, Sheikh Rashid, mentioned that the corridor was "the brainchild of Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa," which was echoed by Punjab's Police Chief, Dinkar Gupta (Scroll Staff 2020). Questions about General Bajwa and Pakistan's true intentions were also raised when Gopal Singh Chawla, a "prominent pro-Khalistan separatist," was not only present at the ground-breaking ceremony of the corridor, but "seen shaking hands with" General Bajwa despite Chawla being a senior leader of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (Press Trust of India 2018). The Director-General of Inter-Services Public Relations (DG ISPR) for Pakistan, Major General Asif Ghafoor, immediately denied any ulterior motives stating, "Indian media taking a myopic view is selectively showing Mr. Gopal Singh meeting COAS. Army Chief met all guests at the venue irrespective of identity. A peace initiative should not be subjected to propaganda" (DG ISPR 2018). The involvement of Khalistani leaders, such as Chawla, led India to cancel the second round of talks, which were scheduled for 2 April 2019 in Wagah (Press Trust of India 2019d). In order to continue the conversations, the Imran Khan-led Pakistan government removed Chawla from the PSGPC before the 14 July meeting (Singh 2019c). While the Khalistan matter has always been a concern for the Indian government, former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Mehbooba Mufti, criticized those trying to portray the corridor as a pro-Khalistan conspiracy as she "fails to understand why allowing people pilgrimage to Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birthplace would assume such undertones" (Scroll Staff 2018). For Sikhs, the corridor was never political, but an answer to a decades-long dream of being able to access historical gurdwaras and sites in Pakistan. Yet, the corridor is unable to serve as a "bridge of peace" until the ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan are resolved. The corridor was not the first step to peace talks between the neighboring rivals, but an isolated incident with ulterior motives for the two countries.

4.4. Kashmir, Citizenship Amendment Bill, Nankana Sahib, and False Peace

In May 2017, the former Minister of State for External Affairs for India, Shashi Tharoor, proclaimed that the corridor would not be beneficial because of the political climate. While acknowledging the positive impact that the corridor would have on religious tourism, Tharoor's reservations, coming just 18 months before the foundation stone for the corridor was laid, came due to the fact that "Pakistani agencies are regularly beheading Indian soldiers" (Dhaliwal 2017). The incident mentioned by Tharoor was the beheading of two Indian soldiers along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir earlier that month (Bhat 2017). Tharoor said that he would advocate for the corridor "only when the situation is normal" (Dhaliwal 2017). Although the governments of India and Pakistan were able to set their differences aside and come to a compromise to open the corridor, the tension between the two countries remains. In 2016, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was recognized as the most militarized land in the

world (Singh 2016b). The territorial conflict over Kashmir, which began with the partition in 1947, shows no sign of slowing down. Shortly before the corridor, on 5 August 2019, Kashmir was put on lockdown and was revoked of Article 370 and Article 35a by the Indian government which gave special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This included the "power to have its own constitution, flag and autonomy over all matters, save for certain policy areas such as a foreign affairs and defense" (Suri 2019). Nevertheless, Prime Minister Khan reassured his commitment to the Kartarpur Corridor as the government of Pakistan isolated the project from the tensions that arose after the annulment of Article 370 (Yousaf 2019). Immediately after the corridor, in December 2019, the Indian government passed the anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Bill—the first sign of the "bridge of peace" being a superficial bridge. The bill was strongly condemned by Prime Minister Khan who claimed Narendra Modi's supreme Hindutva mindset would "violate all norms of international human rights law and bilateral agreements with Pakistan . . . India is working towards making a Muslim majority state into minority in Jammu and Kashmir (JK) by bringing in Hindu people and settling them in the valley" (Press Trust of India 2019b; Sabrang India 2019). With the conflict between the neighboring countries based on religion, the Sikh community was once again caught in the crossfire. A local incident from Nankana Sahib in late August 2019—when the daughter of a Sikh "granthi" (priest) was allegedly kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam, and forced to marry a Muslim man—was brought to the international limelight in January 2020 following vandalism at Nankana Sahib. For India, this incident was an opportunity to justify the Citizenship Amendment Bill. With India being heavily criticized for the bill and anti-Muslim violence, the incident allowed them to shift the criticism onto Pakistan by labeling it a "jihadist and extremist country" that manipulated the Sikh community with the Kartarpur Corridor (New Desk 2020). Although Prime Minister Khan condemned the vandalism and claimed it went against his vision for Pakistan, he also used it as an opportunity to condemn the "Modi's RSS vision" and the ongoing anti-Muslim violence in India (Ahmad 2020). The corridor continues Pakistan's trend of "actively promoting its cultural soft power" by assisting religious minorities (Singh 2019a, p. 9). India followed a similar trajectory, despite its history of persecution of minority groups, by offering refugee to Afghan Sikhs fleeing persecution in 2020 (Bainiwal 2020). While the Kartarpur Corridor was extremely significant, it is nothing more than a symbolic, isolated event that occurred "without any *systematic* changes" in the present structures that are "premised upon an *exclusive Muslim* identity [in Pakistan], standing in opposition to a non-Muslim *Hindu India*" (Khalid 2020, emphasis added). This forces one to ask what "peace" does the "bridge of peace" offer as the current exclusivist structures in India and Pakistan continue to ignore the wishes of the Sikh community unless it benefits them? Talks of a peace corridor to the Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur consistently surfaced for several years, yet it was "held hostage by politics" (Khalid 2017b). As long as the ongoing political tension is present and the current structures remain, they have the ability to strip Sikhs of access to Darbar Sahib once again. Unfortunately, the days of viewing Darbar Sahib from a telescope from Dera Baba Nanak, three kilometers away, may be one incident away.

5. Conclusions

Since the partition in 1947, generations of Sikhs across the globe have been praying for open access to historical sites in Pakistan. From losing access to historical sites in Pakistan to decades-long activism, the Sikh community remained resilient. While thousands of Sikhs died praying for the moment these prayers would be answered, the uncertain political dynamic between Pakistan and India continues to be a serious concern. For the two countries, the opening of the corridor was a political and/or economic move as it serves as a tool for both governments to control pilgrimage and attract tourists. Meanwhile, for the global Sikh community, this supersedes all matters of politics and economics as it is an opportunity for unrestricted access to some of their most historical sites. Sikhs in the diaspora have been more invested in preserving and maintaining historical Sikh sites in Pakistan than the Indian and Pakistani governments. On multiple occasions, diasporic Sikhs have opened lines of communication with both governments, but the political tensions never allowed anything to

come to fruition. Although the friendship between the cricketers-turned-politicians across the border deserves credit for officially opening the Kartarpur Corridor, friendships and agreements between the neighboring countries struggle to remain as politicians come and go. Khan's "first big opposition as the Prime Minister" came following the Kartarpur Corridor (SNS Web 2019). Maulana Fazlur Rehman, president of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) political party, accused Khan of allowing the corridor to happen while India handed over the Babri Mosque to Hindus while a leader of the Pakistan Muslims League-Nawaz and an ally of Rehman, Ahsan Iqbal, called Khan's move to allow Indians to enter without a passport a huge mistake (BR Web Desk 2019; Press Trust of India 2019c). Meanwhile, in India, Sidhu has been criticized for his relationship with Khan. A spokesperson for the current ruling political party of India, the Bharatiya Janata Party, condemned Sidhu for his remarks praising Khan, claiming it was an attempt to place Khan on a higher pedestal than India (Press Trust of India 2019a). However, the criticism for Sidhu was not limited to the opposition political party and non-Sikhs. Captain Amarinder Singh, Chief Minister of Punjab, and Charanjit Singh Channi, Punjab cabinet minister, both criticized Sidhu on his dealings with Khan and Pakistan on separate occasions (Hindustan Times Correspondent 2019; Sethi 2019). Not only are Khan and Sidhu facing criticism for their decision, but individuals from both sides have ulterior motives for the corridor. With the ongoing attack on the Indian Muslim population, whether in Kashmir or through legislation such as the Citizenship Amendment Bill, the Indian government aims to not only secure the Sikh votes but also continue to please the Sikh community with the corridor. Meanwhile, the corridor helps Pakistan boost its economy through religious tourism while potentially being able to support the Khalistan movement. Throughout the entire process, as politicians and media outlets across the border continue to criticize the other's motives, the importance of access to historical heritage sites for the Sikh community is undermined. The "bridge of peace" may be temporary as the project was completely isolated. Therefore, with the ongoing tensions and any upcoming elections, the Kartarpur Corridor continues to be held hostage by the uncertainty of politics between India and Pakistan. What we know for certain is that the threat of closing the corridor due to political tensions may always remain, but so will the drive of the global Sikh community to keep these sites intact and accessible.

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Dedication: I dedicate this article to my Nana Ji (maternal grandfather), Charan Singh "Sangatpura", the prominent Sikh leader from Hong Kong and member of the Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation mentioned in the article. He dedicated his life to the Sikh community and worked on many different causes including the yatras (pilgrimages) to Pakistan. For decades, Nana Ji did ardas for khule darshan didar. Unfortunately, like countless others, he was unable to see the ardas fulfilled. I felt it was only appropriate to preserve his story and acknowledge the numerous sevadars who worked behind the scenes for decades, paving the road for future generations. Far too often, these sevadars are excluded from the dominant narratives. Thank you to all of those sevadars.

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Remembering Guru Nanak: Articulations of Faith and Ethics by Sikh Activists in Post 9/11 America

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Abstract: This paper explores the role of activism as an inflection point for engagement with religious and cultural identity by younger generations of Sikhs in the US. The response of young Sikh activists and the effects on the community are examined in the context of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the US. The paper begins with the reflections of a Sikh activist about her personal journey learning about Sikh faith and history, and her activism and personal interests. Important themes that reflect the attitudes of contemporary Sikh activists and organizations are discussed. The effects of the post-9/11 backlash against Sikhs in the US are compared to Guru Nanak's experiences of and response to violence, strife, and injustice. The social, psychological, and spiritual benefits of service for those who provide service and care are explored in relation to Sikh philosophy, and from the point of view of contemporary cultural and historical studies of Sikh *seva* (selfless service) and humanitarianism. The paper concludes that many Sikhs, particularly those coming of age in the late 20th and early 21st century, often referred to as millennial and Generation Z, view social justice activism, humanitarianism and Sikh *seva* as central and equal to other pillars of Sikhism like worship and devotional practices.

Keywords: Sikhism; activism; humanitarianism; ethics; faith; millennials; Gen Z; civil society

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1. Introduction

The terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, commonly referred to as 9/11, sent shock waves throughout the US and the world. For Sikh Americans the attacks led to years of backlash against the community leaving many feeling vulnerable and vigilant about the future (Goodstein and Lewin 2001; SALDEF 2019; Sikh Coalition 2009; Sikh Coalition 2019). In response, the Sikh community, primarily led by younger activists, invested in institution-building, community-organizing, humanitarian work, and expanding Sikh participation in American civil and political life (Singh 2008, 2013; Singh 2003, p. 211). In addition, the Sikh practice of *seva* (selfless service) is often used interchangeably with "humanitarianism" as Sikhs increasingly engage in *seva* around the world (Murphy 2004; Nippoldt 2018). This paper seeks to explore the significance of Guru Nanak's legacy of *seva* and social justice efforts for the current generation of Sikh American activists. The first part of the paper discusses the reflections of a Sikh activist on her evolving Sikh spirituality, identity, and commitment to social justice activism. This is followed by a discussion of Guru Nanak's evolving theology within the context of social and political upheaval he witnessed. The dialectic between faith and ethical practice that Guru Nanak articulated becomes the foundation for the development of later Sikh traditions and beliefs, and in particular provides a model for Sikh American activists who tend to be part of the millennial and Generation Z cohorts. Ethical practice for many young Sikhs is viewed as an essential step towards a deeper understanding of and connection with Sikh spiritual practices and faith. In addition, contemporary Sikh activists in the US and in the global Sikh community tend to support a cosmopolitan or globalist vision, which they believe was also Guru Nanak's perspective. Finally, in a discussion of recent ethnographic studies, one on Sikh *seva* in India and the US (Nippoldt 2018), one on Sikh *seva* in the diaspora

(Murphy 2004), and another on Finnish humanitarianism (Malkki 2015), the psychological, social, political, and spiritual benefits described by study participants are explored holistically.

In order to understand the dynamics of Sikh philosophy and ethical traditions over time and space, we can look to "revitalization movements" theory of social and cultural change articulated by American anthropologist, Anthony Wallace (1956). Wallace summarized revitalization in five phases which reflected the movement from "a period of generally satisfactory adaption" to "a period individual stress," "a period of cultural distortion," "a period of revitalization" that included "cultural reformulation," and finally a "new period of generally satisfactory adaptation" (Kehoe 1989, p. 122). These five phases outline a heuristic for understanding how cultures adapt and survive through periods of stress, violence, acculturation and/or cultural genocide. Wallace proposed that while all cultures adapt and change, they often preserve much of their history and defining cultural narratives (Kehoe 1989, pp. 121–22). Furthermore, holism, the principle that all institutions of a community are interdependent, is an important feature of the theory of revitalization. Sikh Americans, responding to post 9/11 backlash, embarked on building new institutions and embraced activism, civil and political engagement, *seva* and humanitarianism (Murphy 2004, pp. 359–60). Given the retaliatory murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi on 15 September 2001 (Anwar and Jenkins 2018), the bullying of Sikh children (Sidhu and Gohil 2009, pp. 69–74; Verma 2008, p. 39), the mass shooting at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin (Yaccino et al. 2012), numerous hate crimes, and persistent discrimination Sikhs have experienced in the last 20 years (Sikh Coalition 2009, 2019), and the community's response, it is appropriate to characterize this period as one of revitalization for Sikh Americans. In addition to institution building, activism and engagement, the community has also relied on its cultural and historical memory as building blocks for the future.

The discussion below is informed by a growing body of literature on Sikh American activism and my own ongoing ethnographic research on Sikh American institution building. Research methods I have used include interviews with US based Sikh activists and institution builders, reviewing websites, social media, and public scholarship by Sikh organizations, a tabulation of Sikh organizations before and after 9/11[1], and fieldwork primarily in California that involved attending conferences and cultural events and visiting *gurdwaras* (Sikh houses of worship).

2. Reflections of a Sikh Activist Remembering "Her Guru" (Teacher or Illuminator)

The current generation of Sikh American activists, a mix of millennials and Generation Z, often express their faith and identity first and foremost through ethical practice. These Sikh American activists are not exceptional in that they share this commitment with their non-Sikh cohorts in the US (Case 2014; Parker et al. 2019). While the desire to solve the big social, economic, and planetary problems is a generally shared experience among millennials and Generation Z, their Sikh peers have an additional incentive. Their experience of 9/11 and its violent aftermath, has shaped their perception of activism as an existential requirement. In this section, my main focus is to explore how activism and other forms of service have become important means for exploring faith and identity by young Sikh activists in the US.

From the very beginning of the Sikh faith, founded by Guru Nanak in the 15th century in northwest India, ethical practice was a central tenet of Sikhism. Guru Nanak expresses this tenet in the verse, "Truth is higher than everything, but higher still is truthful living."[2]

[1] See Table S1 in the Supplementary Materials.

[2] Shri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 62, Line 11.
ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥੫॥

Sacẖahu orai sabẖ ko upar sacẖ ācẖār. ||5||
Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living. ||5||
Guru Nanak Dev.

Traditionally, Sikhs around the world have expressed faith primarily through prayer in the *gurdwara* (Sikh place of worship) or at home, and through the celebration of the important Sikh holidays like the birth anniversaries of the 10 Sikh gurus, the martyrdom of two Sikh gurus, and other significant milestones like the establishment of the *Khalsa* (Sikh baptism) tradition. However, millennial and Generation Z Sikh activists view ethical practice to be a central principle of their faith and many see it as equal to traditional forms of worship.

In 2015, a Sikh activist, R Kaur, spoke with me about her faith journey and the principles that guided her personal and professional development (Kaur 2015b).[3] Kaur's reflection on her own activism and the growing number of Sikh organizations in the US working on social and political issues is helpful for understanding how Sikh activists think about faith, ethics, and identity. When we spoke, R Kaur had graduated from college a few years earlier and had an interest in working in the areas of poverty alleviation and social justice.

While in high school, R Kaur began attending the Sunday school classes at her local *gurdwara* to learn more about Sikh history, philosophy, and Punjabi, her ancestral language. While her family regularly attended worship in their local *gurdwara*, Kaur wanted to engage more. Below she describes how her perspective was different from her parents.

> My parents didn't force a lot on me, other than go to the gurdwara and "keep your hair and understand who your gurus are and what Babaji (one of many names for God in Sikh tradition) is." I found myself always wanting to know more, so I found myself lobbying my parents to get up an hour earlier and take me to Punjabi school. I started Punjabi school when I was about 14 and really was intrigued by our history. And I think that was the first exposure that I had to a Sikh academic institution, I would say—downstairs in the Hayward gurdwara. (Kaur 2015b)

During college, Kaur became involved with a Sikh organization, Jakara Movement, which focuses on community building and programs for youth and young adults. In order to continue her education in Sikh philosophy and history, she attended conferences, workshops, and camps sponsored by Jakara Movement other Sikh organizations focused on educational programs for diasporic Sikhs. Kaur describes how these programs shaped her.

> . . . Once college started, I learned about the Jakara Movement and then went to the first conference, I think it was 2007 or so. I just fell in love with the organization and the work they were doing. I felt that their viewpoint really spoke to my thirst for understanding the intersection between being an American and a Sikh in the diaspora and because it made our history relevant to all of the social issues I would face. . . . And secondly, having a more solid peer group that was really helpful too . . . Jakara was the center of my development in terms of my Sikh identity. Other organizations I did have some exposure to, for example, I went to Sidak twice, through Sikh Research Institute, and I found their way of approaching things also very helpful in terms of foundational understanding in terms of Gurmukhi [Punjabi alphabet] and the history aspect, and also Saanjh and Safar. (Kaur 2015b)

After college, Kaur continued to volunteer with the Jakara Movement and to be inspired by the historical examples of the Sikh gurus' activism and by Sikh scripture and philosophy. In particular, she identified with the core principles of humility, compassion, and a belief in the equality of all people. These principles informed Kaur's personal and professional perspectives on contemporary movements for social justice like anti-racism, LGBTQ rights and poverty alleviation work. Visits to India with her family, during which she was deeply moved by the extreme economic and social deprivation and disparities also influenced her desire to ally with marginalized communities. All of these experiences

[3] In 2014, my research was approved by the IRB at Santa Clara University. The IRB approval requires that I follow US government guidelines for consent and confidentiality for human subject research.

led to what she describes as a deepening of " . . . my personal faith and my relationship with my guru. I did want to have a mark on the world and I did want to have a positive effect" (Kaur 2015b).

As R Kaur developed relationships with other activists, her parents expressed reservations about her involvement with new Sikh organizations. They worried about the level of her involvement, which they felt was extreme and could not relate to because they had grown up in India and in communities where one learned one's culture and language through immersion. Over time, however, Kaur's parents began to appreciate their daughter's commitment to self-education and to her community of Sikh peers and activists. R Kaur makes the important observation that her generation, growing up in the US were used to questioning the status quo, unlike her parents' generation many of whom had grown up in India where the norm was to privilege the perspectives of elders over youngsters and men over women. She summarizes what she sees as generational differences between young activists and their parents' attitudes.

> I think that it goes back to the difference in the way Sikhi is viewed and how Sikhi is used in one's life. I think what we expect from our faith today is often different from another [older] generation. Appearances are not enough. There needs to be a strong personal connection. It can't just be told to you that "this is just how we do things." If there's not a strong personal connection, then Sikhi is just not going to resonate. It is very easy to get away from Sikhi in this environment. It's not like being in India. If we can't make that personal connection with Sikhi then that needs to be facilitated. It's not something that someone can just do himself or herself. That's the role of the sangat [community or congregation] and of these alternative institutions. (Kaur 2015b)

Reflecting on her experience as a woman in the community and changing roles for women in the new Sikh organizations, Kaur describes a process that is at times progressive and substantial, and at other times more symbolic.

> In some organizations there's that intentional push to put a woman on the forefront so that they are seen and that we are challenging the way we look at leadership within organizations. One the other side it is somewhat of a quota if at all. A lot of the dialogue that happens is very specific to the male perspective, and the Sikh male identity. There are organizations that are mindful of it and there are organizations that just do what they do to make people happy, but it's not sincere. . . . I don't have an exact percentage [for Jakara Movement] but the overwhelming majority of leadership and volunteers in our organization are female and I think that's done intentionally. When we have conferences, we are trying to swing the pendulum to the other side and highlight the female experience. . . . I saw how intentional the older people [in the organization] were about setting that tone. I was kind of awestruck with how many strong women there are in our community. It's not that that's changed but it doesn't get highlighted and demonstrated and I think that is really important. (Kaur 2015b)

In other work, I suggest that the new Sikh institutions post-9/11, in particular those focused on civil rights, activism, and community building, have generated more opportunities for Sikh women to take on leadership roles and to be recognized for that work (Luthra 2017).[4] I believe this represents an important moment for shifting attitudes toward women's roles in the community. However, more research needs to be done to understand whether in the larger community an acceptance of Sikh women leaders will extend to *gurdwaras* and to what extent it will redress the particular forms of exclusion and subservience expected of many Sikh women and girls in family and community life. Other Sikh activists,

[4] See Table S1 in the Supplementary Materials for a listing of Sikh organizations and the participation of women and millenials in these organizations. Acknowledgement: This Table was published with an earlier article in Sikh Formations, 21, June 2018, copyright Taylor & Francis, available online: http://www.tandfonline.com (accessed on 23 November 2020), doi/full/10.1080/17448727.2018.1485374.

