

6th Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies Conference
(May 3-4, 2019)

Celebrating Guru Nanak: New Perspectives, Reassessments and Revivification

ABSTRACTS

1. **“No-Man’s-Land: Fluidity between Sikhism and Islam in Partition Literature and Film”**

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While the logic of (religious) nationalism operative during Partition resulted in horrific, widespread violence, many of the aesthetic responses to Partition have focused on the linkages between religious communities that predated Partition, and in many cases, even continued on after the fact. Indeed, Sikhism and Islam continue to be recognized by many artists as mutually imbricated traditions in the Indian Subcontinent—a tradition cultivated from Mardana’s discipleship with Guru Nanak to the present day—despite the communalism that has prevailed since the colonial interventions of the nineteenth century.

By focusing on the fluidity of religious and national identity, artistic works featuring Sikh and Muslim characters in 1947 highlight the madness of Partition violence in a society previously characterized by interwoven religious traditions and practices, as well as the fundamentally violent, exclusionary logic that undergirds nationalism. In my paper, I will focus particularly on two texts that explore these themes: Saadat Hasan Manto’s short story

“Toba Tek Singh” and Sabiha Sumar’s *Khamosh Pani*. Each of these works portrays its main character’s ultimately futile search for a place in society outside of rigid definitions of religious identity.

In “Toba Tek Singh,” the title character’s death (?) in the no-man’s-land between India and Pakistan gains greater significance when we read this death as an allegory for the place of Sikhs and Sikhism in a Subcontinent now marked by the logic of the “two-nation theory.” *Khamosh Pani*, on the other hand, explores the relationship between Sikhs and Muslims both during Partition itself and thirty years after. Set in the village on the outskirts of Panja Sahib, the film portrays Ayesha/Veero’s search for a place in society outside of rigid definitions of religious belonging. This fruitless search ultimately leads her to jump in the village well, where the well represents a no-man’s-land of religion and nationalism, as well as a no-*man*’s-land that frees her the strictures of patriarchal definitions of self.

Ultimately, by exploring the connections between these two texts, I will show how the exclusivist logic of nationalism displaces the fluidity of religious practice and philosophy expounded by Guru Nanak and continued by Muslims and Sikhs in pre-Partition South Asia.

2. “Tasting the Sweet: Guru Nanak and Sufi Delicacies”

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My paper focuses on the rich Sikh-Sufi confluence in the visual representations and sonorous hymns of Guru Nanak. Its primary sources are the Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of the Sikhs, and the B-40 Janamsakhi, an early illustrated hagiographic account of Guru Nanak. Aristotle’s statement that poetry is concerned with the universal (chapter 9 of the *Poetics*), and the impact of art as defined by Tolstoy: “a means of union among men” (*What is Art?*) form the backdrop of my study. The overall goal is to bring attention to the neglected area of Sufi-Sikh bonds so we can enjoy their exciting visual and lyrical arabesques, and taste their pluralistic ingredients vital for our empathetically arid and dangerously divided global society.

3. “Image of Guru Nanak as depicted in the Puratan Janam Sakhi”

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The Janam Sakhis are understood to be a very basic and primary source of history for the reconstruction of the image of Guru Nanak. We will base our study of the Puratan Janam Sakhi as edited by prominent modern Sikh scholar Bhai Vir Singh. In the introduction Bhai Vir Singh, after making comparative study of the available manuscripts, concludes about its period of writing and how this MS had been brought from the India Office London library. He made a very significant contribution by critically editing the MS on all accounts. He also gave sub-headings to some related incidents. Traditionally, Guru Nanak is known to have undertaken four journeys (*udasis*) in order to spread his message far and wide. But Bhai Vir Singh has mentioned the fifth journey also. During his travels, Guru Nanak interacted with many Jogis, Pirs, Pandits, Sufis, Saints, Preachers and religious leaders belonging to various religions and different sects as Bhai Gurdas has mentioned in his first Var: “The Baba proceeded on long journeys (*udasis*) so that he might educate and send his message to the whole world.” During his stay and travelling in different parts of the world, Baba Nanak had always a friendly dialogue with the spokespersons and followers of different religions and sects. He frequently questioned their theory and practice and very logically advised them to practice the right type of religion, without any ritualism, bigotry, and meaningless religious ceremonies. During his dialogues Baba Nanak convinced them that they all were leading a false and hypocrite life. This process of the continuous dialogues with others helps us to understand the knowledge-based and socially-committed philosophy and towering personality of Guru Nanak. In my presentation I will delineate and discuss the multifaceted personality of Guru Nanak in detail. It is quite logical to point out here that Puratan Janam Sakhi is more comprehensive and authentic from historical point of view because of the absence of superficial elements in this treatise. This Janam Sakhi reveals the true reflections of details of Guru Nanak's life. It reflects historical facts from Guru Nanak's birth to the succession of Guru Angad and his spiritual reign.

