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Sahib Shri Kanshi Ram: The Architect of Bahujan Samaj

**Prem K. Chumber Editor-In-Chief:
Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba**

Babu Kanshi Ram ((15 March 1934 – 9 October 2006), venerated by his followers and admirers as 'Sahib' and 'Manyavar' continued the legacy of great Dalit struggle that began with the advent of Buddhism in India in the 6th century BCE and slowly graduated through the strenuous efforts first of Jyotirao Phule (11 April 1827 – 28 November 1890) then of Boddhisatva Bharat Ratan Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (4 April 1891 – 6 December 1956). He brought into the vast public domain of Indian democracy a new form of leadership that instantly made a long-lasting place in the imaginations of millions of lowest of the low and the underprivileged artisans/service class people of India – constitutionally designated as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). His sterling contribution lies in organizing the educated youth and varied SC and OBCs employees and inculcating within their hearts missionary spirit for the social transformation of the Indian society as a whole by emancipating and empowering them to rule the country. To achieve this mega goal – "Change the System" – Sahib Shri Kanshi Ram founded the All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees' Federation (BAMCEF) in 1971 and Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DS-4) in 1981 that eventually culminated into a larger political formation what came to be known by the name of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in 1984.

Sahib Shri Kanshi Ram did not confine the strings of his newly launched socio-political process of empowering the lower castes to himself only. He, rather, let it loose to spread among his people who hitherto fore were prevented from entering the corridors of political powers by varied Machiavellian machinations. He based his political strategy to prepare the way for his people to enter the parliament on the basis of the famous slogan of Dr. Ambedkar: "Educate, Agitate, Organise", and chiselled his innovative '85 vs 15' formula of 'Master Key' to unlock the portal of political power. He taught his people that they should prepare themselves to attain political power on the basis of 'bargaining and not begging'. He cycled day and night for months together to reach the lowest of the low to apprise them of their hidden numerical power that can win for them political power in the state and national democratic electoral processes. His dexterously prepared second line of young leadership belied the centuries old indoctrinated belief that Dalits are born only to serve! He proved the world that they have now come up to take over the reign of the rule into their own hands and became capable of writing their own destiny. The BSP under his pupil Mayawati ruled Uttar Pradesh, one of the most politically powerful states in India, for four terms as Chief Minister. Sahib Shri Kanshi Ram taught millions of SCs and OBCs of this vast democracy how to convert their numerical strength into a potent electoral force to defeat those who thrived by dividing them in the name of caste, religion and false electoral promises.

The forum of "Ambedkar Times" and "Desh Doaba" take immense pride in congratulating our contributors, readers and well-wishers on the 88th birth anniversary of Manyavar Sahib Shri Kanshi Ram Ji. We are also feeling proud to humbly state that Ambedkartimes.com, dedicated to teachings and life-works of Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia and Sahib Shri Kanshi Ram, has successfully completed its 13 years of regular publication. We seek your support and encouragement and good wishes to continue with our small effort in your service.

Revisiting Social Democracy

Since the advent of the enlightenment phase in Europe, a sort of unethical war has been going on between man and mother nature. Nature has been around since the birth of our solar system – in fact, it was even much older than that given the birth of the solar system within the already existing galactic system. Mother nature has given shape to the our earth planet where we evolved at one of its innumerable evolutionary time intervals. Nature has its own pace to move on, nevertheless with certain identifiable patterns. There was a time in the life of human beings when they used to believe in supernatural powers as and when they confronted any devastating natural phenomenon nay calamities. They socially constructed various myths to appease the angry nature that eventually became an interesting area of study in the domain of cultural anthropology to delve deep into the folk psyche of our forefathers to critically interpret our current lives. However, with the onset of the project of en-

lightenment in Europe, a new beginning was made in the evolutionary phase of human society. It was during this period that the process of taming nature was put into practice. Since then a sort of tug of war has been going on between nature and homo sapiens. Covid-19 is one of various consequences of this ongoing belligerent interaction.



lightenment in Europe, a new beginning was made in the evolutionary phase of human society. It was during this period that the process of taming nature was put into practice. Since then a sort of tug of war has been going on between nature and homo sapiens. Covid-19 is one of various consequences of this ongoing belligerent interaction.