A Kaur (Kaur 2014) and J Kaur (Kaur 2015a), agree with R Kaur's assessment that the progress being made is important but has not been achieved evenly in all segments of Sikh society.

In April 2015, in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, the Sikh organization, Jakara Movement, published an "open letter" to address the silence around the issues of sexual abuse and domestic violence within the community (Jakara Movement 2015). R Kaur felt that this was a milestone moment for the organization by shining a light on a difficult issue that has been generally ignored. The response from the Sikh community regarding the open letter was mostly positive. Kaur described how many people shared the letter on their social media platforms, and others sent messages of thanks and approval to the board of the Jakara Movement for breaking the ice on an important and relevant issue and one that reflects the Sikh gurus' respect for women. The Sikh Family Center is another Sikh organization that has raised this issue and runs an anonymous hotline and helps with referrals for domestic violence and abuse victims (Sikh Family Center).

Many in the Sikh community cite Guru Nanak's 16th century verse challenging the pervasive and long-standing belief that women are inferior to men: "So why call her bad? From her kings are born. From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all" (Shri Guru Granth Sahib 1604, p. 473, Line 9). While this verse seems to be a clear renunciation of the denigration and second-class status of women, the lived reality for many Sikh women, over the course of more than 500 years, has not led to the realization of Guru Nanak's aspiration (Jakobsh and Nesbitt 2010, pp. 19–22). Jakobsh observes that even the scriptural basis for a Sikh view of the equality of women to men is equivocal at best as is evidenced by verses in which women are depicted as obstacles to moral rectitude and to spiritual salvation (Jakobsh 2003, pp. 25–27). Purnima Dhavan describes the period after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, in which the success of Sikh battles against local Muslim and Hindu rulers led to the establishment of a Sikh landed gentry which led to upwardly mobile caste practices that further restricted the freedoms of women and eventually led to more restrictive roles and purdah for Sikh women (Dhavan 2010, pp. 60–82). Dhavan concludes that, 100 years later in the 19th century, Sikh women continued to face traditional restrictions and subservience to men (Dhavan 2010, pp. 60–82). During the colonial period the practice of female infanticide was widespread in Punjab even in the face of the British campaigns to end such practices (Malhotra 2010, pp. 83–114). In the contemporary period, Sikh girls continue to be devalued starkly as evidenced by high rates of female feticide through sex-selective abortions in North India (Khanna 2009). Nicola Mooney describes the persistence of gender inequality among diasporic Sikhs at the turn of the 21st century. She states that "Jat culture, whether rural and historical or urban, middle-class, and contemporary takes precedence over the gender-egalitarian virtues and values of *Sikhi*" (Mooney 2010, p. 180). The question of gender parity in Sikh scripture is a complex one and much of Sikh society still sees girls and women as lesser than their male counterparts. However, there are small improvements, as I have suggested above. Post 9/11 activism in the US seems to be generating opportunities for Sikh women to assert their influence and to be accepted in leadership roles in their communities, and I believe these opportunities may positively impact women's experiences in other areas of Sikh life (Luthra 2017).

In acknowledging socioeconomic disparities in the Sikh community, R Kaur talked about the Sikh community often presenting itself as a model minority, and her ambivalence about this representation (Kaur 2015b). She explains her discomfort with this characterization which implies that, "a model citizen . . . is one having an affluent job, contributing to society, having a 'full' family with both boys and girls" (Kaur 2015b). Kaur feels that the presumption of economic success and traditional family life leaves many Sikhs feeling marginalized and unaccepted because they may not have an affluent lifestyle or they may not have a conventional family life. For Sikhs who are working class, single, or married but without children, or identify as LGBTQ, trying to conform to model minority standards can be alienating.

Unease with the "model minority" mantle has been expressed by Judge and Brar in their essay, "Guru Nanak is not at the White House: An essay on the idea of Sikh-American redemption" (Judge and Brar 2017). Judge and Brar reject common refrain used by some Sikh organizations that "Sikh values are American values." They argue that the equating of Sikh values with American values is a distortion of the core principles and philosophy of the Sikh gurus; and an erasure of the original American sins, the genocide and displacement of indigenous peoples, a long and brutal legacy of slavery and continuing systematic exploitation of black and brown people (Judge and Brar 2017, pp. 147–48).

Another dilemma that the "model minority" and "Sikh American" appellations generate, especially in light of the post-9/11 backlash, is a false choice between "model minority" and "victim." In his paper, "Precarious and model minority: Sikh identities in the 'new' global politics of religion," Pal Ahluwalia explores this dilemma for Sikhs not only in the US but in the UK and globally (Ahluwalia 2019).

> In many parts of the world, Sikhs have come to be perceived as a "model" minority—so much so that some have critiqued the Sikh community for taking up positions that are perceived as assimilationist. Such critiques, however, gloss over the sense of precarity, and the litany of hardships, racial discrimination and legal battles in which Sikhs have been forced to be engaged in a post-9/11 world. . . . Hence, conceptualizing Sikh identities as precarious, vulnerable "model minorities" in a post-Brexit/Trump era allows us to explore a Sikh ethics underpinned by the universal message of SGGS Ji. This is so because such ethics have never been conceptualized as simply being "other-worldly," but rather as precisely grounded in the world that has been entrusted to us. (Ahluwalia 2019, p. 332)

Ahluwalia's analysis highlights how Sikhs around the world, and I would suggest particularly in the US, have responded to discrimination and hate crimes through political engagement and activism, allowing them to reconcile these contemporary yet contradictory realities. As mentioned above, since 9/11 Sikhs in the US have experienced a persistent and dangerous backlash expressed through workplace discrimination, racial profiling in airports and other government buildings, bullying of Sikh children in schools, and numerous hate crimes against Sikh persons and property and against community gurdwaras (Sidhu and Gohil 2009, pp. 59–103; Sikh Coalition 2014). Just days after the 9/11 attacks, the backlash resulted in the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi in in front of his business in Mesa, Arizona. The backlash continued unabated for years, culminating in a mass shooting at the Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in 2012 (Singh 2013). Ultimately, seven people including the shooter died, and three were injured. That the shooter, Wade Michael Page, identified as a white supremacist made the attack even more sinister and troubling to a community that had lived in relative harmony with their non-Sikh neighbors (Michaelis and Kaleka 2018).

The dark reality of the post-9/11 backlash led many Sikhs to identify as victims, an image that was at times difficult to reconcile with the image of a model minority embraced by many in the community. In the years following, Sikh activists, organizations, gurdwaras, and citizens spent a great deal of time and money defending themselves against prejudice and threats of violence (Jakobsh 2017; Luthra 2017; Singh 2008; Verma 2008). One common response was to engage in outreach and education about Sikh history and culture directed at the general public, local and national governments, law enforcement, and the media (Murphy 2004, pp. 358–60). However, the Sikh ethos of *Chardi Kala* (rising optimism) has been referenced by Sikhs as they reconcile their resilience with their victimization. Out of this very difficult time, a new image of the community has emerged. Today Sikh communities and institutions are being recognized in the US and around the world for their *seva,* humanitarian work, and for their commitment to fighting for social justice for all people (Murphy 2004, pp. 348–57). Recently the organizations United Sikhs and

Khalsa Aid USA are examples of growing momentum and support for the area of Sikh humanitarianism (Krishna 2020; Lee 2020).[5]

While Sikh civil society in the US continues to expand and become more representative of the diverse needs and priorities within the community, there are still limitations and challenges for Sikh organizations and communities. R Kaur spoke, for example, of the need for more collaboration between Sikh organizations and for better coordination and communication with gurdwaras around the country. She describes the kinds of challenges she and some of her peers have observed:

> Well, it depends, on the type of community or what area it is. Those who haven't seen organizations like Jakara might be really welcoming, while others have a kind of burn out and they see this [outside organizations] all the time and they think it's just another group. . . . When we talk about other Sikh organizations that are not gurdwara focused, I think there is a lot of mutual desire for collaboration, and we have had those types of events happening more in recent years. I think that as the organizations grow what's going to matter is whether you stay aligned with the core of our beliefs and Sikhi. But that will always come back to the gurdwara because that is the central place where our community does gather. And the goal is to serve the community. I see it as an ecosystem that will feed each other. Right now, I do see an imbalance. (Kaur 2015b)

3. Contextualizing R Kaur's Personal and Activist Journey

R Kaur's interview explores a number of themes that reflect the ethos of many contemporary Sikh activists in the US. The first theme is a spiritual coming of age narrative that explores what it means to identify as a Sikh in the diaspora. As Kaur states above, "it's not like being in India, you have to make an effort to learn [Sikh history and philosophy]" (Kaur 2015b). Another theme is the desire to integrate faith and worship with a call to action for social justice and to continue the legacy of the Sikh gurus. Kaur describes being drawn to the Jakara Movement's awareness of Sikh history and traditional organizational models like *misls* (chapters) to support the needs of the communities they serve.[6] Kaur and her cohort of Sikh activists see their work as remembering their history and the Gurus' institutions as they design and build their own community-based programs and nurture alliances with activists of diverse backgrounds in the US. Fighting for equality, for Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike, is both a strategic and moral decision.

R Kaur's narrative also offers a window into how many diasporic Sikhs learn and connect with *Gurbani* (the Guru's words) and the Guru Granth Sahib, the primary Sikh scripture viewed as a living Guru. This learning occurs in various settings like Khalsa/Punjabi school programs offered by many community *gurdwaras*. These schools offer classes in Gurmukhi (the Punjabi alphabet), Punjabi language, and Sikh history. Other ways of learning about Sikh beliefs include participating in *seva* both in the *gurdwara* and in the wider non-Sikh community; attending Sikh camps and conferences; online forums and websites dedicated to Sikh history, philosophy, language, and sociocultural issues; and finally, for many like R Kaur, visits to India and to directly experience Sikh history and culture. Each of these contexts elicits a distinct mode of learning—liturgical, participatory, and experiential. In addition, the overlaying of context, content, and experience generates an intuitive and holistic understanding and a visceral or emotional experience of *Sikhi* (Sikhism) as philosophy, faith, ethics, and culture. In her reflection above, Kaur is particularly passionate about the need to nurture a "personal connection to Sikhi," without which she feels diasporic Sikhs will "get away from Sikhi" (Kaur 2015b). Kaur values the integration of faith, ethics, and activism within Sikh organizations, and emphasizes how

[5] For more information on the work of United Sikhs see https://unitedsikhs.org/ (accessed on 23 November 2020) and for Khalsa Aid USA, see https://www.khalsaaid.org/donate-usa (accessed on 23 November 2020).

[6] https://m.facebook.com/jakaramovement/posts/10154744457573990:0 (accessed on 23 November 2020).

important her experiences with Jakara Movement and activism in general were in shaping "my personal faith and my relationship with my Guru" (Kaur 2015b).

R Kaur and other Sikh activists, working for civil rights, community building, and various other social justice causes, see themselves as "connecting" with what they see as Guru Nanak's original project. They see their work as coming from the heart of Sikhism, what GS Sahota describes as Guru Nanak's "rational civil theology" (Sahota 2011). Citing J.P.S. Uberoi, Sahota points to the egalitarian ideal within Guru Nanak's vision:

> For Uberoi, Sikhism "set out to annihilate the categorical partitions, intellectual, and social, of the 'medieval world' by rejecting 'the opposition of the common citizen or householder versus the renouncer, and of the ruler versus these two, refusing to acknowledge them as separate and distinct modes of existence." (Sahota 2011, p. 135)

Guru Nanak's ethos challenges the status quo in order to articulate a theology based on the truth of the oneness of existence; and the "annihilation" of religious orthodoxy described above, is driven by the need to make room for something new, what Sahota describes as " . . . the coordinates of an ethics based in reason, virtue, justice, civility, truthful relations with the other as the one and the whole" (Sahota 2011, p. 136). Sahota goes on to elaborate how intertwined Guru Nanak's spiritual awakening was with his worldly practices:

> For Guru Nanak, the illusion of a fundamental separation between the self and the other, between the subject and the object, had to be dispelled *in experience and through practice, and not merely in thought*. The focus was on cultivating collective norms and inculcating a mindfulness of the whole. (Sahota 2011, p. 138). . . . It is perhaps no surprise then to see that the daily routines in the commune Guru Nanak established in Kartarpur in 1526 emphasized in their totality a negation of this core illusion of civil society. Collective sociality rather individuality is expressed at every level, suggesting that the ultimate negation of the source of evil—ego—can only be the actualization of practices that fundamentally undo it. (Sahota 2011, p. 139, emphasis added)

While the popular imagery of Guru Nanak is that of the wandering sage, Sahota highlights the Guru as an activist critically engaged with the dominant religious and socioeconomic institutions of his time. The Guru's commitment to standing up to injustices especially when perpetuated by the powerful against the powerless is shown to be central to his mission and was furthered by his efforts to build alternative social and ethical practices. The characterization of Guru Nanak's theology as rooted in "rational" and "civil" is attractive for many young Sikhs for whom projecting a modern and progressive image with which they can relate and is also particularly useful in the diaspora. Grewal in a paper on Sikh women asylees in the US also notes the desire of Sikh leaders to project an image of Sikhs as modern (Grewal 2010, p. 290). Sikhs in the diaspora for whom the experience of feeling like a perpetual outsider act pragmatically to appeal to the values of their adopted homes. Dusenbery describes the need of diasporic groups to curate their image and behavior in order to feel comfortable and accepted:

> . . . Sikhs in all locales have had to come to terms with what it means to be a Sikh at large in the face of alternate and changing modernities. In fact, many of my more thoughtful and articulate Sikh friends and informants over the years have been well aware of being engaged in a process of making Sikh subjects who can thrive in new and varied social settings without ceasing to be Sikhs. (Dusenbery 2008, p. 5)

There are however some real historical parallels between Sikh activists of the millennial and Generation Z cohorts and similar experiences and motivations of Guru Nanak and the early Sikhs. Both were deeply concerned with injustice and inequities in their respective societies. Both are also increasingly embraced a universal and humanitarian worldview that challenged parochial divisions. As R Kaur's reflections above suggest, many Sikh

activists aspire to these ideals and seek to apply them in their work as institution builders, and in their personal faith journeys.

Pashaura Singh explores a different but equally formative experience in Guru Nanak's life, that of Babur's invasions of Punjab in 1526 (Singh 2020). In his paper "Speaking Truth to Power: Exploring Guru Nanak's *Babur-Vani* in Light of *Baburnama*," Singh says that Guru Nanak understood the need for both spiritual-political praxis (2020, p. 12). Shaken by the violence he witnessed, Guru Nanak lamented the cruelty and destruction unfolding around him (Singh 2020, p. 16). In another vein, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh describes the impact of Babur's invasion on Guru Nanak's understanding of the effect on Punjab's women, in particular.

> Baburvani questions patriarchal institutions. The historical attack heightens Guru Nanak's consciousness, and practices like purdah and sati along with the convictions that undergird them, force themselves upon his attention. (Singh 2016, p. 17)

Equally important was the effect on the early Sikh community at Kartarpur, which led to the establishment of new social spaces and practices that could undo the prevailing religious and social conventions and plant the seeds for a realization of unity at the center of Sikh theology. After the violence unleashed by Babur, according to Pashaura Singh, Kartarpur became even more important as a model for a devotional and loving community (Singh 2020, p. 16). Equally significant was that Kartarpur was the site of the first *Guru Ka Langar* (community kitchen) in which the hierarchies of wealth, caste, and gender were discarded, and in which all, regardless of sect or religion, were welcome. The institution of *Guru Ka Langar* was significant in that it rejected the prevailing concepts of ritual pollution and purity which required the strict segregation of low caste from high caste and women from men. However, as Jakobsh observes, the progress was not complete because Guru Nanak's critique of the social order was primarily focused on spiritual equality and not social equality which was evidenced by the persistence of second-class status for women in society (Jakobsh 2003, pp. 25–26). What began with the first Guru continued to develop and it was during the tenure of the Guru Amar Das, "that both scriptural and popular sources attribute a shift towards the inclusion of women in the Sikh panth" (Jakobsh 2003, p. 29). That successor Gurus continued reforms, reflects an "openness" in early Sikh society:

> Early Sikhism was not a fully formed doctrine or fixed articles of faith so much as *an openness to the course of historical movement itself, to the natural evolution of democratic customs,* and the continuous reconceptualization of the mind and the spirit according to the circumstances at hand and . . . illuminated by providential wisdom. (Sahota 2011, p. 136, emphasis added)

What the scholarship above tells us about Guru Nanak—his experiences and analysis of historical events and their impact on society—has important significance for many Sikhs today, and in particular with those in the US. As in Guru Nanak's experience of Babur's invasion, the most recent wave of Sikh American activism was also spurred by an apocalyptic moment. The 9/11 attacks left all Americans including Sikhs feeling dazed and confused by the fury of that day. For Sikhs, and other minorities, the attacks were just the beginning of an era of more fury and violence that spurred a call to action and a revitalization movement for the Sikh community. Ultimately R Kaur's reflection illustrates that her identification with "her Guru" is simultaneously personal and collective.

Contemporary Sikh American activists like R Kaur find succor in remembering Guru Nanak's life. The memory of the Guru is forged not only through historical sources, but also in attending classes in *gurdwaras*, participating in community traditions, and studying Sikh scripture. Equally important but at times not fully articulated, are the bicultural experiences of growing up as a Sikh in America: celebrating American holidays, studying American history, and participating in rites of passage and rites of solidarity like graduations, proms, concerts, and sporting events.

4. Seva (Selfless Service) in Contemporary Sikh Culture and Identity

The traditions of Kartarpur—humility, humanism, equity, and *seva*—have been revitalized, as many Sikhs around the world are embracing these principles with renewed vigor. In her review of various types of *seva*, Murphy identifies the following types of *seva: Kar seva* which has primarily been the work of building and maintaining sacred sites; traditional *Langar seva* or the community kitchens which are a feature of all Sikh *gurdwaras*; philanthropy as *seva* that provides charitable services for those in need; and finally, a renewed interest in activism as *seva* (Murphy 2004, pp. 348–36). With regard to the latter, Murphy describes Sikh diasporic *seva* at the turn of the 21st century as redefining the meaning of "the political":

> Seva as both concept and action therefore takes complex and inter-related forms. Its relationship to political action is similarly complex . . . many of those interviewed for this article emphasized the apolitical nature of their work, as an alternative to militant political action aimed at the establishment of a sovereign and independent state [Khalistan} . . . (Murphy 2004, p. 362)

It is important to note that there have been some differences between the work of Sikh humanitarian organizations and Sikh philanthropists. According to Dusenbery, Sikh philanthropy has primarily been driven by wealthy Sikhs living in the diaspora with the goals of promoting modernization and development in their native Punjab, and often by giving directly to their natal villages (Dusenbery 2008, pp. 150–54). Dusenbery also notes the contribution of diasporic philanthropy to supporting a budding civil society sector in the state (Dusenbery 2008, p. 155). Finally, Sikhs engaging in *seva* in the 21st century are increasingly articulating a cosmopolitan point of view and often see *seva* as humanitarian work. The difference between the views of *seva* as humanitarianism and Sikh philanthropy has been that the latter tended to focus on Punjab and the Sikh community, while the former seeks to "Recognize the Human Race as One" (the slogan of the organization, United Sikhs). Finally, Murphy emphasizes that all of these expressions of seva, modern and traditional, are predicated on the principle of "*niskham*—done without benefit to the one performing the act" (Murphy 2004, p. 344). The *nishkam* principle does in fact have one benefit for the sevadar, that is the experience of what Sahota describes as "the ultimate negation of the source of evil—ego" (Sahota 2011, p. 139).

In a 2018 paper, "Transformed through Seva: Personal and Community Experiences of the Sikh Service," Lauren Nippoldt explores, through her ethnographic fieldwork in India and the US, the meaning and impact of *seva* on *Sikh sevadars*.

> By engaging in seva for the marginalized and for the communities who have harmed their own in the past, Sikhs may be able to shed experiences of trauma and conflict. In this transformative shedding through the practice of seva, a newly healed subject comes into being. The social bonds and new relationships that arise through acts of care and service also foster intercommunity harmony between Sikh sevadars and the communities they serve. (9)

Nippoldt notes that, while *seva* has been part of other religious traditions in India, in the Sikh faith it is "an essential part of religious life" (Nippoldt 2018, p. 1). She notes evolutionary models of care practices often described as "prosocial behaviors" that have been present since the earliest human societies and are seen as central to the evolutionary success of humans as a species. In general, among humans, prosocial behaviors primarily involve members of "in-groups" (Nippoldt 2018, p. 2). However, the Sikh tradition of *seva* more often than not involves inter-community service, that in addition to providing care also seeks to subvert social taboos like crossing the "boundaries of caste, class, ethnicity, and religion" (Nippoldt 2018, p. 2). This distinction suggests that the inter-community nature of Sikh *seva* often goes beyond being a care practice to being much more including a form of humanitarianism, activism, and resistance of the subjugation of subaltern groups.

Another important finding in Nippoldt's research is that there are multiple benefits for *sevadars* (practitioners of seva) as individuals and as a community. These benefits

described to Nippoldt by her interlocutors include a sense of peace and fulfillment, a sense of religious duty, a way to find satisfaction outside of consumer culture, a renewed pride in one's Sikh identity, and the perception of a renewed respect for the Sikh community overall.