4. **“Contemporary Issues and Challenges in the Panth: Guru Nanak’s vision and the twenty-first century”**

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The Panth, at a global level, faces many challenges in terms of authenticity and tradition, with the effects of national and regional cultures playing a role in the negotiation of multiple identities. This paper will analyse a number of contemporary issues and challenges facing Sikhs, primarily in Britain, in the light of Guru Nanak’s teachings around Oneness and their relevance in the twenty first century from a number of perspectives including politically and philosophically. One of the topics of discussion in this paper will be around the question of whether Gurdwaras, particularly in the diaspora, are fit for the twenty first century in their role of spreading and creating awareness of Sikhi as per Guru Nanak’s vision. To what extent are Giani’s and Parcharaks equipped with the skills and knowledge to impart Guru Nanak’s message in such a manner that it becomes a pull factor to engage the younger generation with the religious institutions. Guru Nanak is heralded as a pioneer of interfaith

dialogue; however, the very fact that a Sikh wing of the English Defence League exists is a major consideration in assessing the relevance of Guru Nanak's teachings in contemporary Sikh behavior and attitudes towards other faiths. Here also, the barring of Bhai Mardana's ancestors from performing *kirtan* at Harmandir Sahib becomes a topic, which requires exploration in terms of authenticity, historiography and indeed interpretation in the light of Guru Nanak's vision. This paper will also explore the actions of a number of youth groups in the UK in terms of an analysis of their efforts as detrimental or supportive of Guru Nanak's vision of Oneness and equality.

5. **“Sikhism and Secularism.”**

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I am very interested in attending the conference and would like to make a presentation on “Sikhism and Secularism.” I shall explore Guru Nanak's thought and the evidentiary verses in Guru Granth Sahib to discuss the compatibility of Sikhism with what we call secularism today.

6. **“The Political Philosophy of Guru Nanak and its Contemporary Relevance”**

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This essay celebrates the 550th birth anniversary of the founder of the Sikh religion, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. There is a large body of spiritual, biographical and historical literature available in various forms on the life and philosophy of Guru Nanak. However, the most authentic and direct source of the Guru's philosophy is his *bani*; a composition comprising the founding segments of the sacred Sikh scripture Adi Granth (Grewal, 1990). Guru Nanak's *bani* is comprehensive and multi-dimensional involving religio-spiritual, socio-cultural and historical contents. Its linguistic, metaphorical and cultural forms reflect the geo-political, socio-economic and contextual conditions of the 15th-16th century India. Guru Nanak mainly used the Punjabi language and Gurmukhi script for composing and sharing his messages - although he was familiar with Sanskrit, Persian and other languages, which he used in his wider discourse during travels across South West Asia, the Middle East and beyond (Bhardwaj, 2013).

The selection and interpretation of philosophical dimensions of Guru Nanak's teachings highlight their deeply spiritual, social and highly intuitive nature. In order to develop a contextual framework for understanding Guru Nanak's political philosophy, this essay offers a comparative overview of the origins and parallel development of the Sikh and Protestant political philosophies across India and Europe. It also considers the conceptual and linguistic evolution of the philosophical principles, which have influenced the development of contemporary Sikh/Punjabi/Indian politics. The selection, extraction and interpretation of relevant philosophical dimensions from Guru Nanak's teachings highlight their deeply spiritual, widely social and highly intuitive nature (Mandair A-PS in Singh P and Fenech, 2014).

The rise of the Sikh Reform Movement in North India was contemporary to the rise of the Protestant Reform Movement in Northern Europe. Both movements hugely influenced the course of history through the transformation of their respective societies. The movements were parallel but unconnected until British colonial intervention in India. However, it is of a great historical coincidence that the fifth successor of Guru Nanak, Sri Guru Arjan Dev ji, compiled and installed the Adi Granth at Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar in 1604 while the commissioning of the modern version of the Holy Bible - involving translation from the original Hebrew and Greek languages into English - also took place in 1604 at Hampton Court, London, at the request of King James 1 of England (Bragg, 2011). Unlike the King James Bible, there was no state patronage or commissioning of the Adi Granth. Instead, it was a liberating organic development compiled in the Punjabi language and Gurmukhi script - a unique historical shift from the use of Sanskrit and Persian, which were the established and dominant languages of Indian philosophy, and the Moghul Empire.