The cataclysm of the Covid-19 pandemic – first identified in China – is now afflicting the entire globe. It continues to rampage unbridled in its new strains despite the availability of recently developed vaccines to impede its deadly spread. At the social level this terrible malady has clearly shown that socially constructed boundaries of caste, class, and creed go unrecognized by such a contagion. It refuses to distinguish between the so-called upper and lower castes, or the rich and poor, as it scythes through societies. Thus, Nature has taught us, in its own unique but harsh way, an unforgettable lesson of unity in diversity, and to similarly defy such man-made social divisions. No doubt, that poor lower castes, daily wagers, slum dwellers, and hapless migrants in general, have been suffering the most, but this tiny but monstrous virus has not spared the affluent either – who are disproportionately from the 'upper' castes. It has become clear to all and sundry that freedom is indivisible; so is the burden of oppressive social divisions. Discriminatory practices generate social tensions, which eventually give rise of covert and overt conflicts. Once conflicts are erupted, their spread could not be confined only to the underdog in a given society. The recent eruption of mass violence in the United

States of America over the brutal killing of George Floyd, a 46-year old black man, by a white cop of the Minneapolis police, which engulfed the entire society in no time across its racial bounds, is a case in point. Violence has an inherent tendency to spread destruction all round. One or a few may ignite it. But once it is out of bag, its heat does not spare anyone who comes within its range. The same principle applies on structural violence. Though the weaker and vulnerable sections of a society suffer the most in structural violence, but those who control the levers of political, social and economic power could also not live with peace for the evident fear of social upheaval. It is a common sense that those who live in palaces surrounded by shanties remain in constant fear of revolt against their ill-earned wealth.

There is no doubt that our susceptibility to Covid-19 is common across all social, economic and cultural boundaries. Our sorrows and pleasures are also common. So why do we sequester ourselves in discriminatory caste/ class/ faith/ gender boundaries? Can our caste/ class/ faith/gender save us from the likes of the Corona virus? To face boldly such Corona pandemics like natural onslaughts, we need to free ourselves from oppressive boundaries of social exclusion and discriminatory social practices. However, if we dismantle our fabricated boundaries of caste-based exclusion and structures of social oppression and end our over-exploitative approach to Mother Nature, then surely, the latter will reciprocate in its innate benign way. We have already seen the beginnings of this, though in some pockets, in the last couple of decades. We can feel a stark difference in our environment just a little after self-imposed restraint as a preventive measure against the spread of Corona virus. As Covid-19 afflicts us physically, so social discrimination afflicts us mentally, hollowing out our society, and leaving us more vulnerable. Let us leave behind caste binaries, and unite and empower ourselves as a society. This could be the only way to overcome not only such pandemics, but to proceed on to strengthen ourselves and achieve the real freedom which Dr Ambedkar had appropriately called the soul of a nation, entailing as it does Equality and Fraternity to ultimately get rid of our society from the centuries old endemic of social exclusion.

All scientific advancements as generally projected, have failed so far to control the Corona pandemic. The purpose here is not to underrate science per se, but the way it has been developed and used, needs to be looked a bit more seriously. No doubt, for an instance, we have been able to overcome food crisis in our country with the adoption

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Revisiting Social Democracy

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of new agrarian technology under the rubric of green revolution. But at the same time, we have also despoiled our soil and groundwater sources, and contaminated our food products in the mad race to achieve ever more yields through the overdose of varied chemicals. Man has created many more such crises in different domains in the world. However, no worldwide crisis till date had totally locked down the entire world as witnessed currently. Deaths are reported from all parts of the world. The whole world is seized by the fear of this pandemic of Covid-19. Equipment to fight the deadly pandemic has fallen severely short. Hospitals are refusing to admit some, especially the elderly patients. It is alleged that there are no more ventilators to provide relief to the sick. Moreover, disposing of dead bodies has become a crisis within a crisis. Food shortages further aggravate the misery. The State apparatuses are becoming increasingly oppressive in their endeavors to keep recalcitrant populations indoors. A vicious spiral is evolving with the passage of every day - more patients, less hospitals, less food, and more resistance to staying indoors. Fears are rising that if lockdowns are allowed to continue for some more days then law and order problems will inevitably arise.

During such times of crises in the past, the psychological respite of religion used to provide some solace. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has pushed religions of various nomenclatures into oblivion - at least for the time being. None were competent to face its poisonous fangs. This last resort of the masses has also betrayed them in their hour of need. It has taught a lesson, in a way, to all those who had shut their doors to the so-called lowest-of-the-low on the one hand, and to *kaffirs*, on the other. Both science and religion seem to be on the run. The doors of all religious centers throughout the world have been shut for the fear of the further spread of the Corona. And science is still groping in the dark to find a suitable remedy for this worldwide ailment. Scattered voices can be heard, frequently echoed, that humans played with nature, and now, it seems, nature is taking a swipe at them and their avaricious civilization. That they are being tutored that they are not alone, and that other living beings have inalienable rights to our planet too - and these swipes are becoming both increasingly frequent and potent, in the shape of tornadoes, floods, pandemics, heatwaves, etc.