The idea that *seva* acts as an antidote to the consumerist lifestyle is particularly interesting because it reflects Guru Nanak's critique of the preoccupation with money and wealth in the "early modern mercantile society" in which he was born (Sahota 2011, p. 132). It is also important to note that the Sikh practice of *seva* or "selfless service" is ideally offered in a calm and humble manner, or as a prayer. *Seva* also embodies the Sikh exhortation to value all humans and all of creation, as expressed in the last verse of the Sikh daily prayer, the Ardas: "Nanak Naam Chardi Kala, Tere Bhane Sarbat Ka Bhalla", which translates as "Oh Nanak, in the Name [of the Divine] one finds uplifting optimism, and with the Divine's will all of creation may flourish."[7]

In spite of the perceived benefits of *seva,* Nippoldt's interlocutors also describe the critique and disapproval they sometimes face from family and friends who see the work as low-status and even potentially dangerous. Finally, Nippoldt notes that there is a generational difference between millennials and Generation Z Sikhs who engage in seva compared to their elders. One difference is that the younger generations often engage in seva outside of the traditional gurdwara programs and settings. Another is their focus and commitment to addressing the needs of marginalized groups and promoting social justice in the wider society. These findings support a holistic view of *seva* within Sikh tradition and practice. Nippoldt's research suggests her interlocutors view Sikh *seva* as akin to humanitarianism because both traditions ultimately share the ideal of serving all of humanity without prejudice.

5. Humanitarianism from a Holistic Perspective

In her book, *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism,* Liisa Malkki explores the positive effects and benefits of humanitarian service on those who give aid and provide care. Based on ethnographic research with Finnish humanitarian professionals and volunteers, Malkki finds that many professionals and volunteers feel their humanitarian work generates a feeling of being more connected to the "world outside," an effect she describes as "relations of self to self" (Malkki 2015, p. 3). Her interlocutors describe social and emotional isolation, which is particularly acute among many elderly people in Finland, as a motivating factor for participating in humanitarian work that offers a "human connection (even if precarious) and helps them to feel like real persons" (Malkki 2015, p. 4).

Malkki seeks to recalibrate the archetype of the heroic aid worker as having both, "impressive strength and good sense, but also for many an undeniable *neediness*" (Malkki 2015, pp. 2–3). These humanitarians often reap benefits from their work, and although internationalists in intent, they bring with them unique personal histories and situated cultural lenses.

> The case I studied, at least, suggests that it is not as generic "global citizens", "worldly nomads", or "cosmopolitans" but as specific social persons with home-grown needs, vulnerabilities, desires, and multiple professional responsibilities that people sought to be part of the something greater than themselves, to help, to be actors in the lively world. . . . This sense of the domestic sheds light on how the conduct of the aid workers "out there" reflects their specific culture regions and social contexts—and the way that aid work abroad presents for some a line of escape from the familiar, and sparks urges to self-transformation. (Malkki 2015, p. 4)

[7] I want to acknowledge Ms. Jessi Kaur of Cupertino, CA for helping me with this translation.

As suggested above, a re-examination of social context and the "needs" and "desires" produced therein, should be applied to understanding Sikh American activism and *seva*. At the beginning of this paper, I alluded to the events of 9/11 and the violent and prolonged backlash that followed were critical in spurring Sikh American activism and humanitarianism. It is difficult to know if young Sikhs would have been as engaged in civil and political society if 9/11 had not happened. But studies of millennial generation attitudes in the US suggest that they generally are more engaged in activism than older generations (Case 2014; Parker et al. 2019). As Nippoldt's study shows, renewed engagement with seva by Sikhs in India was driven by multiple factors, and therefore it is possible that the same commitment to activism and seva could have developed in the US even without the trauma of 9/11. One thing is fairly certain that Sikhs today are more interconnected through the digital technologies than ever before and this has led to sharing of experiences and values that are no longer limited by physical distance. At the same time, the forms of civil and political engagement by Sikhs will necessarily continue to be shaped by the specific social and political systems in which they are living (Dusenbery 2008, p. 5). Given the longevity of *seva* stretching back more than 500 years to the time of the first Guru, it is safe to say that the Sikh imperative to serve humanity will continue to be practiced and to remain the foundation of Sikh identity and spirituality.

Finally, Malkki offers a definition of ethics that is dynamic and multidimensional, "ethics can be thought of as an imaginative practice and imagination as an ethical practice" (Malkki 2015, p. 14). It is precisely this interplay of imagination and ethics that reflects what Sikh activists like R Kaur are hoping to achieve—that is, the rebuilding of an ethical practice and an inclusive community by revitalizing Guru Nanak's experiment in Kartarpur within the contemporary realities of globalization and in relation to the diversity and multiculturalism that diasporic Sikhs inhabit.

6. Conclusions

This paper makes the case that contemporary Sikh American activists find meaning and motivation through the ethical practices and social justice traditions embraced by Guru Nanak and carried on by his successor Gurus, while also revitalizing that vision to reflect the needs of their time. This generation, coming of age at the turn of the 21st century, is increasingly expressing their faith through activism . . . , civic and political engagement, and *seva* and humanitarian work. In the crucible of 9/11, they have mobilized to establish a new generation of Sikh organizations, and to expand civil society participation (Luthra 2018). In everyday acts, like serving meals to those in need, organizing for civil rights, lobbying governments, marching and speaking out against bigotry and hate, and working to build a more just and equitable society, they seek an alchemy of imagination and ethical practice at the heart of Guru Nanak's faith.

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Article

Narratives in Action: Modelling the Types and Drivers of Sikh Activism in Diaspora

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Abstract: Using data gathered for an investigation of "Sikh radicalisation in Britain", in this article I develop a typology of different types of activism among Sikhs in diaspora based on an analysis of historic and contemporary media sources (newspapers, radio, television, online), academic literature, ethnographic fieldwork and a series of semi-structured interviews with self-identifying Sikh activists. I assess the reasons behind a variety of different incidents involving Sikh activists, how Sikh activists view the drivers of their activism and to what extent this activism can be regarded as being "religiously motivated". I critique existing typologies of "religious activism" by developing a typology of Sikh activism which challenges the distinction often made between "religious" and "political" action. I argue that "religiously motivated actions" must be understood in conjunction with narratives, incidents and issues specific to particular religious traditions and that generic motivations for these actions cannot be applied across all religious traditions.

Keywords: Sikh; diaspora; activism; radicalism; Sikhism

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen regular media reports about the activities of Sikhs in diaspora, ranging from concerns about "Sikh radicalisation" (Singh 2015b) and "Sikh extremism", particularly in Britain and Canada (Majumdar 2018), to the role played by Sikh aid organisations around the world (Dalton 2020). Using data gathered for a research project examining "Sikh radicalisation in Britain" (Singh 2017),[1] in this article I develop a typology of different types of activism among Sikhs in diaspora[2] by examining the incidents, narratives and issues which drive Sikhs to participate in this activism. I use the term "activism" with reference to the work of Moskalenko and McCauley (2009, p. 240), who distinguish between radicalism, which indicates a "readiness to engage in illegal and violent political action", and activism, which is a "readiness to engage in legal and non-violent political action".

Data were gathered from historic and contemporary media sources (newspapers, radio, television)[3] , online media sources (social media, internet discussion forums), the academic literature, ethnographic

[1] This article further develops my analysis of the types and drivers of Sikh activism in Diaspora as contained in my 2017 CREST research report (Singh 2017).

[2] I am avoiding using the umbrella term 'Sikh diaspora' following Dusenbery (1995), who argues that there is a danger that this term treats Sikhs as a homogeneous group. Instead, I will refer to "Sikhs in diaspora" and "Sikh activism in diaspora" following Grossman, who argues that characteristics of members of a diaspora are that they are "outside the homeland due to dispersal or immigration. Group identity is among the things that render them a community. Their homeland orientation involves transnational exchange" (Grossman 2019, p. 1269).

[3] This analysis examined English language historical and contemporary newspapers, television reports and radio programmes. Television programmes were located using Box of Broadcasts (https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand), the ITN archive (http://www.itnsource.com/en/) and online video hosting websites. Similarly, radio programmes were located through Box of Broadcasts, BBC iPlayer and online searches. For all of the media analysis listed above, the following search terms were used to find data and examples of relevant incidents, Sikh extremist(s), Sikh extremism, Sikh fanatic(s), Sikh fanaticism, Sikh radical(s), Sikh radicalism, Sikh radicalisation, Sikh fundamentalist(s), Sikh fundamentalism, Sikh terrorist(s), Sikh

field visits and a series of semi-structured interviews with self-identifying Sikh activists. Media evidence was gathered from English language open source materials using bibliographical and electronic searches. In total, 20 interviews were conducted with a range of respondents who were selected due to their currently being or having previously been involved in (a) the management of Sikh organisations or gurdwaras and/or (b) incidents reported in mainstream media involving Sikhs and/or (c) organizing, promoting and participating in events and protests relating to Sikh issues. Respondents were recruited via social media or email based on their involvement in Sikh activism. In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, which was a condition of their participation, interviewees will be referred to as Respondent 1, Respondent 2, etc., with no details of their location or role in the Sikh community being disclosed. As the protection of the respondents is paramount, the only quotations used will be those from which there is no risk of identifying respondents. In addition, although field visits were made to gurdwaras and events, these will not be named in order to maintain anonymity. Any events and incidents named are readily available in the public domain.

Religiously Motivated Action

To date, scholars have examined "religiously-motivated action" from a variety of different standpoints including through studies of "religious activism", "faith-based activism" and "religious terrorism", although it is important to recognise that the meaning of these terms varies by context. Although Smilde (1998, p. 290) defines "religiously-motivated action" as "secular action that is inspired by religious beliefs", the linking of actions with specifically "religious" motivations has been challenged by some, including by Gunning and Jackson (2011), who argue, for example, that although "religious terrorism" is often shorthand for "violence perpetrated in the name of religion by religiously motivated militants" (Gunning and Jackson 2011, p. 369), this is based on a particular historical understanding of "religion", which assumes that religion is "clearly definable and distinguishable from the secular and political realms" (Gunning and Jackson 2011, p. 374). In summary, scholarly examinations of "religiously-motivated actions" make clear distinctions between "religious" and "secular" motivations, and highlight several possible characteristics of "religiously-motivated actions", including:

(a) A focus on "transcendent, utopian or religious goals" (Gunning and Jackson 2011, p. 371) with causes aligned "with the ultimacy and sacredness associated with God's will" (Smith 1996, p. 9).
(b) A desire to return society to an idealised version of the past, through a set of anti-modern, anti-democratic and anti-progressive goals (Gunning and Jackson 2011, p. 371).
(c) The utilization of a type of violence which consists of "symbolic sacrificial or devotional acts inspired by God" (Gunning and Jackson 2011, p. 372).
(d) An ability to evoke "total commitment and fanaticism from their members—in contrast to the supposedly more measured attitudes of secular groups" (Gunning and Jackson 2011, p. 372).
(e) Instructions on "how people must live, how the world ought to operate . . . [through] some system of moral imperatives and values that compels the allegiance of the faithful" (Smith 1996, p. 10).
(f) A strong identification through religious "symbols, rituals, icons, narratives, songs, testimonies, and oratory . . . to lend these sacred, expressive practices to the cause of political activism" (Smith 1996, p. 11).
(g) An established support network through trained and experienced leadership, congregations, communication channels, authority structures and financial and office resources (Smith 1996, pp. 14–15).

terrorism, Sikh militant(s), Sikh militancy, Sikh separatist(s), Sikh separatism, Sikh protester(s), Sikh protests, Sikh activist(s), and Sikh activism.

(h) A shared religious identity which acts as a valuable resource for collective identity construction, providing a "basis upon which strangers can work together with relative ease in common purpose" (Smith 1996, p. 18).

To date, there has been little examination of activism among Sikhs in diaspora, beyond Takhar's (2018) exploration of social and political activism amongst British Sikhs in relation to the impact of caste legislation and revelations about Britain's involvement in the events of 1984 (Doward 2017), Mooney's (2018) study of Sikh millennial environmental activism, and Luthra's (2018) analysis of Sikh activism and institution building in the US, in response to 9/11 and the murder of seven Sikhs in a gurdwara attack by a white supremacist in Oak Creek in August 2012 (Curry et al. 2012). Although these studies highlight that narratives from the Sikh tradition play an important role, they also raise a number of questions, with Takhar observing that "there is a need for further research into the current British Sikh political activist environment in order to be able to gather and analyse why young millennial British Sikhs become involved in political activism" (Takhar 2018, p. 312). In this article, I analyse my previously gathered empirical data to explore the ideas, narratives and drivers behind Sikh activism in diaspora, examining the extent to which these drivers can be viewed as being "religious" and/or "political" in nature.

2. The Continuing Impact of 1984

As Singh and Tatla (2006, p. 127) observe, "wherever Sikhs have settled in large numbers, sooner or later one demand always comes to the fore: the right to wear a turban". Mobilisations around turban wearing among Sikhs in diaspora began in the 1960s, as Sikhs in Britain campaigned for the right to wear turbans in the workplace and on motorcycles (Singh and Tatla 2006, pp. 127–35). Mandair argues that these campaigns were regarded by the state as being "religiously-motivated", as were other campaigns including, for example, the Multani case in Canada, where the kirpan was defined primarily as a "religious symbol" (Mandair 2015, p. 135).

Activism among Sikhs in diaspora changed significantly following the storming of Harmandir Sahib by the Indian army in June 1984 (for a concise account of the leadup to these events see Mandair 2015) during Operation Blue Star. Sikhs around the world "reacted with extreme anger and sadness to the Indian army's action in the Golden Temple" (Tatla 1999, p. 113), with many viewing this event "as an act of sacrilege, a premediated brutality, a gesture of contempt, the beginning of a process to destroy Sikh traditions" (Tatla 1999, p. 92). Sikhs immediately took to the streets in Vancouver, New York, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, San Francisco, Los Angeles and in Hyde Park, London, to protest (Tatla 1999).

For Tatla, Operation Blue Star ignited support among Sikhs in diaspora for a separate Sikh state, Khalistan, as until this incident "the theme of a Sikh homeland attracted no more than a fringe audience and only the Indian state's blunder in ordering armies into the Golden Temple forced the issue into ordinary Sikhs' homes and minds" (Tatla 2012, p. 71). The authorities in Canada were clearly unprepared for the emotional impact of Operation Blue Star on Canadian Sikhs with Bob Burgoyne, who worked for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) at the time, noting how "it was our lack of understanding of Sikhs and how very emotional . . . [they were] and how this single issue is what propelled us into what was a very tumultuous year" (Brennan 2007). The emotional impact of Operation Blue Star was echoed by respondents, with Respondent 3 reflecting on the attack as being

> "a life changing moment, you know, certain triggers in your life when you look back and they still stand out, and an attack on the Sikhs' most holy shrine looked like a personal attack on Sikhs themselves"

Interviewees expressed a sense of humiliation after the attack, with Respondent 3 explaining how "it feels like the Indian government at that time wanted to teach the Sikhs a lesson". The need for Sikhs in diaspora to "do something" in response to Blue Star led many to re-engage with the Sikh tradition, with Respondent 7 remembering how "after 84 [there] was a big influx into the Sikh faith. I saw people

who were drinking in pubs one night, and then becoming Amritdhari [initiated] the next day." Four narratives around the events of Operation Blue Star emerged from the interviews:

(1) The deliberate targeting by the Indian army of innocent victims on an important commemoration anniversary.
(2) The desecration of Harmandir Sahib and other important shrines including the Akal Takht and the Sikh reference library.
(3) The deliberate humiliation of the Sikh psyche by the Indian government.
(4) A lack of awareness among non-Sikhs about the events of June 1984.

It is clear that even Sikhs with no direct familial link to the Punjab continue to be emotionally impacted by the events of June 1984, with Respondent 1 explaining how he would "always have that connection to Punjab, because our Harmandir Sahib [Golden Temple] is in our Punjab", while Respondent 18 described how "rather than Punjab as a whole, it is the historical gurdwaras that most feel like home".

Sikh outrage about Operation Blue Star led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in October 1984, which was "followed closely by violence against Sikhs in Delhi and other parts of north India on the evening of 31 October 1984 lasting through 4 November, 1984" (Devgan 2013, p. 207). Respondents highlighted how the lack of recourse for this anti-Sikh violence (Saluja 2015, p. 344) was another issue in their continuing activism, with Respondent 3 reflecting how "it's been 33 years and still no justice for all the Sikhs that lost their lives, innocent Sikhs who had nothing to do with what happened in Delhi". Indeed, despite an extensive body of academic literature and numerous reports which have examined the November 1984 violence against Sikhs, including Grewal (2007) and Mitta and Phoolka (2008), for Ahluwalia, "there remains a deep scepticism amongst Sikhs in both India and the diaspora about real justice and adequate reparations" (Ahluwalia 2010, p. 108). As a Sikh female who interviewed victims of the November 1984 violence for her undergraduate dissertation explained,

> I was only perhaps 20, 21 when I became fully aware of what had happened in 1984. It wasn't something that was discussed in my household … [and] I have to say … it shapes me personally, academically and professionally … [as] there isn't anything positive I can really say when I hear the eyewitness accounts.
>
> (BBC Asian Network 2012)

Respondent 3 highlighted how November 1984 was "very hard, very traumatic … my in-laws live in Delhi, so we were trying to contact them, and all phone lines were dead … they're memories that are, they're still in your head." The main narratives which emerged from respondents in relation to the events of November 1984 were

(1) Sikhs as the victims of state sanctioned violence.
(2) A lack of justice for these victims with perpetrators often gaining important positions in the Indian government.
(3) A lack of awareness of the events of November 1984 among non-Sikhs.
(4) The continued framing of the events of November 1984 as "riots", implying that Sikhs had an equal role in causing the violence which occurred.

The post-1984 period saw clashes between Sikhs in diaspora based on their support of, or opposition to, Khalistan. As reported in the Times of London on 20 March, 1989, "at least seven Sikhs living in Britain, all moderates opposed to the violence of the Khalistan separatist movement, have been shot in past three years, four fatally" (Sapsted 1989), including the murder of Darshan Das in 1987 (Tatla 1999, p. 135). The post-1984 period also saw Sikhs, particularly in the UK and Canada, being accused of plotting against visiting Indian state officials, especially those officials implicated as being involved

in orchestrating the anti-Sikh violence in November 1984 including Kamal Nath, Sajjan Kumar and Jagdish Tytler, all three of whom were named in the "Who are the Guilty?" report (Kothari 1984) published by the People's Union For Civil Liberties. In October 1985, four members of the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) were arrested for plotting to murder Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister at the time (Tatla 1999, p. 123). Sikh activists also protested Kamal Nath's visit to Toronto in March 2010 (Aulakh 2010) and New York in April 2010 (PTI 2010). The most recent incident against an Indian state official was the attack on General K.S. Brar in London on 30th September 2012 (CPS 2013).

As in Britain, the aftermath of 1984 saw a number of peaceful protests across Canada, while some acts of violence also occurred related to Khalistan issues, including the 1985 attack on former B.C. premier Ujjal Dosanjh (CBC n.d.) and the murder of Canadian journalist Tara Singh Hayer (Matas 2012). There were also various plots and protests against Indian state officials, including the 1986 assassination attempt on Malkiat Singh Sidhu (CBC News 2019). The bombing of Air India Flight 182 in 1985, Canada's worst mass murder to date, led to the banning of two Sikh organisations, the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) and Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), who remain on the current list of Terrorist Entities in Canada (Public Safety Canada 2019). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to examine this deplorable act, which was widely condemned by Sikhs at the time (Auerbach 1985), a wealth of analysis about the bombing is readily available in the literature.

Sikh activists have also focused on the plight of Sikh political prisoners in India, in particular those imprisoned under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) an anti-terrorism act enforced between 1985 and 1995 and more recently the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) (Singh 2019a). The scheduled execution set for 31 March, 2012, of Balwant Singh Rajoana, who openly confessed to being an accomplice in the assassination of Beant Singh, the Chief Minister of Punjab in the early 1990s, led to the emergence of a worldwide #IPledgeOrange movement, with the corresponding grassroots "Kesri Lehar" campaign maintaining a presence outside 10 Downing Street, the residence of the British Prime Minister, for six months from April 2013. Following this, high profile hunger strikes by Gurbaksh Singh and Surat Singh have sought to further raise the profile of Sikh political prisoners in India.

The shooting in October 2015 by the Punjab police of Sikhs protesting against beadbi (desecrations) of the Guru Granth Sahib (BBC News 2015a) led to a number of protests including a televised protest by Jagmeet Singh who was appearing as a guest on the live BBC "Sunday" programme (BBC News 2015b) and also to a large demonstration outside the Indian High Commission in London in the same month (Gander 2015). At the time of writing, a Scottish-born Sikh, Jagtar Singh Johal, has been held in India for over 1000 days without charge over his alleged involvement in a series of murders in 2016 and 2017 (Paterson 2020). In response, a #FreeJaggiNow campaign has been running since Johal's arrest in November 2017 and is continuing to mobilise Sikh activists in diaspora around the issue. It is clear, therefore, that the events of 1984, and concerns among Sikh activists about the treatment of Sikhs in India, continue to have an important impact, with Respondent 10 explaining how he saw his main role as an activist being to "work towards highlighting the injustices".

3. Narratives from the Sikh Tradition

Beyond 1984, various incidents have occurred involving Sikhs, relating to gurdwara governance, the contested nature of religious authority and local factional politics (Singh and Tatla 2006, p. 83). I now analyse which narratives from the Sikh tradition were most frequently cited by respondents and highlighted in the media as contributing to Sikh involvement in these incidents. It is important to state that these narratives do not drive particular types of Sikh activism in themselves, or guarantee that an individual will participate in activism, but that the highlighted narratives frequently appeared in interviews, media analyses and the literature.