7. **“The first, the purest, the saintliest and the noblest of them all’: Guru Nanak in the writings of western women 1814-1920”**

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In 1969 Professor Ganda Singh's nearly 100 sources on the life and teachings of Guru Nanak included only one woman, Dorothy Field. Fifty years later, this paper highlights and contextualises Field's contribution plus introducing eight other European women's references to Guru Nanak. These include the brief comments of Victorian travellers-cum-artists and the enthusiastic representation of Guru Nanak by the leading Theosophists, Helena Blavatsky and Annie Besant. The women differed in their politics and religious belief, but all united in commending Guru Nanak as the Sikh religion's remarkable 'founder'. Christianity provided them with a lens and a yardstick. This was especially true for Charlotte Tucker, whose missionary commitment brought her close to Sikhs and led her to study Gurmukhi.

8. “Exploring the Multiple Interpretations of the Legacy of Guru Nanak in Pakistan through the historical Gurdwaras”

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Out of over 170 historical Sikh gurdwaras, all of which are linked to one of the 10 Sikh Gurus, in Pakistan, over 130 of them are connected with Guru Nanak. These are places where either the Guru spent some time of his life, performed a miracle, or simply stopped over for a short while. Before Partition all of these shrines, scattered across the length and breadth of the country, were functional. Today, even as the Pakistan government is actively seeking to renovate and open up historical gurdwaras to Sikh pilgrims, there are only a handful of them which are functional.

In this paper I would explore the story of some of these gurdwaras associated with Nanak, in Pakistan, and how they fit in a Muslim State, which since Partition began imagining itself in a Muslim exclusivist manner. Through the story of some of these gurdwaras I would highlight the contrasting attitude of the people living around these gurdwaras. The most common of these attitudes is either of indifference or antagonism, in line with the State’s historical perception of non-Muslim history of the country. By exploring the stories of the gurdwaras in Pasrur, Uch Sharif and Jhaman I would talk about how these gurdwaras became a victim of history and contemporary politics.

However there is also another set of gurdwaras that defy this statist and exclusivist narrative. Here in the stories of people who live around these gurdwaras, the stories of Guru Nanak survive, which translates into a special relationship with the gurdwara. In this section I would look at the stories of gurdwaras at Kartarpur Sahib, Eimanabad (Farooqabad), and Sialkot, where the local Muslim population upheld, in one way or another, the sanctity of the gurdwara, by either treating it as a sacred space due to its association with Nanak, or by appropriating it in a Muslim milieu. The story of the Muslim Sufi shrine, Nalaukha Hazari at Shahkot also fits this narrative, where a popular folk story presents a unique relation of the shrine with Guru Nanak.

In the final section of the paper I would look at some of the recently renovated gurdwaras of Guru Nanak. Revamped by the State, which is increasingly trying to project a soft image of itself, these gurdwaras reflect the complex relationship the Pakistani state enjoys with its Sikh heritage. While on one hand these gurdwaras reflect the changing attitude of the State on the other hand they represent a continuation of the basic framework of history the State has adopted, which compartmentalizes and otherizes history and heritage into the categories of distinct and often competing religions.

Through the journey of these diverse gurdwaras I would highlight the different interpretations of Nanak’s legacy in Pakistan today, also while exploring the frameworks that produce these distinct interpretations and attitudes.

9. **“What are they teaching these kids?: A look at a small-town Sikh community and their lessons about Guru Nanak.”**

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Springfield, Missouri is home to small, but growing, community of Sikhs. In August 2011, some of them came together to establish the Sikh Temple of the Ozarks, a gurdwara to serve as a community center. While not all local Sikhs frequent the gurdwara, some twenty-five families or so still meet to share the message of the Gurus.

My presentation looks to investigate how the life of Guru Nanak is communicated and emphasized in the teachings of this small midwestern community. Through interviews and surveys, I look to discern which lessons of Guru Nanak stand out in their understandings, interpretations, and presentation of his life. This inquiry will examine the lessons given at the gurdwara, as well as materials used by local Sikhs at home (websites, books, etc.) to critically engage the sources for their views.

The goal here is to examine how a small community engages with both their shared history and their personal connection to Guru Nanak as both an intellectual and affective pursuit.