In the face of the evident inability of science and religion, what

option(s) are left for humans to face the challenge? It is suggested that we have to realize our true calling. Though envisioning themselves to be the apex of all biological life as we do, humans should aspire to live in a happy equilibrium with the earth, its other creatures, and its fauna and flora. In this holistic approach, if any part of (this) indivisible nature is allowed to atrophy, it would have ever larger and more violent impacts on its remaining parts. Covid-19 is the outcome of that unmindful consumption of this biodiversity by insatiable human lust. It is a warning to be heeded by humanity collectively. We human beings are the originators and drivers of the choking pollution all around. Forests are disappearing at an alarming speed, and so are aquifers; and life in the oceans is struggling against annihilation. The heavy hand of extinction was never more visible since the advent of human civilization.

Religion mired in its own political economy has also been failing humanity to connect with its true nature. Instead of teaching the lesson that all humans are similar, its protagonists are busy sowing the seeds of social binaries, prejudices and false hopes. And science instead of becoming a savior/liberator of mankind has been enslaved by the corporate profit ethic, and instrumentalized for exploiting the entire planetary ecosystem to the hilt. Even as humans are the culprits, then it is also only they themselves who can save themselves; and for this they need to turn inward, listening and responding to their inner conscience. They must realize that all living creatures, whether of land or sea, also have a natural claim on the resources of our planet. They are not just resources themselves, to be consumed by humans. They are also children of Nature, and to smite them means to smite Nature itself. We already see signs of its rising rage, and continuing down this path means risking incalculable and irreparable environmental degradation, and pandemic led decimation of human life. Our science should not be a tool to transmute Nature for petty conveniences.

So, what have we to learn from this time of pandemic? We need to be extra cautious against the nefarious spread of this deadly virus, and to be socially well connected to come together and confront this common enemy of the mankind. We have been asked to practice social distancing, but in the Indian context social distancing is not merely an injunction to be observed transiently till the Covid-19 has run its course. Caste and creed have long been creating social distancing in our society, but of a type

which pandemics do not recognise. We are quite used to the practice of keeping social distance from the so-called lower castes. The centuries old evil of caste based social exclusion has done great damage to our country. Despite consistent opposition to this deeply entrenched social malady during divergent social reform movements spearheaded by saints, Sufis, gurus, and statesmen at different intervals, mapping the long historical span of the existence of India itself, caste based social segregations and boycotting of the ex-untouchable castes continue to survive, though subtly, even today. Many of its historically oppressed victims still live in segregated neighborhoods in the vicinity of mainstream villages in the vast rural areas of our country, even after many decades of independence (Ram 2016:32-39). Purifying utensils in fire, considered polluted after the use by ex-untouchables, was a common practice until not so late in our caste-ridden society, as was removal of the stain of pollution through a touch of an ex-untouchable by taking a dip in a holy *sarovar* (pond)/river and/or with a sprinkle of holy water.

What we need today during the deadly health crisis of Covid-19 contagious malady is to practice not only physical distancing (to use this term in place of social distancing) in common with the rest of the world, but also - to coin a phrase - 'social proximity', i.e. the feeling of social cohesiveness to put our emotional, cultural, social and material resources together for common use. This feeling of cohesiveness is what Dr Ambedkar called fraternity for the foundation of a strong nation. One aspect of this fraternity or social cohesiveness would be a sense of collective concern manifesting in a far stronger compliance with both moral and legal injunctions for the greater public good. In the present Covid-19 situation, for an instance, physical distancing and self-isolation would have been much more likely to be both appreciated and implemented at the individual level had fraternity been all prevalent in our society. For the realization of the intrinsic purpose of physical distancing and social-isolation, i.e., to save the mankind from the rage of the current pandemic, we need a cohesively strong society. Such a socially cohesive strong society in turn depends on the depth of fraternity in its social interaction. Furthermore, fraternity implicitly sown the seeds of equality and greater liberty. If the centrality of fraternity is accepted, then the underlying wisdom in the vision of Dr Ambedkar, which emphasized the interconnectedness of liberty, equality and fraternity for the

emergence of social democracy in India, becomes clear. The more socially cohesive we are, the more capable we would be to face the current and any such future challenge. Dr Ambedkar rightly said that caste is antithetical to nation. It does not only divide labour but also labourers. A caste-ridden society prevents, or at least hinders, the flourishing of fraternity.