3.1. Beadbi (Disrespect)

One of the most high-profile incidents involving Sikhs in Britain occurred on Saturday 18th December, 2004, in Birmingham, United Kingdom, when over 400 Sikhs protested at the Birmingham Repertory (REP) theatre against the staging of a play, Behzti, and its depiction of rape and murder in a gurdwara. In the days leading up to Saturday 18 December, Sikhs protested peacefully; however, the weekend protest turned violent leading the REP to cancel all performances of the play. Speaking about the protest during an ITN report broadcast on 19th Dec, 2004, (ITN Source 2004), Mohan Singh highlighted the importance to Sikhs of ensuring the respect of the Guru Granth Sahib and of counteracting any incidents of beadbi (disrespect):

> by setting the play inside the gurdwara it was actually not just tarnishing a person but was tarnishing the whole religion . . . we treat the holy scriptures as our living, breathing Guru . . . we never asked for it [the play] to be stopped—all we've asked is take it outside the gurdwara, set it in a community hall, put it in a park, put it in a school whatever you feel like.

Though the REP claimed that they had consulted with Sikh community leaders who had requested that the play be altered to change the setting of controversial scenes from a gurdwara to a community centre (O'Neill and Woolcock 2004), this consultation was somewhat limited in scope; as the theatre director Stuart Rogers explained, the consultation "wasn't about how would you like us to change the play because we made it clear also that we'd never change the play . . . it was about how can we work together to minimise any offense this might cause to some members of your community" (Channel 4 2005). Although media reports focused on the violence that occurred, as Gurharpal Singh notes, "these simplistic characterisations overlooked the range of responses from Sikhs themselves, some of which, incidentally, were opposed to the cancellation" (Singh 2005, p. 169).

Analyses of the Behzti affair have tended to disregard the impact of the concept of beadbi (disrespect) in the Sikh tradition. More than simply a "Holy Book", the Guru Granth Sahib is seen by Sikhs to contain the jot (light) of the 10 Gurus in a scriptural body and is respected and treated accordingly. The pages of the single continuous volume are often referred to as angs (limbs) further highlighting how many Sikhs regard the Guru Granth Sahib as a living Guru who should be treated as such. Various "Maryadas" or codes of conduct place a responsibility on Sikhs to ensure that the Guru Granth Sahib is treated respectfully. The Sikh Rehit Maryada (SRM) for example states that "No book should be installed like and at par with the Guru Granth. Worship of any idol or any ritual or activity should not be allowed to be conducted inside the gurdwara. Nor should the festival of any other faith be allowed to be celebrated inside the gurdwara." (Sikh Rehat Maryada, Chapter IV, Article V, Section e). Several recent incidents and campaigns have centred on the importance of maintaining the sanctity and respect of the Guru Granth Sahib and of counteracting any incidents of beadbi (disrespect) (e.g., Singh 2009), with examples being

1. Pages from the Guru Granth Sahib (Gurbani) being treated disrespectfully, e.g., being thrown in dustbins, being burnt or torn, being used in "inappropriate" contexts (see Goyal 2015).
2. The Guru Granth Sahib being taken to or installed in "inappropriate" locations, e.g., where meat and alcohol are served or near idols going against the Sikh Rehat Maryada (see BBC News 2006).
3. Individuals being promoted as the "living Guru" in place of the Guru Granth Sahib.

To date, there has been little examination of the impact of the narrative of beadbi in analyses of instances of Sikh activism. The strength of feeling towards the Guru Granth Sahib was regularly highlighted in interviews, with Respondent 1 stating that:

> we will die for our guru. If you're putting our guru in any disrespect, you might as well chop off our arm. We're not going to do nothing . . . you're taking a part of us. The guru's light is shining into us, and we'll do anything for the guru.

Varying notions of what is and is not "inappropriate" and "disrespectful" have led to several recent incidents and campaigns. In June 2010, the Satkaar ("respect") campaign emerged in the UK in response to the gurdwara in Grays, Essex, allowing alcohol, meat and tobacco to be served in a hall owned by and located next to the gurdwara. This led to a demonstration on 16 October, 2010, against a party due to be held in the hall. Since the incident in Grays, the Satkaar campaign has campaigned against the serving of meat and alcohol in halls owned by various gurdwaras in Britain (Satkaar 2011) following on from the earlier R4G (Respect for Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji) campaign of 2005, during which Sikhs demonstrated against the practice of taking the Guru Granth Sahib to party halls or hotels for wedding ceremonies (Booth 2005). Operation Blue Star was also regarded as an act of beadbi by many respondents, as the Harimandir Sahib Gurdwara and Guru Granth Sahib were seen to have been desecrated.

In participating in the beadbi campaigns, Respondent 8 found "elders questioning 'why are you doing this?' and I was thinking 'we're only doing what you told us to do, respect Guru Granth Sahib Ji' . . . you were telling us to do this, now we're doing it, you're telling us what we're doing is wrong." Although many respondents clearly respected the first generation of Sikh migrants for establishing gurdwaras and organisations, Respondent 8 "felt that complacency had kicked in and it was almost like shaking the system a bit . . . you can use the word "extremist" or whatever but I call it duty bound."

3.2. Diversity: Doctrinal and Factional

As per the incident in Grays, doctrinal and factional disputes have led to several incidents where Sikhs have protested at Sikh institutions. One of the main issues relates to the status of the Akal Takht, the headquarters of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandak Committee (SGPC), or "Central Gurdwara Management Committee", located inside the Harmandir Sahib complex in Amritsar. The Akal Takht is often described as the "Parliament of the Sikhs", which acts as "a forum to legislate on all issues concerning the community" (Shani 2008, p. 317). The status of the Akal Takht as the temporal throne of the Sikh tradition further explains why its destruction by the Indian Army in 1984 led many Sikhs to regard this as a challenge to Sikh sovereignty.

Having been established by the sixth Guru, the Akal Takht is important because of the status of its Jathedar (head) who is often described as the "Pope" of the Sikhs, despite the fact that the Jathedar is answerable to the SGPC and is not seen to possess the gift of infallibility (Shani 2008, p. 317). The Jathedar regularly makes pronouncements which "although not binding, have a normative status within Sikhism" (Shani 2008, p. 317). For some Sikhs, however, as the Jathedar of the Akal Takht is appointed by the SGPC which is controlled by the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), a political party (Shani 2008, p. 37), there is a risk of these edicts being overly influenced by the political status quo. Additionally, as there is no clear process through which Sikhs are made aware of new edicts or amendments to previous edicts, edicts are not respected or adhered to by all Sikhs or followed in all Sikh institutions. Nevertheless, many recent campaigns have highlighted the wish for Sikh activists to uphold edicts issued by the Akal Takht Jathedar. A Sikh female from Birmingham, who participated in the protest at the Dudley Sikh Cultural Centre in May 2011, explained that she had protested to uphold the sanctity of the Akal Takht:

> So, recently in 2006, Akal Takht actually made an order that there would be no meat, alcohol or tobacco in any gurdwara premises or any premises associated with a gurdwara . . . so on a total faith level, to step above Akal Takht Sahib is to then take yourself out of the Sikh faith because there is no higher authority than that. (BBC Asian Network 2011)

Given the variety of models of gurdwara management (Singh 2014), not all gurdwaras necessarily follow Akal Takht edicts. This often brings them into conflict with Sikhs who regard Akal Takht edicts as binding for all Sikhs, leading to incidents such as the Dudley protest above. Although many Sikhs do regard the Akal Takht as the supreme temporal authority for Sikhs, others may instead regard a Sant ("charismatic individual") or a leader of a jathabandi ("ideological group") as their main

authority and may, therefore, not be concerned about Akal Takht edicts at all (Singh 2014). Linked to the Akal Takht is the Sikh Rahit Maryada (SRM), a document described as "the Official Sikh Code of Conduct and Conventions" was published by the SGPC in 1950. A poster published by the "Karaj Campaign", a group of Sikh activists campaigning against interfaith Anand Karaj ceremonies in gurdwaras, highlights how Sikh activists often reference the Sikh literature to support their claims:[4]

> "The Sikh Rehat Maryada Article XVIII clause k states that . . . persons professing faiths other than the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the Anand Karaj ceremony. Also at XVIII clause b . . . meaning a Sikh's daughter must be married to a Sikh. In the Sikh spirit of gender equality, it is implied that a Sikh's son must also be married to a Sikh."

> "Guru Gobind Singh Maryada 38/52: The daughter/son of a Sikh should be given in marriage to a Sikh. Give their hand in a house where God's Sikhi exists. Where the household is of a good nature, disciplined and knowledgeable."

To date, I have found evidence of five protests taking place at gurdwaras in Britain against interfaith Anand Karaj[5], although several related incidents of intimidation have also occurred.[6] Those protesting argue that the main focus was to uphold the edicts of the Akal Takht (Sawer 2015) with an ex-president of the gurdwara in Swindon, Mr. Mudhar explaining that "we are not militants, we are standing up for what was right and to uphold the law [of the Akal Takht]" (Swindon Advertiser 2012). However, commentators have observed that as protests have most often been targeted against Sikh women marrying non-Sikhs and rarely against Sikh men, protestors appear to be primarily concerned with controlling the behaviour of Sikh women (Hundal 2015; Dhaliwal 2016; Jhutti-Johal 2017).

3.3. Miri/Piri

Respondents also highlighted how their activism was driven by the concept of miri/piri through which "the role of the individual Sikh was transformed from a purely spiritual aspirant (piri) to that of a spiritual aspirant fully immersed in temporal affairs (miri/piri) . . . [through] the immersion of politics and spirituality (or rather, the resistance toward the separation of these two realms)" (Mandair 2011, p. 67). For Pashaura Singh, the concept of miri/piri "affirms that religion and politics are bound together, thereby allowing religious issues to be defended in the political arena and political activity to be conducted in accordance with the religious values of truth and social justice" (Singh 2019b, p. 296). Furthermore, Takhar found that the young British Sikh political activists she spoke to were "keen to mention that it is being Sikh which is an important contributing factor to their activities and support for campaigns for Justice" (Takhar 2018, p. 308).

The emergence of humanitarian charities, including Sikh foodbanks, where food is distributed free of charge to the homeless (Singh 2015a), can also be seen to be driven by miri/piri, and was highlighted by Respondent 6 as being driven by the importance of "getting involved in your local level, national or international level in society and community . . . the main source of us doing this is sewa and miri/piri." Respondents further highlighted how they gained inspiration from the lives of the Sikh Gurus, with Respondent 11 explaining how Sikh history included numerous examples of activism including "Guru

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[4] The leaflet is available to view on the Karaj Campaign Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/Karaj.Campaign/photos/a.1142415149109176/2198582750159072/ (accessed on 17 August 2020).

[5] The first protest occurred on 5 July, 2012, at a gurdwara in Swindon, when "protesters occupied the Kembrey Street temple and locked the gates to halt the marriage between a Sikh woman and a Christian man" (Swindon Advertiser 2012). The second protest took place in Bradford on 19 July, 2014, (Yorkshire Sikh News 2014) and received little coverage in mainstream media. The protests which took place in Southall on 11 August, 2015, (Dearden 2015) and in Birmingham on 18 August, 2015, (Fricker 2015) were widely reported in mainstream media, as was the Leamington protest which took place on 11 September, 2016, for which Sikh Youth UK claimed responsibility (Taylor 2016).

[6] These include an arson attack at the home of the president of the Ramgharia Sikh temple in Birmingham for allowing a mixed faith Anand Karaj to take place (Birmingham Post 2007) and an attack on the home of a Sikh family whose daughter was about to marry a man from a different religion (BBC News 2012).

Nanak Dev Ji standing up to the Mughal emperor Babar … [and] the Gurus … standing up to the governments of the time" (for a fuller discussion of this encounter, see Pashaura Singh 2020). Narratives from Sikh history were repeatedly emphasised as a key reason why Sikhs should challenge injustices; as Respondent 10 explained, "when you follow the history of our Sikhs throughout 300 years … they opposed the governments of the day, whether it be the Mughals, the British government or this government in India." This highlights how, through the concept of miri/piri, for many Sikh activists there is little distinction between "religious" and "political" drivers for action.

3.4. Resistance and Violence: Morchas and Martyrdom

Sikhs have a long history of mobilising around single-issue campaigns, or morchas, from the Akali morchas in the 1920s to the turban campaigns in the 1960s to various campaigns post-1984 (Singh and Tatla 2006, p. 95). Alongside these campaigns, respondents highlighted how shaheeds (martyrs) continued to inspire them, as demonstrated by Respondent 8:

> I still really do draw inspiration from Sant Jarnail Singh, even as a child, although I didn't understand what was going on, I think I was always mesmerised by his presence … I was always drawn to that and again, you look at the Shaheeds, whether of the past or the present, certainly ones that were willing to put their necks on the line and uphold what they felt was important, they'll always be inspirational, whether latter or more ancient, they're all important. But I do draw inspiration, I personally do anyway.

Although most frequently discussed in relation to Islam, Mahmood makes an important distinction between Islamic and Sikh notions of martyrdom, explaining that "though the concept of the righteous martyr (shaheed) is related to Islam, death in a holy war for Sikhs is not conceptualized as some kind of entry ticket to paradise" (Mahmood 2002, p. 32). Martyrdom in the Sikh tradition is primarily an act of resistance where "resistance to injustice is an existential stance, as something one does as a mode of worship with no other necessary aim than the fact of resistance itself" (Mahmood 2002, p. 48). Furthermore, in her discussion of the place of violence in the Sikh tradition, Mahmood (2013, p. 71) notes that "the Sikh stance of militancy evolved through the leadership of the ten gurus who originated and led the community; violence emerged as a last resort when all other means of maintaining Sikhi had failed." Similarly, in his examination of Sikh militant movements, Wallace (2011) illustrates how these movements have in general been non-violent, where "militancy" relates to having "an aggressive and passionate stand for the cause of their religion and the Gurus" (Singh 2019b, p. 296).

4. Societal and Cultural Issues

Some respondents stated that an important reason for their activism was to uphold the izzat (honour) of the Sikh community. Although honour and shame are universal terms that play a significant role in all societies, both concepts are culturally constructed and defined (Lindisfarne 1998), and act as a compelling influence on individuals' behaviour. For British South Asians, Toor (2009, p. 244) notes how

> The role of the community is paramount in affirming izzat as it provides a marker of one's status within the cultural community, which is where traditions and morality—which are, in turn, governed and determined by izzat—are continually reinforced and sustained from generation to generation.

The documentaries "A Warrior's Religion" (Amar 2012) and "Warrior Boyz" (Sangra 2008), both examining the Punjabi Sikh community in Canada, highlight how notions of izzat play out, often leading to "violent altercations in gurdwaras, instances of domestic violence and gang warfare … [which] may or may not include violent action" (Jakobsh 2014, p. 171). Regardless of their own religiosity and identity practices, respondents highlighted the importance of defending the honour of the Sikh tradition. Respondent 1 explained how, although he did not maintain long hair, a beard and turban himself, he had the right to expect those that did to uphold the tradition:

> it doesn't matter if we're mona [have a haircut] or anything, we will punish a guy with a turban because . . . he belongs to the guru. You can judge me, I could be in the pub the next day, but I've not become a Khalsa [taken initiation] . . . it's all about Pride and Honour and to be Defenders of the Faith.

With the attack on Harmandir Sahib in June 1984 and violence against Sikhs in November 1984, many respondents felt that the honour of the Sikh community had been tarnished, and that this was a wrong which needed to be addressed. Jakobsh (2014, p. 172) links izzat to hyper masculinity, explaining how "a commonly heard phrase used to describe powerful Punjabi Sikh males is "Sher-Punjabi" or "lions of the Punjab" with Punjabi males often encouraged to demonstrate their masculinity". For Respondent 4, "this is where the whole question of mixed marriages comes in, because mixed marriages themselves are seen as a threat to Sikh male masculinity, because the opposition to mixed marriage is always to do with a Sikh girl marrying a non-Sikh boy." Therefore, some male Sikh activists may be "performing" their masculinity in public, given the "historical representations of Sikh masculinities, in part informed through the colonial encounter, [which] have constructed a hyper-masculine, martial, Sikh warrior (often Jat) as the ideal and 'authentic' Sikh male" (Gill 2014, p. 336).

Linked to issues of honour are incidents, particularly in Britain, relating to Sikh–Muslim tensions. Sian (2011) notes that antagonism between Sikhs and Muslims in Britain is present in large sections of the Sikh community and is not exclusive to members of Sikh gangs and Sikh youth. An analysis of Sian's work in conjunction with the examination of Sikh–Muslim community relations (Moliner 2007) and issues in Britain (Singh 2010, pp. 34–38) highlights contemporary and historical reasons for tensions between the two communities in Britain:

(1) Historical accounts in the Sikh tradition highlighting instances of Sikhs challenging the threat of Mughal "tyranny" combined with stories of violence between Sikhs and Muslims during the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.
(2) Sikh narratives of settlement in Britain presenting them as a "model minority" and the "favoured sons of the empire", a status which many seek to protect by disassociating themselves from Muslims.
(3) The demographics of traditional areas of Sikh settlement changing in recent years due to new waves of immigration. For example, the "Little Punjabs" of Southall and Smethwick seeing increases in the size and settlement of Muslim communities, leading to competition over resources such as housing and education.
(4) The profile of both Muslim and Sikh communities in the UK being very young, leading to intermingling between young members of these communities in certain locales.
(5) The proselytising to Sikhs by Muslim students on University campuses.
(6) The narrative of "forced" conversions being regularly expressed among Sikhs in Britain where it is widely circulated that "predatory" Muslim males attempt to "aggressively" target and convert "vulnerable" Sikh girls into Islam.
(7) Following 9/11 and 7/7, turban-wearing Sikhs have become victims of hate crimes, as they were targeted by racists who made no distinction between Sikhs and Muslims.
(8) Some Sikhs supporting far-right organisations including the British National Party (BNP) and English Defence League (EDL).

In recent years, the narrative around Muslims targeting Sikh girls for conversion (e.g., Birmingham Mail 2007) has evolved to also focus on "grooming", with Respondent 10 explaining that "grooming's been going on for years—Sikh girls being groomed, totally overlooked and acknowledged." Respondents frequently cited a BBC "Inside Out" documentary which aired in 2013 on the issue of Sikh girls being groomed by Muslim men (Adesina 2013) as evidence of the phenomenon. Although it is beyond the scope of this report to empirically examine the truth behind these claims, the narrative of Sikh girls being groomed by Muslim men has been a key factor in some

of the recent incidents of Sikh–Muslim tensions, in particular the Mughal Darbar incident in Leicester in 2013 (BBC News 2013). Further research is required to understand why similar incidents between Sikhs and Muslims have not occurred in other parts of the world (the US and Canada, for example), although this may simply be a consequence of differences in patterns of settlement.

The interviews also highlighted differences in the types of activism undertaken by male and female activists. A female respondent highlighted that Sikh institutions and organisations remain highly patriarchal and that "the female is expected, even in today's age, to go home and look after the kids whereas the men can basically step out and do other things." Another explained that Sikh men are more likely to participate in activism as they have "more flexible and disposable time to do it in". Respondent 4 noted how organisations being run by Sikh women have emerged "due to the utter denial of the gurdwaras to address questions of gender abuse and domestic violence" with these organisations highlighting issues including honour killings, domestic violence, sexual abuse and substance abuse. Indeed, in her examination of institution building among Sikh millennials in the US, Luthra (2018, p. 286) found one particular Sikh female "often being the only woman and only millennial in committee meetings . . . [and having] to rely on her father to get access to local leaders to arrange such visits". These various exclusions have led Sikh youth to establish new spaces where "more than half of those involved in the new Sikh institutions are women" (Luthra 2018, p. 289).

5. Conclusions

In her analysis of different types of religious activism, Gregg (2016) argues that religious activists are either (i) involved in social movements which challenge social practices and government policies, (ii) fundamentalists who defends specific interpretations and practices of the faith, or (iii) apocalyptic warriors who look to hasten the apocalypse. However, like much of the scholarship on "religiously-motivated action", this analysis has been framed through Abrahamic traditions, promoting a clear separation between the religious and the secular realms as pointed out by Gunning and Jackson (2011, p. 370), who highlight how the idea of "religious terrorism" can be traced back to an article by David Rapoport (1984). In his "Fear and trembling: terrorism in three religious traditions", Rapoport (1984) analysed the use of terror in Christianity, Judaism and Islam, which then formed the basis of other scholarly work in this area including (Juergensmeyer 2003; Ranstorp 1996; Laqueur 1999 and Stern 2003). Indeed, the continuing impact of the work of Rapoport (1984) is demonstrated in the analysis of religious activism presented by Gregg (2016, p. 357).

Building on the analyses of relevant incidents and narratives highlighted by Sikh activists, I am proposing a typology of six different types of publicly visible Sikh activism. It is important to note that these are not exclusive categories and that Sikh activists may engage in one or more of these categories at any time:

1. Social Justice: involves pursuing legal channels to investigate human rights abuses and standing in solidarity with others to challenge discrimination faced by minorities, for instance, by campaigning for Sikh articles (turban, 5Ks) to be worn in schools and workplaces. For Luthra, the emergence of Sikh organisations focused on social justice in the US, including Ensaaf, Surat Initiative, and the 1984 Living History Project can be linked to "the Indian government's human rights violations against Indian Sikhs from 1984 and into the 1990s . . . [which] mobilized Sikhs in the diaspora to become politically engaged" (Luthra 2018, p. 289). Following the increase in hate crimes against Sikhs in the US post-9/11, in particular the attack at Oak Creek, Luthra observes that Sikhs are creating alliances with a variety of civil rights movements, "including LGBTQ rights, marriage equality, Black Lives Matter, and women's rights . . . [as they] saw the fight for civil rights and social justice as consistent with Sikh values" (Luthra 2018, p. 289). This social justice activism often highlights and addresses issues previously disregarded by Sikh organisations, including the tackling of domestic violence and mental health issues among Sikhs. The Sikh activism focused on the environment as highlighted by Mooney (2018) would also fall into this category.