10. **“Guru Nanak’s Philosophy of Language and Being in *Siddh Gosht*”**

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Guru Nanak’s composition *Siddh Gosht* in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* represents a dialogic account of an encounter that took place between the Guru himself and a group of Nath Yogis around the town of Batala, Panjab in the early 16th century. In the composition Guru Nanak responds to series of queries posed by the Yogis, and his answers in verse form together present both a critique of the philosophy of the Nath Yogis and at the same time a comprehensive account of the Sikh approach to transcendence and liberation, in particular through the engagement with *śabad*. Guru Nanak outlines the philosophical and pragmatic importance of *śabad* as the medium and the means for realizing the nature of self and of the world and the relation between the two, i.e., realizing the illusory nature of the ego-projected separation between them. In his discourse, Guru Nanak presents a philosophy in which language plays the central part, acting as a material means, the vehicle of thought, and as the very medium of transformation of the self. For Guru Nanak, it is not a particular sectarian formation or the deliberate separation from human society that brings about

liberation, but instead a direct, conscious engagement and merging with the human universal and *sine qua non* of language. Indeed, as Guru Nanak has written elsewhere, “the ego contains its own remedy”. In this case, the remedy is that which is part and parcel of the human experience itself, an engagement and confrontation with the very way of being human. In *Siddh Gosht* we witness what we must regard from our modern vantage as a fusion of approaches; Guru Nanak’s discourse is, in addition to being poetic (which is integral to the technique), it is philosophical, pragmatic, psychological, empirical. His analysis represents a total approach to mind.

11. “Guru Nanak in light of Sajjan Thug Sakhi”

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The janamsākhī literature is routinely referred to as hagiographic literature about Sikhism’s founder, Gurū Nanak. Using this categorization, janamsākhīs are taken to represent two important aspects in the Sikh community’s development. Firstly, an evolving belief in Nanak as a charismatic savior. Secondly, they reflect a communal need to develop and maintain a cohesive -yet, changing and plural, form of religious identity centered. Both considerations rely on notions of hagiography as reflective of the collective memory and belief in religious community in the charismatic personage of saintly figures. The category of hagiography facilitates entry into the domain of world religions and is given to Sikhism in the 1970s, following shortly after the partition of Panjab and addressing the new nationalist context that Sikhs found themselves in during the second half of the 20th century. Furthermore, this definition is central to the field of Sikh Studies, which begins to enter North American universities in tandem the nationalization of the subcontinent. A rigorous academic debate about whether janamsākhīs are best approached methodologically using modern anglophone genres of secular biography or religious hagiography occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Although this debate is largely inconclusive, Sikh Studies scholars at Western universities have largely refused to try to reconsider the categorization of the janamsākhī. An overlooked outcome of this debate is that the diversity of anecdotal sākhīs has been ignored as apocryphal or reduced according to an imagined narrative of the Sikh community’s historical development.

In order to reengage this diverse narrative form, I examine the sākhī about Sajjan Thug to suggest that hagiography is a mistaken categorization. The janamsākhīs are best thought of as a distinct literary “testimonial” genre. The logic of hagiography not only restrains literary interpretations of individual sākhīs but also mistakenly circumscribes seminal literary texts under a paradigm salvation by belief in an embodied saviour. I approach the janamsākhī archive as part of a testimonial genre, making sākhīs available for critical literary and theoretical engagement. Secondly, a more nuanced understanding of Sikh textuality and traditions of intellection can emerge. This promises to develop new avenues in archival research and textual interpretation.

12. **“Dangerous Evolutions: Consciousness, Cosmogony and Cosmology as a Secularizing Force”**

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In my “The Animal Sublime: Rethinking the Sikh Mystical Body” (*JAAR* (2012)), I argued that the human is a liminal space between animal and saint, and that in the transition to colonial-modernity both the animal and the mystic are sacrificed to the god of reason giving birth to the secular liberal subject. In this paper, I want to develop further the notion of that liminal space and refigure it as “evolutionary” or “transformative”, such that the human (*manmukh*) becomes a temporary stage and ground along a much longer, indeed cosmological, scale that “evolves” into the saint (*gurmukh*). This new stadal frame involves re-reading egoic-subjectivity (*haumai*) as a cosmological and cosmogonic principle of individuation (Navdeep Mandair 1991), that is tied to the development of consciousness: first emanating as unconscious (*acit*) or subconscious earth and its creatures (*jag, jant*), then emerging as the human self-conscious (*cit, jiaa*) world culminating in the superconscious state (*chauta-pad*) of the saint, who integrates earth with world, semiotic with symbolic (Kirsteva), animal with human (*jag-jivan*). Although others have made similar evolutionary projections – (Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* (1883), Bergson’s *Élan vital* (1907), Aurobindo’s *Supermind* (1920), de Chardin’s *Noosphere* (1922) – I want to integrate more contemporary thought such as Daniel Kahneman’s *Fast and Slow thinking*, and Iain McGilchrist’s Right and Left Brain hemispheres symbolized as Master and Emissary. Further I want to tie the Guru Granth Sahib’s individuation to Enrique Dussel’s distinction between secularizing and secularism – pointing towards the notion of dangerous evolutions, figured by the short-circuiting of individuation into the trap or loop of false individuality of the ego.