For a sustainable rooting of social democracy in India, caste needs to be stamped out entirely. Fraternity and caste cannot coexist. Fraternity is foundational for a sound social democracy. It is in this crucial context; we need to assure ourselves that this temporary alleviative and precautionary measure of physical distancing (social) to fight Covid-19 pandemic should not be allowed to further intensify the already existing subtle caste-based social boundaries in our social set up. The real strength of a nation to boldly face any challenge, natural or whatever, as emphasized by Dr Ambedkar, depends on the bedrock of social cohesiveness - fraternity. Fraternity is lifeline of a nation. Electoral democracies devoid of fraternity within their respective social realms often pushed their respective political regimes towards authoritarianism. Political democracy without social democracy could not put an end to widening of inequalities.

Nor it helps create conducive environment for the emancipation and empowerment of downtrodden. Rather, it converts the latter into its potential constituency for continuous electoral gains at different intervals. Dr Ambedkar warned of serious consequences of having only political equality (one man, one vote, one value) without a matching equality of social and economic levels in Independent India (for details see: Ram 2010: 12-38). To make everyone realize equal value of his/her vote, s/he needs at the first place to be bring at par with those who hitherto found them better placed in terms of social status and economic conditions historically. Social democracy is not only vital for a viable political democracy; it is equally imperative for boldly facing a common enemy like the prevalent one of novel coronavirus induced pandemic.

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Earth Hour

Climate Change to Save Earth

Earth Hour is observed on March's last Saturday every year in almost all countries of the world to make people aware about natural disasters due to climate change and their prevention. Earth Hour, an international event, is an hour long "light off" event. Excessive and non-essential use of outdoor artificial light, is affecting human health, wildlife behaviour and our ability to observe stars and other celestial objects. It is going to be celebrated on March 27th, 2021 this year between 8.30 pm to 9.30 pm local time for an hour by turning off non-essential lights in homes, businesses and government establishments. As many as 2.2 million people celebrated Earth Hour for the very first time in 2007 in Sydney, Australia on March 31 from 7.30 pm to 8.30 pm by turning off non-essential lights in their homes. The city of San Francisco in the United States of America also joined the Earth Hour campaign in October 2007 by turning off the non-essential lights for an hour.

Earth Hour caught popularity worldwide and has been celebrated internationally since 2008. The idea of celebrating Earth Hour was initiated by members of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature to save the environment. In 2003, Australia was hit by a severe drought, which scientists attributed to the ever-increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. In 2004, members of Australia's World Wildlife Fund for Nature met Leo Burnett, director of a Sydney-based advertising company, to create a campaign with an idea of turning off non-essential lights for just one hour every year to save the planet from environmental degradation. In 2006, Leo Burnett along with Sydney's Mayor Clover Lord Moore and members of World Wildlife Fund Nature, worked hard to make the campaign a reality. The campaign was initially dubbed 'The Big Flick' which was later renamed 'Earth Hour' to address turning off non-essential lights which are causing an increase in greenhouse gases.

Since 2008, Earth Hour has been celebrated on various themes. Starting from the theme 'Dark City, Bright Idea' in 2008 to 'Connect to Earth' theme in 2019. In 2020, the theme was 'Climate and Sustainable Development' with an emphasis on banning the use of disposable plastic products forever. Once used, these plastic items are thrown on rubbish heaps or dumped in water which are later consumed by animals leading to their premature deaths. 2021's theme 'Climate Change to Save Earth' is a timely and straightforward message to all countries of the world. From the Industrial Revolution till now, human beings have changed 75 per cent of the earth in the name of eco-

nomie growth of the human race to fulfill their aspirations. Dense forests have now been replaced by concrete jungles. Most of the wildlife is replaced by cars, vehicles and automobiles while birds are replaced by airplanes and spacecrafts. At the same time human beings through their activities, while blindly exploiting all the natural resources, are releasing huge amounts of gases into the atmosphere. As a result, the average temperature of the earth has increased by more than 1 degree Celsius since the Industrial Revolution. An IPCC 2014 report by the United Nation stated that the rapid rise in the average global temperature due to human activities is increasing the number and intensity of natural disasters. No country in the world



will be able to escape the onslaught of these natural disasters in the near future unless greenhouse gas emissions are rapidly reduced. Fearing the report's warning, countries around the world outlined their plans in the Paris Climate Agreement, 2015 to cut greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the effects of climate change. Even five years later, most countries in the world, especially those that emit the highest proportion of the greenhouse gases into the atmosphere (the United States of America and China) did not pay any attention to it.