2. Humanitarian: focuses on providing aid relief to the needy. This type of activism is most publicly prominent in diaspora in the form of Sikh charity organisations, including Khalsa Aid who provide aid relief during natural disasters (e.g., the 2016 flooding in the UK, see Pidd and Halliday 2016) and the various Sikh food initiatives which have been established in recent years (Singh 2015a) many of which provided relief during the COVID19 pandemic (Reed 2020). Respondents who participated in these initiatives highlighted how the concepts of sewa (selfless service) and langar ("community kitchen") had inspired them to do so.
3. Religious Enforcement: manifests itself in the form of protests against gurdwaras and Sikh institutions which certain activists feel are not sufficiently following the Sikh Rehat Maryada and Akal Takht edicts or which are participating in acts of beadbi. Although there have been a number of such incidents in the UK including the protests in Grays and Dudley already discussed, the most common incidents of "religious enforcement" involving Sikhs in diaspora have taken the form of protests against Sikh preachers who have either been formally excommunicated by the Akal Takht or whose views or interpretations some sections or groups disagree with. These include an attack on Amrik Singh Chandigarh in 2018 (Times of India 2018), Inder Singh Ghagga in Malaysia in 2017 (Asia Samachar 2017) and Prof Darshan Singh in Canada in 2010 (Brampton Guardian 2010). Indeed, most incidents of violence involving Sikhs have occurred against other Sikhs for doctrinal, personal or political reasons, usually targeted towards specific individuals.
4. Diaspora Nationalism: publicly articulates the need for Khalistan as a sovereign Sikh state by raising awareness about the context and continuing impact of the events of June and November 1984. There are various reasons for those participating in diaspora nationalism to publicly articulate the idea of Khalistan. For some, this is primarily an act of resistance against India in response to the events of 1984. For others, particularly Sikhs in diaspora, "diasporic nationalism" can be viewed as a meaning-making practice and a form of self-articulation (Nijhawan 2014). This type of activism is most publicly prominent in the form of the rallies, protests and events relating to the events of 1984, often organised by young Sikhs in diaspora who are "adamantly expressing their views that Khalistan is the only solution to preserving Sikh Heritage" (Takhar 2018, p. 307). For Shani, this "long-distance nationalism" (Anderson 1998) is mainly "concerned with instilling a sense of the global unity of all Sikhs through an involvement in the politics of the homeland" (Shani 2002, p. 11).
5. Community Defence: is undertaken by individuals or organisations who present themselves as 'defenders of the community' against real or perceived external threats. These threats have included Muslim conversion and grooming gangs leading to the incidents relating to Sikh–Muslim tensions highlighted above and the threat of state interference in Sikh affairs, recently demonstrated through these type of activists protesting against the presence of West Midlands Police in Sikh institutions in the UK (Bassey 2018).
6. Personal/Factional: usually focused around gaining control of gurdwaras and/or Sikh organisations and influencing direction and policy. Many of the internal Sikh incidents listed have been a consequence of these types of disputes and are most publicly visible in the form of incidents and disputes at gurdwaras (e.g., Cranmer 2017).

It is important to reiterate that the types of activism listed above are not discrete and do not always map directly to individual incidents. For instance, some participants in mixed faith Anand Karaj protests could be focusing on "religious enforcement" with the key driver being on maintaining the authenticity of the Anand Karaj (wedding) ceremony and upholding the Sikh Rehat Maryada, whereas others could be participating in "community defence" concerned with discouraging Sikhs, particularly women, from marrying out of the faith. Participants in 1984 rallies, for instance, could be participating for "social justice", seeking justice for the victims of November 1984, in "diaspora nationalism", relating to the establishment of Khalistan, in "community defence" against the Indian state due to the desecration of Harmandir Sahib in June 1984, or as a combination of some or all three of these different types of activism. Indeed, as Nijhawan (2014, p. 214) found in his study of Sikh

activists in Canada many Sikhs "resist being neatly packaged into the ideological clusters ("Khalistan supporters") and identity categories ("orthodox" versus "secular" Sikhs) that are often projected from the outside".

The categories above highlight how Sikh activists in diaspora have a number of different focuses and priorities, such that terms such as "orthodox", "conservative", "liberal", "progressive", "extremist", "radical" and "fundamentalist" lose their meaning when they are used to generalise the activities of groups of people. My research led me to engage with progressive Amritdhari Sikhs, conservative non-practicing Sikhs and with individuals from a whole range of religious, political, social and cultural positions in between. Therefore, while some Sikh activists may be motivated by "transcendent, utopian or religious goals" (Gunning and Jackson 2011, p. 371), including the need to ensure that respect of the Guru Granth Sahib is maintained, others are driven to activism in response to specific events, particularly the events of 1984. Others are driven by instructions on "how people must live, how the world ought to operate" (Smith 1996, p. 10) and may see it as their duty to police the behaviour of individual Sikhs and the narratives disseminated by Sikh preachers. In addition, there is little evidence that Sikh activists are "supported by trained and experienced leadership, ready established congregations, communication channels, authority structures and financial and office resources" (Smith 1996, pp. 14–15) and, rather, are more likely to become activists with little involvement from official structures which leads to an increased likelihood of vigilante action. Indeed, although Sikh activists may have a shared religious identity which "provides a basis upon which strangers can work together with relative ease in common purpose" (Smith 1996, p. 18), having a shared religious identity does not necessarily equate to having a shared vision, as diversity within religious traditions often leads to serious disagreements between co-religionists, leading to some of the issues highlighted above. When analysing "religiously-motivated action", therefore, it is necessary to be wary of applying models based on particular understandings of "religion" and to recognize that, while "religious narratives" play an important role, they are only one aspect of a suite of different and often equally important religious, political, social and cultural drivers of action.

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Autoethnography: A Potential Method for Sikh Theory to Praxis Research

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Abstract: The application of autoethnographic research as an investigative methodology in Sikh studies may appear relatively novel. Yet the systematic analysis in autoethnography of a person's experience through reflexivity and connecting the personal story to the social, cultural, and political life has synergy with the Sikh sense-making process. Deliberation (vichhar) of an individual's experience through the embodied wisdom of the Gurū (gurmat) connecting the lived experience to a greater knowing and awareness of the self is an established practice in Sikhi. This article explores autoethnography as a potential research method to give an academic voice to and capture the depth of the lived experiences of Sikhs: first, by articulating the main spaces of synergy of autoethnography with gurmat vichhar; second, discussing common themes such as inclusivity of disregarded voices, accessibility to knowledge creation, relational responsibility, and integrity in storytelling common to both autoethnography and gurmat vichhar. In conclusion, the autoethnographic approach has the means to illuminate nuances in understanding Sikhi that is transformative and familiar to the ancestral process of how Sikhs have made sense of themselves and the world around them.

Keywords: Sikh; autoethnography; lived experience; reflexivity; gurmat; diaspora; pandemic

1. Introduction

This essay aimed to evaluate the inherent subjective nature and flexibility of autoethnography as a potential methodology in Sikh Studies, in particular, in researching the lived experiences of Sikhs across the globe. Autoethnography is a narrative form of writing and research that is self-reflective, introspective, and "places the self within the social context" (Reed-Danahay 1997) to convey familiarity and meaning to readers by connecting the "personal to the cultural and political" (Ellis 2004, p. 37) while confronting the authority and privilege of the author. Sikhi[1], as opposed to the "colonial construct" of Sikhism the religion (Mandair 2013, p. 5), is a term used by Sikhs to describe a way of living that involves continuous learning and sense making. Sikhi uses deliberation (vichhar) of personal experience through the embodied wisdom of the Gurū (gurmat) to gain a greater knowing and awareness of the self. The foregrounding of personal experience and use of reflexivity to unveil new understanding is common in autoethnography and Sikhi and would benefit further exploration.

The catalyst for this line of thought came during a period of self-reflection beginning on 11 March 2020 following the World Health Organisation (WHO) classification of COVID-19 as a pandemic, which resulted in a nationwide lockdown (World Health Organisation 2020). The private celebration of Vaisakhi, April 2020, was a stark contrast to the vibrant mass celebrations on the 550th birth anniversary of the first Sikh master Gurū Nānak (1469–1539) held in 2019.

[1] For detailed history of Sikhi and 'Sikhism' see A Singh Mandair's work in *Sikhism: A guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Being in the midst of a pandemic has shifted everyday norms for many, including how religion is practiced in the collective and public spaces. Faith communities all over the world are limited in the ways they can congregate to celebrate, meditate, and pray (Paras 2020). The restricted access to places of worship has raised the question for many that have relied heavily on traditional institutions for worship, on what a connection to their faith and community may look like going forward (Bentzen 2020). I, like many others, had to go through a sense-making process: What is my experience of this period? How do I adapt in these unprecedented times? It prompted a review of the way in which nurturing a connection with myself and the Sikh teachings differed pre-lockdown in my home and in shared community spaces. My thoughts during this period were recorded in my journal and are shown as an extract below[2].

> *April 2020*
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> *I have varied experiences when it comes to marking Sikh festivals and events. Growing up, I remember taking the morning off school and attending the Gurduara with my dad. Later in the evening there was always lots of food of the fried variety, like hand made samosas and pakoras, (these were the days before filo pastry spring rolls). As an adult I also experienced living solo in cities where I was the only visible Sikh and with the nearest Gurduara a 3 to 4 h drive, so I guess the lockdown was not an entirely new experience. I had been working for a while on making sense of what religion and faith really meant to me. What really matters? (I feel now) is the intention or unsung force behind* ***how*** *things are done. Getting intentional is important, thoughts/words/actions, conscious or otherwise, impact at the particle level, such that an action may appear the same at the surface but can provide very different respones. Confession time: I often rush through when I recite a prayer before eating, during the lockdown I noticed I was a bit more deliberate in my prayer, there was no change in the words I used but I felt grateful and often added a spontaneous 'thank-you' prayer at the end of the meal.*
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> *So, is there a 'right' way of doing things? and if so, what makes it 'right' as opposed to a 'wrong' way of doing things? Can I map the process or create a checklist to ensure a good outcome? Is a checklist my ego's way of asserting control? Does a checklist deny and override my intuition? If yes, then how much external guidance and structure is necessary to still enable my intuition to carry forward my actions with integrity?*

Sikhi has slowly been infused into the fabric of my body home through music and Gurbani. My brick home lovingly amplifies what is created within it and my close networks have formed as an extension of that. Through my conversations with others, I recognize my privileges. I live in a safe, comfortable, spacious environment. I am able bodied and autonomous. I have the skill, ability, and time to read, research, and ponder gurbani, and play and sing gurbani kirtan. All of these have made the lockdown transition only a minor glitch in the 'matrix', where, to my five senses, everything appears the same but I *know* something has shifted in the fabric that makes up my world.

2. Background

It is on this backdrop that I examined autoethnography as a research method and its synergy with researching Sikhi from the window of lived experience, defined here as the "personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people" (Chandler and Munday 2011).

Research that uses any number of methods to make meaning of religion from its ideas, thoughts, and scripture alone often provides a partial truth as theory and praxis diverge in the communities

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[2] I have integrated meaningful or demonstrative extracts to provide rich text and imagery in this essay. They are from my journal and contribute toward a part of my doctoral research into gurbani kirtan for which I am currently using the autoethnographic method.

that use it (Harvey 2014, p. 83). In comparison, the lived experience advocates a level of impartiality toward the study of religion from practice and not simply fixed to the contents of scriptures or doctrines (McGuire 2008, p. 185).

Sikhi has a traditional sense-making process that can be traced back from the Sikh Gurū period to present times. The lived experiences of Sikhs in history are memorialized in the ardas[3], a prayer concluding the morning and evening recitations of bani, a collection of musico-poetic passages that are read or sung as a fixed prayer. The Sikh sense-making process is situated in the lived experience and involves a reflexive practice (Mandair 2013, p. 134). Similarly, in autoethnography the foregrounding of self is inherent: to understand and interpret the lived experience of others, relative to one's own position located in the culture. Our experiences unquestionably shape how we view the world yet should not be the only source upon which we construct our understanding of it. However, presenting a background on the relevant aspects of our values, privileges, and assumptions helps the reader to follow the threads of new knowledge creation (Greenbank 2003).

Autoethnographers approach their research from different orientations including performative, musical, poetic, visual, and narrative representations (Roulston 2018). It is impractical to apply the same criteria to all forms of autoethnography, thereby making it difficult to determine the rigor of the research, a fact not missed by critics of autoethnography. Developing a definitive criterion also risks recreating the foundationalism and inflexibility found in traditional positivist and empirically based research.

When undertaking research, autoethnographers have a set of shared "priorities, concerns, and ways of doing research" (Adams et al. 2015, p. 26). These design features when doing autoethnographic projects have two main spaces of synergy within Sikhi's established philosophical undertaking of gurmat vichhar. By its nature, gurmat vichhar includes a foregrounding of personal experience and use of reflexivity, which is also present in ways of doing autoethnography. In addition, there is an overlap with the relational responsibility in crafting stories and creating collaborative knowledge that is accessible to the communities researched. Finally, both exist as forms of resistance with the intent to shift power dynamics and offer a platform for disregarded voices and a transformative potential.

3. Autoethnography and Gurmat Vichhar—A Sense-Making Process

Every person operates consciously or unconsciously under an umbrella of core values and beliefs. In conjunction with genes, temperament, and environment it is the hidden influence behind every decision, behavior, and habit. Qualitative research is underpinned by reality and truth that is constructed and shaped through the interaction between people and the environment in which they live. In autoethnography "who you are has a central place in the research process, because you bring your [self] . . . to your research" (Kirkby and Kate 1989).

Autoethnography is a relatively young qualitative research method within the social sciences, which has been successfully used in exploring complex emotional and social topics including culture, space, religion, and education (Chang 2016; Adams et al. 2015; Alexander 1999; Harris 2008; Whitinui 2014). Autoethnographers utilize a personal, insider experience to demonstrate the complexities that shape their world views and by extension how they respond in different spaces and situations. Their back stories offer insights that others may use to gain a better sense of self and others. As a research method, autoethnography welcomes research that acknowledges a community's own internal method of knowing and being, regardless of whether one is formally represented in academia in the way indigenous, feminist, or postcolonial theories exist, thus making autoethnography open to a Sikhi-infused research paradigm.

For Sikhs, an indigenous mode of reasoning and thinking, central to the teachings of Sikhi, is one based upon a deep and complete awareness of the nature of Ik (One) that is not simply theorized

[3] Literal translation: petition.

but directly experienced. It is a belief system rooted in gurmat. Etymologically, *Gur* is wisdom/Gurū and *Mat* is understanding/belief, originating with Ik Oankar[4]. The One being manifest as Word and expounded through sabad, the musico-poetic texts from the Gurū Granth Sahib, a linguistic, cultural, self-contained text of embodied wisdom compiled by the Sikh Gurūs. Gurmat vichhar is the contemplation-exegesis of the lived experience through a lens of Gurbani, the *living* word, which helps to build a greater knowing, recognition, and awareness of one's true nature beyond the subjective self-identity created from the ego-mind (Mandair 2013, p. 131). As an established philosophical undertaking, it helps ordinary Sikhs reflect upon the Gurū's teaching as well as offering insight on how to apply that knowledge effectively to life.

In history the lived experiences of the Gurūs demonstrated an embodiment of *knowing* Ik Oankar that extended outwards to a *being* of Ik Oankar in the personal and the universal, in the Nirgun[5] (invisible/absolute) and Sargun[6] (visible/manifest) spaces. For Sikhs today, this sense making exists through the presence of *living* word, the Gurū Granth Sahib (GGS) (Shackle and Mandair 2005).

What is the living word? Freire (2005) labels reflection and action as the two sides of the *true word*, which constitutes the "essence of dialogue". A deficiency of either renders the word *unauthentic* and incomplete, for reflection without action cannot transform reality and action without reflection is doing without praxis and direction. In the current digital era where information is widely distributed and freely accessed, there is no shortage of knowledge or data. However, accumulation of knowledge does not equate to wisdom without the self being an active part of the equation.

The body, heart, and mind synchronicity so often missing in modern life contributes to the rising number of mental health issues (Alberti 2009). Illustrating this, Jung analysist Woodman (1993) explains: "Unless an incident is made conscious, it does not happen in the soul. It has to be thought about, written about, painted, danced, made into music . . . it must move from literal to metaphoric if it is to assimilate into the soul's flowering". Music, art, poetry, etc. are a bridge between the head and heart. The poetic nature and the intentional ascribing of a musical measure (raag) to gurbani reiterates the emphasis for an emotional personal connection and multisensory engagement to sabad and, by extension, the present moment. It is an experience situated in the human body that facilitates a process of chiseling tangible transformation with, through, and by sabad at a subconscious level.

Autoethnographers are encouraged to consider if text alone is the most effective and accessible way to disseminate their work to a non-academic audience, especially where the intent is to maximize transformation potential and induce change. Music, dance, film, and photography can be readily shared via the Internet and are equally viable media for information exchange that do not require a high level of prerequisites, equipment, or access to resources. By being intentional in the 'rituals' of research and religion and taking ownership in the way things are done, there is a real potential for the wisdom of an earlier epoch to join with the present lived experience. Gurmat vichhar is a form of introspection arising from a curiosity of everyday thoughts and interactions: the lived experience and sense making that comes from ruminating on the sabad, resulting in an active application of new knowledge and understanding in the way we live our lives.

3.1. Bridging the Lived Experience

Universities are culpable of knowledge exchange built on research that is less and less about the communities they are situated in, earning the epithet 'ivory tower' (Kristof 2014). Research funders are strong influencers in determining the topics, methods, and findings of research, which may exclude particular less influencing, socially disadvantaged stakeholders and their interests. Academic institutions focus on jumping through hoops for outdated methods of ranking, such as the Research

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[4] The phonetic symbol for the creative binding Force that exists in everything and the opening signifier of the Gurū Granth Sahib (GGS).
[5] The One in a non-existence, formless, wave potential, all pervading state that cannot be predicated.
[6] The One in manifested visible existence form that can be predicated.

Excellence Framework in the UK and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. The consequences are strategic prioritizing of research likely to have measurable short-term impact on position and rank than on innovative work with the potential for shifting paradigms and redefining fields (Sayer 2014). High competition and low pay with little to no benefits and zero hour contracts are increasingly prevalent overall, disproportionately affecting members of historically disadvantaged groups (Hansson et al. 2015), subsequently reducing social and intellectual diversity in centers of learning.

Autoethnography emerged in response to a 'crisis of representation' in the mainstream relational, cultural, and political spheres (Adams et al. 2015, p. 11). The widening accessibility enabled nontraditional students (working-class, minority-ethnic, female, mature students, etc.) to study at higher education institutions, paving a path for new possibilities of thought and research methods (indigenous, feminist, critical race theory, etc.) to be bought into the current institutions (Gilardi and Guglielmetti 2011). These theories acknowledged and incorporated subjectivity and the lived experiences of the researchers such as epiphanies and traumatic interactions as factors in constructing sociological understanding, while acknowledging that the "perceptions of the insider are often unique, sometimes complex and at times subtle of a phenomenon" (Adams et al. 2015), ultimately bridging the subjective and insider experiences to a larger, external, relational culture.

The situating of personal experience to make sense of the wider culture is consistently demonstrated and referenced in the Sikh tradition. The Gurū Granth Sahib repeatedly refers to a knowing of the Divine Light (jot saroop[7]) from an experience of being, like the mute who tastes the sweet candy but cannot speak of it[8]. Contextualizing of experience is also found in other literary works of the Sikh tradition including (Bhai[9]) Gurdas's[10] vars (ballads) and kabits (quatrains)[11], in which rhetorical devices and metaphors are used to create a type of multisensory intratextual experience for the reader. Since words alone fall short, understanding of sabad through reflection of actions is a necessary catalyst. When actions are inseparable from the creator-source, like a dancer lost in the dance, an ∞ infinity loop is formed, such that the inspiration and source of the dance (gurbani) is both inseparable and undistinguishable from the dancer (practitioner); thus, the heart, mind, and body function in unison. In this way both autoethnography and gurmat vichhar value the personal perspective of the experiential as it is situated in culture, fostering an epistemology of self from the inside moments of lived experience. In addition, they both resist conformity to 'legitimate' forms of knowledge creation fixated in a positivistic perspective (Wall 2006).

While a disconnect between religious belief enshrined in text and the actual practice of religion is well documented, for Sikhs the establishment of a community by Gurū Nānak, the first Gurū of the Sikhs, at Kartarpur was an infinity loop of theory and praxis. (Bhai) Gurdas describes the establishment of Kartarpur in his vars, as 'minting a new coin' (Maariaa sika jagati vichi naanak niramal pandu chalaaiaa, Var 1:45). Kartarpur was a communal experiment come to life, a blueprint of a village life with equal emphasis on spiritual and socio-political commitment. At a risk of overly romanticizing Kartarpur as a distant past utopia, there is evidence from the geographical location of the establishment of the Kartarpur community to support a confluence of "the urban culture of Khatris" (trader or business caste) who held positions of leadership and the "rural culture of peasantry" that made up a large proportion of the followers (Mann 2010). Although the exact social composition of the early Sikh community is difficult to confirm, there is significant evidence to suggest that it may have been at the lower end of the social-economical caste system, if part of the caste system at all (Singh 2010).