13. **“Guru Nanak and Sikh Identity”**

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This paper begins by examining three aspects of Sikh identity as they emerge from a consideration of Guru Nanak’s life and teachings. First, it discusses the usage and significance of the term “Sikh” in Guru Nanak’s *bani*. Second, it challenges the academic discourse that posits a medieval “Sant” movement in North India, and Guru Nanak’s supposed placement in this category. Third, it highlights Guru Nanak’s *bani* that comments on social justice and governance. These three examinations provide the basis for considering

the evolution and contemporary expressions of Sikh tradition, and the contested interpretations that exist within Sikh Studies discourse. The paper argues that considering Guru Nanak's *bani*, Sikh history, and expressions of Sikh tradition closely (as illustrated in the initial three examples) can weaken or even sweep aside supposed binaries such as academic vs. traditional, or universal vs. exclusive. Finally, the paper speculates on what this argument might imply for expressions of the Sikh tradition going forward in time.

14. “*Gurbani Kirtan* through Decolonial Lenses: New Challenges of an Ancient Genre”

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Five centuries after it was first established by Guru Nanak, *Gurbani kirtan* remains an important practice among the Sikh communities in India and abroad, albeit changing in its musical settings, which over time have created new standards of performance.

The plurality of forms and arrangements in which *shabads* are rendered is a testimony of the inclusive nature of the Gur-Sikh thinking, as well as is a sonic portrait of historical shifts in the Sikh culture, from the pre-colonial, modern, and post-colonial eras, to the present times of globalization. Embedded though in the epistemic ground of colonial matrix (Mignolo 2011, Bhogal 2015), the notion of modernity, as applied to contemporary normative models of performance, needs to be assessed critically. In the 20th century, the assimilative force of modernity contributed to homogenizing the diversity of local musical expressions into a nationalist key. This put into danger of disappearing the aural knowledge of pre-colonial repertoires, which include rare ragas mentioned in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and a vast array of melodic-rhythmic compositions orally transmitted in the Gur-Sikh culture since the Gurus' time. It is via this framework of colonial and nationalist imprint that *Gurbani kirtan* has been interpreted by ethnomusicologists as a vernacular style of either Hindu devotional song-forms (Slawek 1996, Beck 2014) or classical music genres (Widdess and Sanyal 2002). Through decolonial lenses and musicological analysis, this paper deconstructs the textual and cultural biases that - by neglecting its pre-colonial oral history - have contributed to marginalizing *Gurbani kirtan* as a sub-form of genres popularly practiced, and widely described in written accounts, by the dominant cultures. As dewesternization emerges from the energies, knowledges, beliefs and praxis that have never been destroyed (Mignolo 2018), a decolonial approach entails rediscovering local histories and oral practices delinked from the colonial matrix, to preserve autochthonous forms and repertoires that, from the time of Guru Nanak, have resisted both colonial and nationalist processes of homologation.

15. “Keynote I: Guru Nanak in the Arena of Global Philosophies”

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16. “Keynote at the Reception on Friday Evening”

Dr. Mark Juergensmeyer
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17. “The limits to control of sacred spaces: Nankana Sahib, the partition of Punjab and access to Sikh shrines in Pakistan since 1947”

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The decision of the governments of India and Pakistan in November 2018 to develop the Kartarpur corridor across the river Ravi linking Dera Baba Nanak Sahib (in India) and gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur (in Pakistan), seventy years after the division of Punjab, marks an important symbolic moment in the access to Sikh sacred spaces. This paper examines how the efforts to control and manage this access in West Punjab by the governments of India and Pakistan have been contested by Sikh institutions and circumvented by social developments, including the emergence of a Sikh diaspora in the West. It assesses the regimes of regulation to control access to these shrines. It also reflects on the prospects for the Kartarpur corridor to become a ‘bridge of peace’ in the year of Nanak’s 550-birth anniversary. The Sikh case, the paper argues, offers an unusual comparative case study of closure of sacred spaces in a community’s homeland. Underlying this development, it will be suggested, are profound concerns of Sikh claims to religious and political sovereignty associated with these shrines that ultimately led to the Partition itself.