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7 The common light.
8 'Jin eh chakee sohee jahni gongae kee mithiaee' (Gurū Rām Dās, M4, Sorath 9, GGS, p. 607).
9 Literal translation: brother, also a title given to acknowledge and honor a learned Sikh.
10 Known in full as Gurdas Bhalla, renowned poet, writer, and theologian, whose work is an authoritative source for Sikh life (Gill 2017, p. 2).
11 That extol the beauties of the spiritual experience (Gill 2017, p. 3).

In the Gurū Granth Sahib, there are four sabads that form the Babar Vani, which recounts a lived experience of the invasions of Babar (1483–1530), the first Mughal emperor of India. As an eyewitness to the political reality created during these invasions, Gurū Nānak captures the ferocity of the battle and the sufferings of the people in accents of intense power and protest (Singh 2020b). In addition, the author places the events in the larger social and historical perspective, including connecting the parallel decline in moral standards and a corrupt political system (Jakobsh and Walton-Roberts 2016). Ultimately, these verses cultivate "the spirit of speaking truth to power among the Sikhs at most critical junctures" (Singh 2020b) and, like autoethnographies, are unapologetically bound to social justice aims, with the intention to make a change in themselves and their cultures through their research.

3.2. Reflexivity—"Search Your Own Heart Every Day–Do Not Wander around in Confusion[12]*"*

The concept of reflexivity is relatively familiar among the research community. In autoethnography it involves acknowledging and critiquing one's own place and privilege in society. In my parallel role as a registered health professional in the UK, I am required to submit a continuous professional development (CPD) portfolio to remain on the healthcare register. The portfolio includes written evidence based on a reflective cycle that may begin as an unplanned learning; "an event occurs that causes a learning activity to be undertaken or carried out without any prior thought or planning" (Dowdall 2018). Working from the inside out, autoethnography is similar to an *unplanned* learning activity, whereby an event or epiphany prompts a *pause and reflect* on our current understanding and beckons a second glance "inward—into our identities, thoughts, feelings and experiences—and outward—into our relationships, communities, and cultures" (Adams et al. 2015, p. 46). For the researcher, reflexivity involves critical self-reflection on the ways "social background, assumptions, positioning and behavior impact on the research process" (Finlay and Gough 2003, p. 14).

Self-reflexivity may be discursive, language dominated, where the observation unfolds through a symbolic medium like an internal dialogue or through a conversation with another. Concurrently, it can be embodied, i.e., physical sensation dominated, where the observation unfolds through a corporeal medium like meditation, music, or movement (Pagis 2009). Self-reflexivity, which is often closely linked with the discursive written or language medium, also benefits from embodied reflexivity, especially in cases where a practice of the other senses is involved, e.g., sound in music. However, even with an unconscious exclusion of other senses, there is usually some overlap. For example, if something makes you angry, you may say 'that makes my blood boil' and at the same time experience a physical response like a warm feeling or clenched fists. Being conscious of our feelings and emotions in a given moment and the parallel internal commentary helps to reveal a plethora of new insights. Like a rainbow, which is only visible when light exits a water droplet at an exact angle of 42 degrees from our line of sight, these insights are made (revealed) when the environment is conducive. Gurmat vichhar requires an active dedication to self-reflexivity, a relationship with sabad and curiosity for life. In addition, access to your tribe or sangat (congregation) helps to gain clarity, insight and understanding. The socially distant measures of lockdown have highlighted the privileges of having accessibility to such networks. To provide a (pre-lockdown) example, I share the following journal extract on my gurbani kirtan class. Gurbani kirtan is the musical and vocal performance primarily of the compositions found in the Gurū Granth Sahib. The class is a small gathering of about five students and teacher taking place in the home of one of the students.

> *January 2020*
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> *In the class every person operates from an implicit position that exists because of subtle cultural and or hierarchical dynamics, these exist between the Ustad (teacher) and students, and between fellow classmates. The class typically involves a 2 to 3 h riyaz (music practice), playing set pieces at*

[12] 'Bandhae khoj dhil har roj naa fir parsanee mahi' (Bhagat Kabir, Tilang 1, GGS, p. 727).

> *increasing complexity and tempo before ending with the practice of gurbani kirtan. Towards the end of class, I feel a change, a natural unravelling and softening to previous positions, a mist cloud envelopes all, blending the outline of each person into the mist until everything is more or less one cloud. Over a period of several classes, an ecosystem powered by and through a sacredness/respect/love for the people/environment/gurbani kirtan takes shape. Here a space is created where questions, experiences, feelings and observations are openly voiced and lived experiences, validation, stillness, or expounding of gurbani and ancestral history knowledge are readily shared/offered in response.*

Both discursive (conversation) and embodied (music) reflexivity are apparent and, in that instance, the conditions for a rainbow are met. Rainbow geometry also means that each rainbow is unique to the individual. A rainbow viewed by a person positioned on either side will arise from a different set of water droplets and, therefore, will be a different rainbow. Relational interpretation allows that different observers can give different accounts of the same series of events, depending on the information they have about the system. In this way, two observers of one event are likely to have different accounts of the event. Returning to the above reflection from my gurbani kirtan class, every person receives a *download* of information and understanding that is specific to them in a given moment because each person 'stands' in a different place, i.e., each person's DNA, lived experience, and current mental state is unique, albeit sometimes similar. Looking at it from a musical perspective, raag (melody) creates an atmosphere by evoking through its very nature a vibration built upon the vaadi (the most prominent note in the raag) and samvadi (the second most prominent note in the raag). It is a co-creation of the musician's self-expression within the boundary of the raag's framework, as is the freedom in classical Indian raag. Yet, what is heard and experienced by the listener varies as a result of the unique filter of the person's lived experience. A reflexive practice enables one to look beyond the superficial and draw out what cannot be seen on the outset to make sense of ourselves and our relationships, communities, and culture (Conquergood 1991).

3.3. Relational Responsibility

Autoethnography places the researcher's subjectivity at the center rather than attempting to limit it and, thus, by its very design, challenges standard practices of conducting and approaching research (Reed-Danahay 1997; Holt 2003). The intention is to co-create a reciprocal relationship where research is "a socially—and relationally—conscious act", which is accessible to multiple audiences, and reclaims lost and disregarded voices (Adams et al. 2015).

Relational responsibility is an awareness of the *process* of *relating*, which shifts from the individual as the central concern toward an emphasis on what we are creating in our relations with others (Reich et al. 2017). Positionality is an important factor that affects every stage of the research process. It is, therefore, crucial researchers understand their own beliefs and assumptions in order to explore the experiences of the *other* with fresh eyes (Ellis 2007; Wilson 2008, p. 54).

The early anthropological research perspective minimized individual differences to create an essentialist simplified and homogenized culture bound by observable features of custom, language, history, art, etc. (Chang 2016). Observing a culture while standing outside creates, at least theoretically, an impression of a boundary between the researcher and the researched that purports to impartiality and objectivity. However, failing to grasp basic fundamental beliefs and aspects of the community being studied or failing to acknowledge one's own unconscious bias and judgement, especially where beliefs may be in direct contrast with one's own, impacts the data collection and interpretation. This is often raised as an issue among minority communities who are studied and written about, without serious lived insights or an in-depth understanding of the cultural paradigm.

Complete objectivity is a challenge for all researchers. The dual insider/outsider expression exists in many social science disciplines. Outsiders have the advantage of working off a 'clean slate' but are prone to overlook critical nuances that impact any final submitted conclusions. While an insider may successfully navigate the social, political, and cultural landscape, they may need to be aware of any inherent biases that may impact the design, evaluation, and conclusion of the research.

As a researcher how you are perceived and thus admitted into the field being researched affects both researcher credibility and the degree of access to the field. Autoethnography views fieldwork relationships as those built upon seeking "*reciprocal responses from multiple audiences"* through mutual curiosity, responsibility, and care (Adams et al. 2015, p. 35). As co-participants in creating *reciprocal responses* the researcher's subjectivity is embraced and simultaneously held responsible by making "ourselves more personally accountable for our perspective" (Ellis and Bochner 1996, p. 15). Researchers have a responsibility to the academic community, the communities being researched, and themselves to work with integrity and care. There is no universal protocol as to what that responsibility and care is but it involves consciously protecting the confidentiality and privacy of others implied or involved in the research, while developing a connection that is not one-sided or solely built for the purpose of a research output, for example, sharing written works with participants for their comments, switching off the recording device to offer participants a space to speak freely, or creating composite narratives to sustain privacy of participants. Upon embarking on this PhD journey, the most important care and responsibility has been to myself. This statement seems self-centered (even as I type it). However, to truly care for others requires a practice of care and responsibility to self, beginning with getting clear of my intentions and motivations. The thoughts that arose during that early period were recorded in my journal and are shown as an extract below.

> *January 2018*
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> *Am I writing to be recognised, accepted and validated? If yes, by whom? my community, my academic peers or both? PAUSE. Neither, I write for me and by that simple intention I write for anyone else who is willing to be curious with me. What does that look like? A willingness to let go of everything, especially who I have told myself I am, and . . . to start listening–deep listening to the music of the spheres.*

The result of working with integrity and applying autoethnography diligently is a collaborative output that is more than the sum of its parts. Yes, an academic paper or article published in a reputable peer-reviewed journal is a measurable achievement. Yet, the deliberate act of, for example, creating space for another, seeking their permission to tell a story, being self-reflexive on who has privilege to or the right to tell that story, acknowledging that the relationship is not neutral, working consciously toward an outcome that is nonhierarchical, etc., the undocumented moments and spontaneous conversations have the ability to changes hearts and experience the interconnectedness.

In the early 16th century Gurū Nānak accompanied by (Bhai) Mardana, a Muslim rabab player, met diverse members of the Hindu, Muslim, and Nath religions during their udasis (travels) (Singh 2019). He carried the message of oneness (Ik), embarking on a journey to uncover the similarities and differences of how Ik was understood and experienced in the lives of the common person, across religious boundaries without claims of exclusivity to religious truth. Comparably, the Gurū Granth Sahib contains the compositions of six Sikh Gurūs and non-Sikh bhagats (saint-poets), not to meet diversity quotas or gain popularity through superficial displays of solidarity, rather as a recognition of Ik as the Sikh Gurū's experienced the expression of the *other* as a song echoing pluriversal values, resonating and voicing the "complexity of the truth as a heterogenous but coherent sonic form" (Bhogal 2019). Autoethnographers, through a variety of forms such as poetry, journals, short stories, and other styles of writing, attempt to inspire the reader to reflect on their own experiences and recontextualize their understanding of those experiences from an encounter with someone else's shared narrative to discover coherence in the embodiment of realization.

3.4. Inclusivity

In sociological terms, accessibility can be at the micro, meso, and macro levels. The wider the scope for disseminating one's research, the greater the benefits: sharing new knowledge, gaining feedback, establishing an academic reputation, increasing potential collaboration opportunities, etc. How we write (if writing is the chosen medium) influences who is able to connect and who is excluded.

The use of specialized, technical terminology exclusive to particular groups limits accessibility to those outside the circle, thereby restricting the impact of the work and its potential for bringing about change (Walter 2018). Over time, this imbalance risks perpetuating a narrative of them and us, or the learned and unlearned.

The Gurū Granth Sahib is written using multiple languages and dialects, with multiple contributors from a variety of socio-religious backgrounds. This clear subversion worked by flouting the strict rules of exclusion commonly observed through restricting a religious text to a religious group. The raags (musical measures) like the languages and dialects used in the Gurū Granth Sahib also cross multiple social economic lines. The use of classical raag and the Sanskrit language commonly associated with people of high class and caste status is situated alongside folk tunes more popular in the villages, placing both on the same platform, demonstrating marginalized voices of equal value.

Increasing inclusivity by taking into consideration language, history, and culture improves accessibility. Autoethnographers make an intentional and conscious effort to make their work more accessible and available further afield from academic circles, utilizing the intellectual, analytical mind and the sensory, emotional aspects of experience to offer a relatable output.

In gurbani imagery, metaphors and similes are used to evoke a multisensory response to convey that which cannot be fully captured by words alone yet may give rise to a relational understanding. Metaphors act as a transformer of the raw energy patterns into forms that can be assimilated by consciousness (Woodman 1993, p. 54). For example, gurbani describes the life force Ik Oankar as the sustenance behind all of creation, like the unconditional love of a mother for her child[13], or in (Bhai) Gurdas ji's var on the love between Sikh and Gurū, like the Chakvi's (Sheldrake, a bird belonging to the duck family) love for the sun, who feels elated in the presence of sunlight (Chakavee sooraj hayt hai mili honi soukhaalay, Var 2:17). These analogies are relatable because they include nature, well-known folk references and everyday experiences that were familiar to ordinary people of the time.

3.5. Crafting and Telling Sakhis (Stories)

> *July 2018*
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> *Storytelling is about finding my own story by connecting all the complex and messy parts of my life and still managing to value the entirety of the journey so far. Are you ready to walk with me? I'm familiar with this question. On the surface of my soul boat where the waves crash and I am called upon to sit in the uncomfortableness–I hold on to the mast, for an unwavering knowing exists that this moment too will pass.*

Successful autoethnography recognizes the symbiotic relationship between culture and people. It draws out the interconnectivity between the self and the wider social and political issues, through personal stories and narratives (Chang 2016, p. 46; Ellis 2004, p. 19). The process is one of collaboration that works with, for, and through participants to uncover meaning from the individual and collective experiences.

Storytelling is an established medium, open to multiple audiences and a familiar tradition for Sikhs. Sakhis (stories) on the lives of the Gurūs and Sikhs during and after the Gurūship period are a popular form of engagement with Sikhi and Sikh history across all ages, in both the home (private) and gurduara (public) spaces, and more recently across continents through social media (Murphy 2012). A contemporary example is the translation of the precolonial text of the Suraj Prakash. Jvala Singh, a PhD student at the University of British Columbia, summarizes chapters of the text into English for his podcast, the Suraj Podcast. The original written text is in Braj Bhasha[14] with significant use of Sanskrit words in Gurmukhi script. The translation allows the key message of the Suraj Prakash

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[13] 'Apunae Jeea Janth Prathipaarae || Jio Baarik Maathaa Sanmaarae ||' (Gurū Arjan, M5, Mājh 36, GGS, p. 105).

[14] Language descended from Shauraseni Prakrit and commonly viewed as a western dialect of Hindi and usually written in the Devanagari script (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2009).

to be shared with a wider audience who may not be learned in Braj Bhasha and Sanskrit, as well as reclaiming the stories that make up the text (Singh 2020a).

The janam-sakhis (the birth stories of Gurū Nānak) viewed as "interpretive and didactic texts" provide the reader with a specific overarching take-home message as opposed to a historical narrative (Johnson 2013). The emphasis placed in retelling these stories varies through the publisher's choice of design, color, imagery, and language and the voice and context placed by an orator. Crafting stories requires the skill to adapt writing style and good discernment as to the level of detail and depth, in particular when writing for a young audience or outsiders of the community (Khalsa 2018). In addition, when retelling popular works like the janam-sakhis it is important not to lose the spirit of the original author.

Designing autoethnographic research requires placing equal "importance on intellect/knowledge and aesthetics/artistic craft" (Adams et al. 2015, p. 25). The intention is for the key points to impact as wide an audience as possible and stimulate change. Therefore, choosing the most effective methodology and attaining proficiency in the chosen form of data collection is as important as acquiring and perfecting the skills to convey the findings in the chosen medium, e.g., writing, dance, performance, etc.

3.6. Transformative–Speaking Truth to Power

Information and knowledge from research are utilized in problem solving, decision making, and creating new understanding. The outcome and narrative of a publication are influenced by who defines and determines the focus of the research and their particular interests and problems. Autoethnography as a transformative research method acknowledges this embeddedness of self because it allows the researcher, in a tangible way, to understand and be aware of their role in creating and shaping knowledge. Transformation "requires vulnerability, fosters empathy, embodies creativity and innovation, eliminates boundaries, [and] honors subjectivity" (Custer 2014). The transformative potential in autoethnography originates from self-reflection and self-analysis on the part of the researcher, participant, and reader (Chang 2016; Chase 2018). It is not a research method for the fainthearted. It requires courage to deep dive into old, unclaimed emotions and seek clarity on the cultural and familial patterns that are the blueprint to how we see ourselves.

The Sikh model of sovereignty grows from a union between the institutions of sabad Gurū, the Gurū in the form of musical word as found in the GGS, and a doctrine of combined temporal (miri) and spiritual (piri) authority. Transformation is through the contemplation-exegesis of the lived experience through a lens of gurbani. For example, Asa Ki Var[15] (Ballad of Hope), one of 22 vars recorded in the Gurū Granth Sahib, is sung every morning in gurduaras and homes of Sikhs around the world. This is a bani, a fixed prayer, that strongly challenges the "religious hypocrisy, hegemonic structures and stereotypes prevailing in the human consciousness and the society at large" (Sikh Research Institute 2014). The bani subverts and critiques everyday common "socio-cultural ills, ritualism, and customs" facilitating reflexivity in the reader to their own beliefs and practices (The Guru Granth Sahib Project 2020).

For Sikhs, a spiritual faith practice and social political involvement are not mutually exclusive. Speaking truth to power and allying with the powerless is a cornerstone of Sikhi. Examples commonly conveyed between generations through the medium of storytelling include the ninth Sikh Gurū's stance against the state's policy of denying Kashmiri brahmins their right to practice their religion and (Bhai) Kanhaiya serving water indiscriminately to the wounded soldiers from both sides in the battle of Anandpur Sahib in 1704.

More recently, following migration and settlement to diverse conditions outside Punjab, Sikhs have sustained and adapted their faith within new environments, meeting the challenges of assimilation by advocating and raising awareness of Sikh issues and rights in the wider society. Examples include

[15] Also referred to as Asa Di Var.

removing restrictions on wearing the turban in the work environment and exemption from wearing protective headgear while riding motorbikes or bicycles (Spennemann 2020).

Yet to sustain such a noble endeavor requires constant wakefulness and dedication. A practice of reflexivity to account for our own influence, privilege, and relationship to power relative to the *other* is as important as critiquing the wider cultural norms, experiences, and practices, both as a researcher and as a Sikh. Issues include gender preference as witnessed in the practice of sex-selective abortions, colorism, casteism when seeking a partner, or blinkeredness when it comes to standing with and alongside survivors of sexual abuse and communities that suffer from structural racism.

4. Final Thoughts

Professor Puran Singh, a poet, philosopher, and scientist, writes that for Sikhs, "Our history is of the soul, all its events are of the soul. All truth for us is personal. We have not to prove it, we have to stand witness to it in our soul" (Fischer 2012, p. 128). With a sizable debate around authentic and traditional ways of practicing and interpreting faith, an autoethnographic approach offers insight from a lived experience on what is authentic, i.e., "a direct and immediate expression of [a person's] essence" (Lindholm 2007, p. 2). Gurmat vichhar and autoethnography both use the lived experience in the sense-making process, yet do not solely rely upon it in understanding the world at large.

To write by foregrounding personal experience without accusations of 'narcissism' requires a process of getting to know all the facets of self (Coffey 1999; Roth 2009). In Sikhi this includes reflexivity through the lens of Gurbani. In autoethnography this involves reflexivity on place and privilege in society. Reflexivity is critical. Most often the questions we ask, and the narratives we create in telling the complicated stories of others, reveal more about ourselves as authors. Consciously or unconsciously we choose our positions (hero vs. victim), numb out our triggers, and work with what fits best and does not make us too uncomfortable. World history has repeatedly shown this is especially true when mainstream voices speak for minority voices.

In contrast, autoethnography attempts to walk in 'the shoes of the other' while simultaneously acknowledging that it is still 'my feet in their shoes'. The writing of stories in autoethnography is a weaving of both lived experience and theory (Ellis 2004; Spry 2001). Stories provide a richer text to counter essentialist simplified and homogenized representation of cultures that too often find their way into essential reading lists.

In the Sikh tradition "the stories of one's ancestors makes their descendants good children"[16] and, like indigenous culture, are used to pass on experiential knowledge and history. Autoethnography, with its many places of synergy with Sikhi, also believes in the power of storytelling. Despite the time and effort placed to convey legitimacy and validity among mainstream methods, the works speak for themselves. For someone who is navigating to be unapologetically herself in all spaces, using autoethnography bridges my study of gurbani kirtan in a way that does not separate out my ancestral form of sense making.

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[16] Babaaneeaa kehaaneeaa puth saputh karaen. (Gurū Amar Dās, Rāmkalī 10, GGS, p. 951)

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Article

The Institution of the Akal Takht: The Transformation of Authority in Sikh History

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Abstract: The Akal Takht is considered to be the central seat of authority in the Sikh tradition. This article uses theories of legitimacy and authority to explore the validity of the authority and legitimacy of the Akal Takht and its leaders throughout time. Starting from the initial institution of the Akal Takht and ending at the Akal Takht today, the article applies Weber's three types of legitimate authority to the various leaderships and custodianships throughout Sikh history. The article also uses Berger and Luckmann's theory of the symbolic universe to establish the constant presence of traditional authority in the leadership of the Akal Takht. Merton's concept of group norms is used to explain the loss of legitimacy at certain points of history, even if one or more types of Weber's legitimate authority match the situation. This article shows that the Akal Takht's authority, as with other political religious institutions, is in the reciprocal relationship between the Sikh population and those in charge. This fluidity in authority is used to explain and offer a solution on the issue of authenticity and authority in the Sikh tradition.

Keywords: Akal Takht; jathedār; Sikh institutions; Sikh Rehat Maryada; Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC); authority; legitimacy

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1. Introduction

The Akal Takht, originally known as the Akal Bunga, is the seat of temporal and spiritual authority of the Sikh tradition. The Akal Takht is literally translated as the "Throne of the timeless one." The foundation of the Akal Takht was laid by Guru Hargobind after the execution of his father, Guru Arjan, by the Mughal Regime. The exact date that the construction started is disputed, sometime in between 1606 and 1609 (Dilgeer 1980, p. 20). Since then, the Akal Takht has served as the political center of the Sikh tradition. Guru Hargobind would sit on the Takht, or throne, and hold court to give his commands, listen to queries, and have bards sing heroic ballads. The Takht was initially built twelve feet high as a challenge to the Mughal government, as only superior government officials were permitted to sit on elevated platforms and address the populace. It was likely built higher than typical Mughal thrones to signify the higher authority that the Guru possessed in comparison to the Mughal rulers, as the physical elevation of a person is a sign of royalty, sovereignty, and respect in South Asia.

When the young Guru Hargobind received the guruship, he adorned himself in royal clothing and a kalgi[1], differentiating himself from the previously more humbly dressed gurus. He requested two swords from Baba Buddha, which he named *mīrī* and *pīrī*. *Pīrī* represents spirituality and devotion, while *mīrī* represents sovereignty and temporal power.[2] The sword of *mīrī* was slightly shorter than the sword of *pīrī*, signifying the superiority of spirituality over temporal power. However, the presence of both signify the importance of both spirituality and temporal power within the Sikh tradition. This was the point in history where the Guru instructed Sikhs to carry arms and the first Sikh militia arose (S. Singh 2011, p. 2403). With the use of the *Chaur* (royal whisk), *Takht*, *chandōā* (royal canopy), and the Guru holding court at the Akal Takht, it ran as typically as any South Asia royal *darbār*, or court.

The idea of *mīrī* being connected to *pīrī* can be seen within the design of the Darbar Sahib complex as well. The two *nishān sahibs*, or flags, outside of the Akal Takht are slightly different in length, with the *nishān* representing *mīrī* being slightly shorter than the *nishān* representing *pīrī;* the two *nishāns* are connected by a circular insignia with the inscription of "Ik Onkar and Khanda" to show the connectedness of the two structures. Another example of this significance is how Harmandir Sahib, or the Golden Temple, is visible from almost all angles of the Akal Takht, but the Akal Takht is not visible from any part of the Golden Temple. This signifies the importance of religious and spiritual consciousness, while addressing temporal issues and the ignorance of the temporal world while focused upon one's own spirituality; in the Sikh consciousness, secular temporal power does not exist, and must be conducted with a religious mindset.

Today, the Akal Takht does not hold power over a state or direct power over any state affair, but it represents the spiritual and political affairs of the Sikhs. The Akal Takht issues commands to Sikhs, holds the power of banishment, brings forward Sikh issues to governments, holds ultimate power over the gurdwaras in Punjab, and holds the authority to command gurdwaras and congregations across the world. Many powers of the Akal Takht have been delegated to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), but the Akal Takht holds superiority in the eyes of Sikhs. This view of superiority will be explained later in the article.

Scholars have written about the intertwined nature of spirituality and politics in the Sikh tradition and the lack of secularity in the Sikh psyche (P. Singh 2019). Sikhs have been actively working in the temporal realm since the inception of the tradition, with the first instance being Guru Nanak challenging Babur in his *Babarvāni*.[3] However, there is a lacuna in scholarship on the origin of the authority of the Akal Takht, the institution specifically built for the representation of the temporal authority of the Sikh body, into the politicized institution that it is today. The purpose of the article is to argue that the Akal Takht has not been a static institution with consistent amounts of authority, but rather an institution that has behaved according to the expectations of the larger community and political powers in play in order to retain authority and legitimacy in the Sikh community. The institution of the Akal Takht has not been static; it has had shifts in authority and public opinion throughout history, and it has navigated the change of the institution into what it stands as today. Since the founding of the Akal Takht, wider Sikh temporal activism has typically been centered around the Akal Takht; however, there have been instances of it taking place away from the Akal Takht, and even against the institution of the Akal Takht itself. The article will address these trends throughout history.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

1.1.1. Symbolic Universe

Berger and Luckmann (1966) highlighted that institutions are the outcomes of social constructs. Active institutions exist in symbolic universes, a set of beliefs held by society and considered to be common sense or self-evident knowledge. The institution often goes unquestioned, as it is supposed to be the way that society is. In order for an institution to enter the symbolic universe, the process of legitimization must take place, where the ideas of the institution are passed on to different generations. Berger and Luckmann explained the process as follows:

1. Incipient legitimization: society accepting that the institution is a part of the norm in the society. This is a pre-legitimization level, as it is the starting of an institution and the contemporary society is already accepting of it, either through pressure, hearsay, supernatural inspiration, or legal change.
2. Theoretical legitimization: the institution being justified through methods such as, but not limited to, folklore, stories, history, and folk tales. This is the first step towards legitimising the institution in the fabric of ongoing society.

3. Legitimation in bodies of knowledge: the institution is recognized across differentiated bodies of knowledge. The knowledge of the institution is formalized in its transmission to others.
4. Symbolic universe: the institution is fully habitualized and integrated into the fabric of society. Human experience takes place within this universe, with it becoming impossible for it to operate outside of the institution (Berger and Luckmann 1966, pp. 94–95).

This framework was used by the authors to describe the institutionalization of large societal behaviors. However, I use this framework to examine the legitimization of the formal institution, the Akal Takht. The incipient legitimization of the Akal Takht took place with the authority of Guru Hargobind[4]. As the Guru of the Sikhs, his command was considered sacred, and contemporary Sikhs regarded the Takht as the political institution for Sikhs. The folklore, histories, and stories involving the Akal Takht and its superiority emerged during and after this time. For Sikhs, the Guru is equal to God, as highlighted in the verse "*guru paramesaru eko jāṇu*" (GGS, p. 864), meaning "know the Guru and God as one". Therefore, when the command of the Guru is transmitted through the folklore, histories, and stories, Sikhs instill them in their hearts as the command of God himself. This helps to solidify the legitimization of the institution of the Akal Takht in the fabric of Sikh Society. Muslim and Sikh bodies of knowledge and literature accepted the legitimacy of the Akal Takht. Sikhs wrote about the authority in their literature, Mughal and Durrani forces would specifically attack Harmandir Sahib and the Akal Takht during battles and invasions, knowing that it is the spiritual and political center for the Sikhs. As time went on, Sikhs and non-Sikhs accepted the Akal Takht as the center of authority of Sikh tradition which led into level four of legitimization, where the institution of the Akal Takht became a part of the symbolic universe in the Sikh universe, wherein it became the seat of Sikh temporal and spiritual authority.

1.1.2. Authority

Authority is the legitimate and socially approved use of power. Although the legitimacy of the institution itself has been established in the Sikh tradition, it does not necessarily establish authority over the Sikh masses, although it does help aid in it. The authority itself is held by the *jathedār*, or leader, of the Akal Takht, as the *jathedār* is the person who holds the power invested by the Akal Takht, so the legitimacy of the Akal Takht alone is not enough to provide the formal institution with authority. Unlike the pope, the *jathedār* of the Akal Takht is not considered to have godly revelations, but is simply viewed as a mouthpiece for the Khalsa, who is also subject to fallibility. The *jathedār* of the Akal Takht is the highest recognized spokesman of the Sikhs, and, with the help and cooperation of four other Sikhs, can make commands and official decisions on behalf of the Sikh *Panth*.[5]

Weber's three types of authority are defined as below:

(a) Traditional authority: this authority is derived from lines of tradition, social customs, and cultural norms. This is typically an authority that has been habitualized into society and has become a part of the symbolic universe.
(b) Charismatic authority: this authority comes from the charisma and personality of an individual leader. Their charisma is typically seen as superhuman, which sets them apart from the average person.
(c) Rational-legal authority: this authority is based on the formal states of government, written laws. This the most familiar source of authority today, usually in the form of modern governments (Weber et al. 1964, p. 328).

Although the established legitimacy in the symbolic universe does not establish authority for the Akal Takht, it does aid in legitimizing its authority. The authority of the Akal Takht is constantly supported by traditional authority, given the fact that the Akal Takht, being an authoritative institution, is a part of the symbolic universe of the Sikhs. Its existence and God-given status go unquestioned by the Sikh body. However,

the legitimization of the authority of the Akal Takht has been swayed by both charismatic authority and rational-legal authority since its inception. I will discuss the various trends of this shift in section two of this article. The addition, or lack thereof, of Weber's other types have caused the authoritativeness the Akal Takht to fluctuate throughout its history.

It is important to keep in mind the difference between authority and coercive power. Authority is when a society voluntarily allows an institution to exert power, whereas coercive power does not need the permission of society to operate and relies solely on violence to operate its power. The Akal Takht itself has not relied on coercion to assert its power over the Sikh populace.[6] It has relied on its own authority and the faith of the Sikh populace to maintain control. In many instances, it has also relied on the state to carry out the Akal Takht's orders and decrees. In other cases, within and outside of India, individuals have taken it upon themselves to use coercion to implement the commands of the Akal Takht. They received this inspiration as they accepted the authority of the Akal Takht. The Akal Takht itself does not dispatch forces to enact its decrees through coercion, but rather, it is self-inspired people, who have accepted the authority of the institution, who have attempted to enact the order of the Akal Takht through coercion. Instances of all of these will be found in section two of this article.

Though these factors help to provide the Akal Takht with its initial authority, this legitimized authority is sometimes pushed back upon and even delegitimized by the Sikh body. As noted earlier, authority is the legitimate and socially approved use of power. Barnard (1968, p. 168) explains that authority is not within the hands of just those in charge, nor is it in the hands of the subjects of said authority, but it is a social relationship between the two entities. This means that the authority does not lie in the hands of the leading party but in the reciprocal relationship of communication between both sides. Merton (1968, p. 394) expands on this in his analysis, illustrating that authority does not come with unconditional power, but that it must exist within the norms of the group it exists in. The authority is allowed to push the boundaries of the group norms, so long as it stays consistent with the larger collection of previously existing norms, which allows for seamless cultural evolution over time. Merton explains that when those in authoritative positions act outside of the norms of the group, the leader(s) start to lose authority among the group. This leads people to start disregarding the authority, and can even lead into larger social movements to overthrow existing authority.

Applying the above theories to the Akal Takht, the institution of the Akal Takht was legitimized into the symbolic universe of the Sikhs. This allowed for the Akal Takht to have legitimized authority among the Sikh populace in accordance to Weber's traditional authority. Throughout history, the institution of the Akal Takht has been able to leverage charismatic and rational-legal authority to strengthen the legitimacy of its authority. However, as Barnard's and Merton's theories explain, the Akal Takht must act within the group norms to retain legitimate authority. The article will cover the evolution of the Akal Takht throughout history, and the fluctuations in its relationship with the Sikh community and beyond.

2. Akal Takht in History

2.1. The Akal Takht from Guru Hargobind to the Execution of Bhai Mani Singh, 1606–1738

In 1609, shortly after establishing the Akal Takht, Guru Hargobind was arrested on the orders of Jahangir for taking on royal attire, using the Akal Takht as a royal *darbār*, and creating a Sikh militia, although the official arrest warrant was for an unpaid fine that was imposed upon Guru Arjan (G. Singh 1949, p. 38). During the Guru's imprisonment, Bhai Gurdas was given control of the Akal Takht and the militia by the Guru (B. Singh 1997). However, with the Guru still being alive, Bhai Gurdas was not given the same authority as the custodians of the Akal Takht would be given once the guruship was given to the Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhs saw Guru Hargobind as the only authority of the Akal Takht and other Sikh shrines, regardless of his absence. With the Guru captive in Gwalior, activism from the Akal Takht did not end. Baba Buddha led processional chaunkis (singing of hymns)

from the Akal Takht to protest the captivity of the Guru until his release from captivity in 1612 (P. Singh 2011, p. 118).

Guru Hargobind's reign in Amritsar and in the Akal Takht did not last long. In 1630, Guru Hargobind had to leave Amritsar for Kartarpur, near Jalandhar, and later went to Kiratpur in the Himalayan Sivalik foothills due to his battles with the Mughals, as Amritsar was constantly being attacked from nearby Lahore (Mandair 2013, p. 49). During this time, the descendants of Prithi Chand[7] had taken over the shrines of Amritsar, including the Akal Takht. His offshoot sect stayed in control of the Akal Takht well into the eighteenth century.

It is likely that Guru Har Rai and Guru Harkrishan never visited Amritsar and spent most of their time near and around Kiratpur. In November 1669, Guru Tegh Bahadur had attempted to enter the Darbar Sahib complex after receiving the guruship, but was stopped by the followers of Prithi Chand (Dilgeer 1980, p. 30). He paid his obeisance from the outside walls and rested right outside the Akal Takht. That place is now marked by Gurdwara Thara Sahib.

It is important to keep in mind that during this period, the institution of the Akal Takht did not hold any authority over practitioners of the mainstream Sikh tradition. The Sikhs viewed authority as being completely invested by God in the Guru and followed the authority of the Guru. It was the Guru's traditional and charismatic authority over the Sikhs that held supreme. Guru Tegh Bahadur's trip to Amritsar, even when it was under the control of a rival group, shows that the space itself was still considered sacred and a part of the Sikh symbolic universe, but the authority had left the institution. Merton's theory would explain that due to the mainstream Sikh group norms being violated by the absence of the Guru or Guru-appointed leader and the Prithi Chand's sect acknowledging of someone else as the successor of Guru Nanak's guruship, the authority of the Akal Takht was no longer valid; the institution had gone leaps and bounds beyond Sikh group norms by debarring the Guru from his rightful throne.

Not much is known about the history of Amritsar during the life of Guru Gobind Singh or during Banda Singh Bahadur's period in Punjab. It is likely that the Akal Takht stayed under the control of Prithi Chand's decedents. It was not until 1721 that Mata Sundri sent Bhai Mani Singh to Amritsar to become the custodian of the Akal Takht after tensions between the Bandai Khalsa and the Tat Khalsa[8] were taking place in Amritsar over the caretaking of the Darbar Sahib complex. When Bhai Mani Singh came to Amritsar as the custodian of the Akal Takht, he mediated the issues between the two groups and passed a *gurmata*, or decree of the Guru, in favor of the Tat Khalsa (Johar 1977, p. 57).

Bhai Mani Singh is the first person in history who could be considered the "*jathedār*" of the Akal Takht in the mainstream Sikh tradition. Though that was not an official title given to him, he fulfilled the duties of what the *jathedār* of the Akal Takht today would do. Bhai Mani Singh was a successful mediator between two contesting groups, and this was possible due to the legitimacy and authority that he had as a leader. Putting aside whether or not everyone present considered him to be the rightful leader of the Akal Takht, especially since the dispute was between two competing groups, Bhai Mani Singh was a person who had gained some clout throughout his lifetime. The fact that he was associated with four of the Gurus; was the father of five sons who had died in battle with Guru Gobind Singh; was the head scribe of the recompiling of the Guru Granth Sahib; and was the official representative sent to Amritsar by Mata Sundri, the wife of the Guru, gave him credit among the masses. These experiences gave Bhai Mani Singh authoritative legitimacy as per Weber's charismatic authority. Although there are no records of Bhai Mani Singh's personality, for someone with so much experience, the ability to solve a conflict that the people themselves could not solve, and an endorsement from the Guru's own wife must give some insight into the type of personality and charisma that Mani Singh must have possessed. With the authority that must have been granted by his charisma, and the endorsement of Mata Sundri, Mani Singh took leadership of the Akal Takht, and therefore the Khalsa, legitimizing his authority over the Sikh tradition even further with

the traditional authority that the Akal Takht brought along with it. This established the first legitimate control of the Akal Takht in the mainstream Sikh tradition.

Under the leadership of Mani Singh, the tradition of *Sarbat Khalsa* was started. Sarbat Khalsa was a deliberative assembly where the entire Khalsa was to gather at the Akal Takht to make decisions on behalf of the community. The Sarbat Khalsa allowed for the people to be involved in the proceedings of the Akal Takht, thus solidifying the reciprocal relationship between the people and the authority, making the Akal Takht's authority very stable. Sarbat Khalsa would take place twice a year at the Akal Takht on Vaisakhi and Diwali. The next major gurmata that was passed was in 1726, where it was decided that the Khalsa would raid and loot Mughal treasuries, armories, trade transport, and kill informers. This decision was made after a well-respected Sikh, Bhai Tara Singh, was killed by a Mughal official (Dilgeer 1980, p. 33). The Sikhs took the gurmata to heart and started to plunder Mughal property. This led to Zakariya Khan, the governor of Lahore, pushing back against the Sikhs. As the number of rebellious Sikhs continued to increase, Zakaria Khan attempted to calm the tensions by offering the Sikhs a *jāgīr* and the choice to appoint a Nawab. At the Sarbat Khalsa of Vaisakhi 1733, the *jāgīr* was accepted by the Khalsa and Kapur Singh was selected to be the nawab (Grewal 2002, p. 89).

With the patronage of the *jāgīr,* the Khalsa reorganized into the Buddha Dal, consisting of older veterans, and the Taruna Dal, consisting of younger men, at the next Sarbat Khalsa. The Khalsa was flourishing in Amritsar, as Sikhs in hiding and from other parts of the subcontinent were beginning to move into Amritsar. With members increasing rapidly, Nawab Kapur Singh and other leaders had trouble keeping the Khalsa in control. Some fringe members of the Taruna Dal began to confiscate taxes from areas where the dues were for the Mughals. This act upset Zakariya Khan, which led him to confiscate the *jāgīr* from the Sikhs and reinstate orders to oppress and kill Sikhs (Dilgeer 1980, p. 34). Many Sikhs left Amritsar but continued to raid Mughal properties in smaller groups (Grewal 2002, p. 90).

Mani Singh, still the custodian of the Akal Takht and Harmandir Sahib, attempted to organize Diwali in Amritsar in 1738. The governor of Punjab allowed the celebration to take place with a demand of 5000 rupees. When the Sikhs gathered, they felt that the Mughals were planning an attack on the celebration, so they dispersed before any festivities could commence. Bhai Mani Singh then refused to pay the 5000 rupees, as the event never took place. Zakariya Khan responded by sentencing Bhai Mani Singh to death by having his body cut limb from limb (Dilgeer 1980, p. 34). Even through hardships, the Khalsa continued to act upon the gurmatas passed by the Sarbat Khalsa at the Akal Takht. It shows the sacredness and validity of the authority that the Sikhs had placed in the institution, where they would go to dangerous levels to continue to live up to the gurmatas that were passed under its authority.

2.2. The Misl Period 1738–1799

The Akal Takht was without leadership for some time, as the Sikhs had dispersed from Amritsar in the face of persecution. Sikhs continued to plunder and raid the Mughals. In 1745, with the death of Zakariya Khan, the Sikhs had the opportunity to hold a Sarbat Khalsa on Diwali. The Sikhs regrouped and continued their battles against the Mughals. In 1746, the *Chhōtā Ghallūghārā,* or small genocide, took place. In the year after this, another Sarbat Khalsa took place where the decision to continue to fight the Mughals to fortify Amritsar was made. In 1748, another Sarbat Khalsa was held where the Khalsa was reorganized into 11 Misls, each with their own leadership and armies (Gupta 2001, pp. 89–90).

Sarbat Khalsa and the passing of gurmatas continued to happen until 1757. In 1757, Ahmad Shah Abdali's forces tore down Harmandir Sahib and the Akal Takht. Baba Deep Singh led an army towards Amritsar to attempt to rebuild the Harmandir Sahib and the Akal Takht. He was killed upon reaching the Darbar Sahib complex (K. Singh 1963, p. 145). The Akal Takht and Harmandir Sahib were eventually rebuilt by the Sikhs. It

was followed by back and forth battles between the Sikhs and Mughals, Sikh executions, battles with the Durrani empire, executions by the Durranis and Mughals, and numerous destructions and rebuildings of the Akal Takht and Harmandir Sahib. Regardless, the Sikhs continued to grow their militias and grow their control over the Punjab region. It is also during this period that the oldest written Hukamnama from the Akal Takht is found. It was addressed to the Sikhs of Patna requesting funds for the rebuilding of the shrines in Amritsar (Dilgeer 1980, p. 40). After Durrani's last defeat in Punjab, the Sikh confederacy became the uncontested rulers of Punjab. The Sikhs were holding uninterrupted Sarbat Khalsas at the Akal Takht for the first time in history.

Once the Misls were established, the practice of Sarbat Khalsa started to fizzle out. The initial change came from amending Sarbat Khalsa from being a gathering of the whole Khalsa to just the leaders of the Misls. Once inter-Misl feuds began, attendance at the Sarbat Khalsa slowly declined until they finally ended (*Brief History of Sikh Misls* n.d., pp. 13–14).