18. “Sounding Guru Nanak’s Message: Means that Matter”

Dr. Inderjit N. Kaur
Assistant Professor of Ethnic Musicology
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Whereas Guru Nanak, and the successive Sikh Gurus, spread their spiritual, philosophical, social and political message through aural song, rather than visual text, much of the analysis of their message has been done without reference to the role of the production and reception of the sonic. In this paper, I present a small portion from a book project, in which I ask questions such as: (i) What does a consideration of the physiological production and aural

reception of Gurbāni add to our understanding of the transmissibility of Guru Nanak's message? (ii) In what ways are the message and means of transmission commensurate? (iii) What sorts of modernist binaries are troubled through such a consideration? For this presentation, I will make my argument through a musical and phonetic analysis of sung Gurbāni.

19. **“The Gurbani Kirtan *Parampara*: A Pedagogy that Decolonizes the Sikh Self”**

Nirinjan Kaur Khalsa, Loyola Marymount University

This paper will utilize my own research, education and personal practice within the Gurbani Kirtan *parampara* to argue that its orally-transmitted knowledge resists both colonial and reformist attempts to homogenize and calcify Sikh identity into a normative standard, and instead is a dynamic living process that continually decolonizes the Sikh self. For the past 18 years, I have been learning Gurbani Kirtan, including its history and philosophy, from exponents of the *parampara* who trace their musical lineage to Guru Arjan's court and Sikh lineage to Bhai Sadharan, a close disciple of Guru Nanak (Bhai Sadharan was “second only to Guru Angad in serving Guru Nanak” [*Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*] who honored him with the title Bhai. He was also a mason who built Guru Angad's home in Kartarpur [*Mahan Kosh*] and Baoli Sahib at Goindwal.). The pedagogy and knowledge conveyed by this family has given me an insight into the holistic self-understanding of a pre-colonial Sikhi, which continues to inform my own Sikh Studies scholarship and practice. It has demonstrated to me the centrality of experiential methodologies as a way to reorient and liberate the colonized mind from hegemonic socio-cultural and religious conditioning. It has shown me the unbounded and ever flourishing nature of Sikh knowledge production that is fearless (*nirbhao*) - never afraid to neither question nor be questioned and does not fear diverse modes of Sikh practice, expression and interpretation. Today, when fear and enmity are driving nationalist and isolationist mentalities in the name of communal and self-preservation, the path of Guru Nanak offers a revolutionary way of being in the world that recognizes the interconnectedness of all life. It is through the memory, pedagogy and practice of the Gurbani Kirtan *parampara* that Guru Nanak's path can be experienced as a *sadhana* to be embodied rather than a dogma to be enforced. In other words, it offers a transformative lens through which “traditional” *parampara* scholarship can be understood as a pedagogy that decolonizes the self for a Sikh sovereignty.

20. **“Guru Nanak as *Nirgun Bhakt*: The First Sikh Master, the Sikhs, and the Seventeenth-century *Bhakt-Māl* of the Dadupanthi Raghavdas”**

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On this, the 550th birth anniversary of the first Sikh Master, Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE) it is fitting that we recognise 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 that these teachings have constructed. Both early and later Sikh writers have done a fine job excavating these teachings over the centuries looking at both the hymns written by the Guru and those narratives written about him by his loving followers, the Sikhs or Nanakpanthis.

But these very same writers have generally neglected acknowledging 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, a situation that was only remedied in the early nineteenth century. This remedy was short lived however and the situation it encountered more or less remains so to this day. This paper will take up the challenge and examine what is the earliest non-Sikh look at Guru Nanak in Brajbhasha from the perspective of those one writer who believed he shared a kinship with the first Sikh Master, the famous Dadupanthi writer, Raghavdas.

21. “Keynote III: Guru Nanak: A Contemporary Message for Precarious Times”

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22. “How can we inculcate Guru Nanak’s Teachings in our Children?”

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23. “Guru Nanak’s Universal Message is a Solution for our Modern Times”

Harbir Kaur Bhatia
Cultural Commissioner
Santa Clara Cultural Commission
Chair in Community Relations & Advisor to Joy of Seva, CA, USA

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