This period of history was the most concerning for the existence of the Sikhs. It is also when the power and authority of the Akal Takht was utilized the most to make decisions for the Khalsa. The gurmatas, cooperation, and consistent meetings allowed for the Sikhs to establish their rule in Punjab. There is a lack of evidence of a specific custodian or *jathedār* of the Akal Takht, and this might have to do with the Guru-centric nature of the gurmatas and Sarbat Khalsa. This idea is emphasized with the initial minting of coins by the Sarbat Khalsa, where the coins were Guru-centric, devoid of the names of any of the chiefs. Though the Sarbat Khalsas were attended by all, Dhavan (2011, p. 147) notes that those making decisions were the chiefs of the Misls, which proves that hierarchy within the system existed, and so some form of leader or mediator must have existed. I argue that the leadership of the Takht, as least during the Sarbat Khalsas, were under Nawab Kapur Singh during this period, given that he was often the chief leader of the various regroupings of the Khalsa and the fact that the Sarbat Khalsa dying out of practice coincides with the retirement and death of Nawab Kapur Singh. This theory does leave a blind spot on as to who was handling the day to day operations of the Takht; however, it is likely that it might have been under the custodianship of Udasi Mahants. Although history leaves us with a blind spot on his leadership, it is quite clear that it was because of Kapur Singh that the Khalsa was able to organize in the ways that it did. Kapur Singh may have derived his authority over the Khalsa from his initial appointing as nawab by Bhai Mani Singh, and the character that enabled him to ever reach that position. His authority would, then, be derived from both traditional and rational-legal authorities, as it was the initial *jāgīr* that gave Kapur Singh any power at all. This is a shift from the lack of rational-legal authority under Mani Singh's tenure as the custodian of the Akal Takht. After Kapur Singh's retirement and the lack of a proper leader, they no longer had the means to or motivation to organize Sarbat Khalsas, as the Misls became more focused upon their individual autonomy and territories. With the Khalsa growing larger and a lack of centrality, Sarbat Khalsa most likely became too difficult to hold regularly. In its later years, the idea had become symbolic, where only the leaders higher in their ranks would attend, thus not even living up to the name *Sarbat Khalsa*. The Akal Takht's authority dwindled as the average Khalsa became less involved in the Sarbat Khalsas, as it had shifted the reciprocal relationship between the people and the instution into non-existence. Ranjit Singh officially abolished Sarbat Khalsa in 1805.

2.3. Sarkār-e-Khālsā 1799–1849

In 1800, Akali Phula Singh, along with an army of 2000 Akali Nihangs proceeded into Amritsar and took control of the Akal Takht (Kaile and Singh 2009, p. 43). During Akali Phula Singh's tenure as the *jathedār* of the Akal Takht, he punished Ranjit Singh twice, once for marrying a Muslim woman who did not covert and once for offering a used canopy to the Akal Takht. Ranjit Singh accepted the punishment both times. Only one Sarbat Khalsa took place during the Sikh Empire, which was for the settling of an issue between a Maratha refugee and the British in 1805. The Sarbat Khalsa issued a gurmata in

favor of the British, and soon after, Ranjit Singh officially abolished Sarbat Khalsa (Hoti 1966, pp. 135–46). Akali Phula Singh is known to have been a very charismatic warrior and leader according to popular Sikh rhetoric. He led an army of thousands of nihangs and fought alongside the Sikh Empire. Phula Singh stopped a battle from taking place between the Sukerchakia and Bhangi Misls on the battlefield and mediated a negotiation instead (B. Singh 2010, p. 146). Though not recorded, it is likely that Phula Singh took care of day to day activities at the Takht and settling issues between Sikhs and Sikh groups as the leader of the Akal Takht. Oral history among Sikhs shows that Phula Singh was a charismatic person. With the help of the traditional authority that comes from holding the seat of the Akal Takht, Akali Phula Singh's tenure as *jathedār* was supported by charismatic authority. His authority in the Akal Takht remained mostly political and in relation to the larger *Sarkār-e-Khālsā*. It does not seem like the Takht handled many issues of the larger Sikh populace itself, at least in public ways.

After Phula Singh's death, a Khalsa Sikh did not take control of the Akal Takht. It was individuals from the Udasi sect who had become the caretakers of the Takht (Lorenzen 1997, p. 57). It is likely that they may have been appointed by Ranjit Singh himself, as the Udasis were the most patronized group by the Sikh empire (S. Singh 1985). The Udasi mahants came into control of almost all historic gurdwaras. During this time, a painting of Guru Hargobind was installed at the Akal Takht to be worshipped. Worshippers would regularly worship idols and pictures in the various gurdwaras in the Darbar Sahib complex (Oberoi 1994, p. 104). These caretakers of the Akal Takht did not hold any legitimate authority over the Khalsa, as their practices were outside of the group norms of the Khalsa. The Khalsa found its leadership amongst their own *jathas*, or groups. However, the Udasis played a massive role in the pluralism of the various religious traditions in Punjab.[9] This is a point in time in which, although the Akal Takht existed in the symbolic universe of the Sikh psyche, the authority of the institution had diminished in the eyes of the Khalsa due to it stepping outside of the larger group norms of the Khalsa tradition.

2.4. British Raj 1849–1947

When the British conquered Punjab, they took control of historical Sikh shrines, including the Akal Takht. Until 1869, the caretaking of the shrine would stay with those already at the Darbar Sahib complex. In 1869, the British appointed a caretaker, called a Sarbrah, as the leader of both the Akal Takht and Harmandir Sahib. The Sarbrah had the authority to issue hukamnamas, or commands, to the Sikhs. Being appointed by the British, the Sarbrah would often be a mouthpiece of the British. The goal of the British was to keep the status quo at the Darbar Sahib complex, so the image and idol worship continued. Although idol and picture worship started before the British Raj, it was already a step outside of the group norm of Khalsa Sikhs. This idol and picture worship would be the first of many steps outside the group norms of the Khalsa that the Akal Takht would take (Dilgeer 1980, p. 54).

When reformists in the Singh Sabha started to rise, the Akal Takht was quick to react. The Sarbrah of the Akal Takht banished Gurmukh Singh of the Lahore Singh Sabha for opposing practices such as idol and picture worship in the Darbar Sahib complex and opposing Khem Singh Bedi[10] sitting on pillows in the congregation. Gurmukh Singh still continued his publishing and preaching. There are numerous instances of the caretakers of the Akal Takht and Harmandir Sahib refusing to let in, refusing to do ardās (prayer of request) for, and banishing members of the Lahore Singh Sabha[11] or its offspring organizations. People of lower caste were not allowed to give or receive prasad at the Darbar Sahib complex and were only allowed into the complex at certain times of the day.

The week after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the caretakers of the Darbar Sahib complex honored and conducted the pahul ceremony for General Dyer. The pahul ceremony is the ceremony that initiates an individual into the Khalsa. Dyer was given permission to cut his hair and smoke tobacco by those that conducted the ceremony, even though those acts are major transgressions of the Khalsa code of conduct (Colvin 1929, pp. 201–2).

After this, General Dyer was given a *siropā*, or honorary scarf, by the Sarbrah of the Akal Takht. The pahul ceremony of General Dyer and the failure to do the sevā, or service, of the Guru Granth Sahib one evening at the Akal Takht infuriated many Sikhs. A meeting took place in August 1920 in the Darbar Sahib complex, demanding the resignation of the Sarbrah. The Sarbrah apologized for his transgressions and resigned. Another Sabrah was appointed; however, the mistreatment of the lower castes and the continuation of idol worship still upset many Sikhs. Although the authority of the institution technically should have existed at this point in history, as the Takht had its original traditional authority and the legal-rational authority established by the British Raj, Merton's theory would explain how the caretakers of the Akal Takht had taken so many steps outside of Sikh group norms that no sense of authority in the institution remained among common Sikhs. The relationship between the Sikhs and Akal Takht had been startled by these steps outside of the group norms.

In October 1920, Khalsa reformers stormed and took over the Akal Takht from the Sarbrah and other caretakers of the Takht. Right after, the British appointed a 36-member committee, comprised of Sikh aristocracy, to take care of the Darbar Sahib complex. In order to negotiate a long-term solution, the Central Sikh League called a meeting in the Darbar Sahib complex, where ten thousand Sikhs attended. At this meeting, a 175-member committee was elected to form a committee to manage all gurdwaras across India. That committee was called the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (Grewal 2002, p. 158). The committee has controlled the Darbar Sahib complex and appointed the *jathedār* of the Akal Takht since then. The Akal Takht once again became the center of Sikh politics and activism, with frequent meetings and decision making taking place. The Akal Takht would be the home of the Sikh struggle throughout the Gurdwara Reform Movement. That same year, the Akali Dal was formed at the Akal Takht (Dilgeer 1980, pp. 161–62). The British formally accepted the SGPC as the caretakers of the Darbar Sahib complex in January 1922 (Grewal 2002, p. 160). The Akal Takht became even more active than it was during the Sikh Misl period.

Although the Sarbrah were the caretakers of the Takht, most Khalsa Sikhs did not accept their authority as legitimate. The Sarbrah were taking steps outside of the group norms by partaking in idol worship, caste discrimination, obeisance to the Bedi family, the honoring of the perpetrator of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, and the banishment of any Sikh who would speak against the practices of the Darbar Sahib complex. For the first time in history, the Sikhs mobilized against the caretakers of the Akal Takht and instated a new leadership structure. This new structure was legitimized by rational-legal authority, along with traditional authority, as the SGPC ran through legal structures. With the establishment of a controlling body made by the people, the Sikhs had a working reciprocal relationship with the Akal Takht where they felt that their input was valid and that the Takht was no longer taking major steps outside of Sikh group norms.

The SGPC continues to run through the legal system of India today. The charisma of the Akali leaders helped to solidify the support of embedding the Akal Takht into the legal system through the creation of the SGPC. Since the success of the Gurdwara Reform Movement, the Akal Takht is able to legally control the gurdwaras of Punjab, Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Haryana through the SGPC[12]. The other Takhts, in Anandpur, Patna, Talwandi Sabo, and Nanded, were also given positions of status; however, it remained the status quo that the Akal Takht reigned supreme.

2.5. Partition of Punjab until Operation Bluestar 1947–1984

Upon Indian independence, the Sikhs focused on establishing a Punjabi speaking Suba. With the banning of Punjabi Suba slogans, many Akalis, members of the SGPC, and the then *jathedār* of the Akal Takht were arrested. This led to the first invasion of the Darbar Sahib complex by the Indian state in 1955. Punjabi Suba agitations were centered around the Akal Takht up until the establishment of the Punjabi Suba in 1966 (Dilgeer 1980, p. 80) In 1975, the Akal Takht led agitations against the state of emergency enacted by Indira

Gandhi, which lasted two years, after the ban on political activates was lifted (Dilgeer 1980, p. 84). This authority was a continuation of what was established with the founding of the SGPC.

On Vaisakhi 1978, a group of Sikhs from the Akhand Kirtani Jatha and the Damdami Taksal, under the leadership of Bhai Fauja Singh, went to protest outside a Nirankari congregation, where the Sikh gurus and scriptures were being subject to disrespectful rhetoric. Attendees of the Nirankari congregation attacked the protesters, and thirteen of the protesters were killed (Mahmood 2010, p. 79). The Akal Takht released a hukamnama on the 10 June 1978 condemning the attack and instructing Sikhs to avoid and not to associate with individuals from the Nirankari sect (R. Singh 2003, p. 77). This hukamnama is still binding today, and practicing Sikhs continue to not associate themselves with Nirankaris.

In 1982, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale sponsored the Akalis through the *Dharam Yudh Morcha* to pressure the Indian state to accept the Anandpur Sahib Resolution.[13] A year later, Bhindranwale, with other armed Sikhs, moved into the Darbar Sahib complex to lead the movement from the Akal Takht. In December of 1983, Bhindrawale relocated to the Akal Takht itself. It was from here that Bhindranwale stockpiled the building with weapons and prepared for attacks from the Indian state. Bhindranwale and his followers, including men and women with small children, battled from the Akal Takht during Operation Bluestar, making the complex, once again, a battleground between the reigning government and Sikhs. It was during Operation Bluestar that the Akal Takht was destroyed by the Army tanks. Although Bhindranwale was never the *jathedār* of the Akal Takht, nor ever claimed to be, he used the building of the Akal Takht as a way to establish legitimacy and help support his charismatic authority with the traditional authority of the Akal Takht.

2.6. 1984 to the Present

After 1984, the Sikhs were in a distressed situation. There was a group of people, predominantly from the Damdami Taksal, who had attempted to take control of the Akal Takht and the Darbar Sahib Complex after an attempted *Sarbat Khalsa* in 1986. Although partially successful, their control over the Akal Takht was handed back to the SGPC. Since 1984, there has been a tense relationship between various Sikh organizations regarding whether or not the SGPC is a valid group representing the issues of the Sikhs, especially among diasporic and radical Sikhs. This tension continues until today, especially with the new competing *jathedars* of the Takhts instated by an attempted *Sarbat Khalsa* in 2015.[14] These two *Sarbat Khalsas* had attempted to lay claim to the authority of the Akal Takht.

The tension in the community in regard to the Akal Takht and the SGPC stem from 1984 and the idea of whether or not the Akali Dal and the SGPC are partially to blame for Operation Bluestar. Sikhs, especially in the diaspora, have taken issue with the SGPC's management of the Takht. On the other hand, the Akali Dal continues to win the SGPC elections, showing that the Akal Takht management does have local approval, at least since the last election; however, there does seem to be more people standing in opposition to the Akali ticket in the forthcoming SGPC elections. The split in approval of the Akali Dal's control of the SGPC has been heightened since Gurbachan Singh forgave Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, a sect leader who had impersonated Guru Gobind Singh and the Sikh initiation ceremony. However, the approval of the SGPC's management of the Akal Takht has become more stable after Harpreet Singh was enacted as acting *jathedār*. With the disconnect between diasporic Sikhs and Sikhs in India, there seems to have also been a disconnect in group norms on what is acceptable for the Akal Takht and its authority, which has caused the disconnect between whether or not the authority of the Akal Takht can be considered legitimate.

3. Conclusions

The Akal Takht has undergone many transformations since its inception by Guru Hargobind. The Gurus left behind no structure or instruction on the running of the

institution, so Sikhs had to figure out how to run the institution ad libitum. The Akal Takht has had periods of supreme authority and periods of absolutely no authority. It is the relationship between the caretaker of the Akal Takht and the general populace that has determined the amount of authority that the Akal Takht is able to yield.

The institution gives caretakers and leaders the means to lead; however, it is the actions of the leaders and their relation to the populace that ultimately lets them retain, gain, or lose legitimate authority. Bhai Mani Singh was able to gain legitimate authority with his ability to mediate between the Bandai Khalsa and the Tat Khalsa. Nawab Kapur Singh used his charisma and leadership skills to maintain a grip and proper reciprocal conversation and compromises in tension filled Sarbat Khalsas; although after his death, without a suitable leader, the institution no longer operated in the same way, leading to the extinction of the Sarbat Khalsa in the Sikh Confederacy and the official banning of it by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Akali Phula Singh was able to regrasp the authority of the Takht, but without the same political standing that the Takht had during the confederacy. Without an official way to appoint a leader of the Akal Takht, the leadership was, in a way, random and sporadic.

It was when the mahants took over the Darbar Sahib complex that we started to see the norms of the Khalsa being challenged in the Takht. The mahants during the British Raj held no legitimate authority over the Khalsa. The British appointed Sarbrahs were even further from the group norms, thus causing Khalsa Sikhs to organize and overthrow the sarbrah system. The establishment of the SGPC allowed for the Khalsa to take back control of the Darbar Sahib complex and all other gurdwaras, while establishing acceptable *jathedārs* of the Akal Takht, once again making the institution active, and adding legal-rational legitimization to the authority. However, with the increase of the internal politics of the SGPC, the *jathedārs* did not continue to hold legitimate authority among the Sikh populace.

Bhindranwale's period in the Akal Takht reestablished the Akal Takht as the militia center and made the Akal Takht the literal political center of Sikh activism and armed conflict. Although he was not the *jathedār* of the Akal Takht, his charisma in his speeches lent him more legitimized authority than the *jathedār* of the Akal Takht himself. This shows that the authority of the Akal Takht was not limited to the appointed leader of the institution. Bhindranwale had more of a sway upon the Sikh population during his time in the Akal Takht than the *jathedār* did.

During the 1986 and 2015 Sarbat Khalsa, we saw a split in the leadership of the Akal Takht for the first time, with certain Sikhs aligning with one side over another. The SGPC *jathedār* had the legal authority over gurdwaras, and many individuals and gurdwaras still choose to align themselves with the leadership appointed by the Sarbat Khalsa, showing that not even the legalities enforced by the state can impact who people choose as their legitimate authorities.

Berger, Luckman, and Merton's theories help us understand the basis of where legitimate Sikh authority is derived from, and how it has been unstable throughout time. The symbolic universe keeps the Akal Takht within the loop of the Sikh psyche, even in uncertain times when the institution of the Akal Takht stepped outside of group norms. Even at the most dire stages, the Akal Takht continued to remain a central part of the Sikh tradition due to how embedded it is within the Sikh symbolic universe. It is through Merton's theory of group norms that we are able to understand why the authority invested the Akal Takht has not stayed static, but has had a spectrum of varying statuses among the community throughout history.

This is evidence of how fluid this institution has been and continues to be. When statements in the Panth are made about Sikh Rehat Maryada being the only acceptable maryada due to its endorsement by the Akal Takht, one must reference the history of the Akal Takht. Then, the realization is made that the power of the Akal Takht is invested in the agreement of the majority of the populace. When there is a large portion of the Khalsa that does not agree with the Sikh Rehat Maryada, the authority of the Takht no longer exists, as the Takht has pushed beyond the group norm. Rather than blanket statements about the

sanctity and the authority of the Akal Takht being made, the history of the institution must be observed.

Today, the Akal Takht represents the Sikhs across the world, but only Sikhs in Punjab have the right to vote in the SGPC elections. This causes a bigger rift between the authority of the Akal Takht being accepted by all Sikhs. When the interests of Sikhs in India and abroad do not correlate and group norms between the two groups continue to grow apart, the disconnect of the Akal Takht with the greater Sikh populace will continue to grow. This may cause the need for the SGPC and the Akal Takht to reorganize in a way that allows Sikhs in the diaspora representation in the Akal Takht and the SGPC in order to continue a proper reciprocal relationship between the institution and the people, especially as the structures of authority and legitimacy continue to change as time passes.

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Notes

1 A kalgi is a feather or cluster of feathers worn on the turbans of South Asian royalty.

2 The word *mīri* is derived from the Arabic أمير (*amīr*), which is translated as king or prince. The word *pīri* is derived from the Persian پیر (*pīr*), which is the name used for a Sufi saint, used often within South Asia.

3 *Babarvāni* is the collection of hymns by Guru Nanak addressed towards the first Mughal emperor, Babur. A more detailed analysis of *Babarvāni* can be found in "Speaking Truth to Power: Exploring Guru Nanak's Bābar-vāṇī in Light of the Baburnama" (P. Singh 2020).

4 The theory can also be applied to the legitimacy of the Guru. Guru Nanak had gained a following and claimed supernatural inspiration, thus embedding himself in the incipient legitimization step. With Guru Nanak being embedded into this process, and eventually inserting himself into the symbolic universe of many Punjabis, he gained legitimacy, which he passed on to the following Gurus. His authority is further justified through Weber's types of authorities, which are still to be discussed.

5 The gathering of five Sikhs represents the Sikh institution of the *panj pīāre.* The official gathering of five Sikhs are seen as the physical representatives of Guru Gobind Singh and are given the authority to make decisions for the community. Local congregations may gather five respected Sikhs to make decisions for their respective area. The gathering of five Sikhs at the Akal Takht, with the *jathedār* of the Akal Takht leading, is seen as the highest authority. Today, the *panj pīāre* making decisions at the Akal Takht typically consist of the *jathedār* of the Akal Takht, the *jathedār* of Takht Damdama Sahib, granthīs of Harmandir Sahib, and sometimes the *jathedār* of Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur (McLeod 1989, p. 58).

6 Though the institution has owned the means to violence at various points in its history. The Akal Takht houses and has housed many weapons has had the disposal of Sikh militias before the colonizing of the Sikh Empire. There are, however, no instances of the Akal Takht using its access to violence to assert its power over the Sikh people. The access to violence was typically used to protect Sikh lands from invaders.

7 Prithi Chand was the oldest son of Guru Ram Das and brother of Guru Arjan. Sources written by Prithi Chand's sect suggest that Prithi Chand was a devout follower of Guru Arjan and was the rightful heir of the guruship after Guru Arjan, and that miscreants attempted to give the guruship to Guru Hargobind instead. Mainstream Sikh sources refer to Prithi Chand as a jealous older brother who was sour at Guru Arjan receiving the Guruship, and started his own sect, being a challenger of the Guru. Regardless, the Prithi Chand sect (also known as Miharvanias, after the son of Prithi Chand, or derogatorily as Minas by mainstream Sikhs), was a major parallel sect throughout the seventeenth century (Syan 2014).

8 Bandai Khalsa and Tat Khalsa were early sects of the Sikh tradition coming about after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. The Bandai Khalsa believed Banda Singh Bahadur to be the eleventh guru, while the Tat Khalsa held that Guru Gobind Singh gave the Guru Granth Sahib the guruship.

9 Due to the Sikh Empire being a minority rule, Ranjit Singh utilized various methods of attempting to keep the peace. One of these methods was the propagation of syncretic thought, like that done by the Udasis. According to Haklai (2000), blurring the lines between the majority and the minority is an important method in keeping minority rule. Groups, such as the Udasis, did just that.

10 A descendant of Guru Nanak, founding member of the Singh Sabha.

[11] The Lahore Singh Sabha was a reformist group whose goal was to remove all Hindu-like practices and traditions from the Sikh tradition and reinforce the institution of the Khalsa.

[12] To read more about the origins and political structures of the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal, refer to "Ideological basis in the formation of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Shiromani Akali Dal: exploring the concept of Guru-Panth" (P. Singh 2021).

[13] Elaboration on the Anandpur Sahib Resolution was done by K. Singh (2004) in "The Anandpur Sahib Resolution and Other Akali Demands".

[14] The resoultions for the 2015 Sarbat Khalsa can be found at: https://www.sikh24.com/2015/11/11/official-resolutions-from-sarbat-khalsa-2015/ (accessed on 27 May 2021).

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