The theme of this year's Earth Hour is 'Climate Change to Save Earth'. Through this theme Earth Hour is delivering a message more pertinent and raising awareness about the crisis of nature loss, climate change and global warming. So far, human beings have brought negative changes in the climate in the name of economic growth, imbalancing various ecosystems. Rising global temperatures, increasing number of natural disasters, declining numbers of wildlife species are urging human beings to put a stop to their harmful activities and adopt pro-nature actions to reverse the changes in climate to save the planet. Otherwise nature has its own way to reverse the imbalance as has been highlighted

from the existing COVID-19 pandemic.

The main purpose of celebrating Earth Hour seems to be a small effort to save the environment from the rising amount of greenhouse gases by turning off the non-essential lights for just one hour a year. But if we think deeply, stopping the use of non-essential lights is a great lesson in protecting human beings and other organisms from all kinds of harm. Using more light consumes many energy sources and increases Earth's temperature by emitting greenhouse gases. More than 80 per cent of the world's population, and 99 per cent of Americans and Europeans cannot see the natural scenery at night because of the light pollution. People living in cities with high levels of arti-

animals being misled by the illusion of daylight have set up shelters near the beaches.

All types of vegetation are affected by lights. The difference between day and night becomes negligible for the vegetation near these artificial night lights. They suffer from staying in the light all the time and also from high temperature which causes them to start flowering prematurely. The size of flowers and fruits remain small due to lack of a full time period required for a normal plant life cycle and adequate temperature to grow. Some plants wither prematurely being exposed to high temperatures and artificial illumination.

Guided by the Earth Hour campaign, some big cities have started turning off non-essential lights every day in main areas of the city. The city of Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, USA is making every effort to turn off the lights every night from 9 to 11 pm. New Island, an island nation in the Pacific Ocean, has become the world's first 'Dark Sky Place', with no lights on at night. In doing so, the country has made a significant contribution to the Earth Hour's campaign to tackle climate change while preserving the beauty of the night, protecting the flora and fauna from light pollution. Learning from the New Island, all the countries of the world should make their due contribution in this campaign to save the environment from Light pollution.

This year's Earth Hour, where the United Kingdom and Italy plan to continue the Paris Climate Agreement in Glasgow in November, 2021, could be a beacon for other governments around the world. The decisions that will be taken at this conference will affect the future generations. In this conference, plans should be made to save fauna & flora and the natural environment so that we can protect ourselves as well as the earth from the scourge of climate change. Earth Hour, though a series of small steps helps in protecting the planet from the increasing emissions of greenhouse gases and their deadly effects. It is in fact providing a great deal of education and guidance. In the long run, we will not only save the earth's environment by turning off the unnecessary lights, but we will also be able to save the earth from all kinds of disturbances in the life of all living beings. If every country, state and city adopt these practices, we can improve the state of the existing environment and save the lives of billions of birds and insects.



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Baba Nanak and the Bhagati Movement

As part of the generation born after the partition of Punjab in 1947, my first formal acquaintance with the terms *bhagat* (bhakta) and *bhagatī* (bhakti) came through a chapter entitled *bhagatī laihar* (literally, wave of devotion) that was to be found in my middle-school history textbook. That section of the book included sketches of individual saints—actual pictures, I mean. These were neatly framed by a paragraph or two of prose, providing information about the lives of the persons being depicted. I can still call up the images of Kabīr, Nānak, Ravidās, Sūrdās, and Tukārām that appeared on those pages, and I vaguely remember the thrust of the write-ups that accompanied them. Taken collectively, they suggested that these poets adopted ideas from a shared reservoir of sentiment that challenged existing beliefs and in the process opened a path of devotion for ordinary people. If the concept of the bhakti movement was not made explicit, the general idea of such a thing was certainly implied.

This classroom introduction to various bhakti poets served to amplify the knowledge of their poetry that I had absorbed courtesy of the first broadcast of the day from All India Radio, Jalandhar, which served the Punjab region. With the radio sitting in the common area of my family house, everyone's morning routine came to be enveloped in the misty waves of bhakti poetry that flowed from this hour-long program.

Other childhood memories of these saints came from diverse sources. My family once went to watch *Mahātmā Kabīr*, a commercial film released in 1954, and pictures of these saints were to be seen in newspapers and magazines that shuffled around in my house. Then there were the people who came to our house for one errand or another and whom my father warmly addressed as Kabīr Panthīs or Ravidāsīs. Indeed, two temples dedicated to Ravidās and one to Nāmdev existed in and around the town where I grew up.

In the years that followed, the history texts that came my way continued working on the assumption that these saints were part of a spiritual collective who sang about personal devotion and thereby set the outlines for a religion of the masses. Later we met the paired categories of sargun vs. nirgun (*Sanskrit saguna and nirguna*, meaning with or without attributes, these being thought of as distinct approaches to the divine) and bhaktavs. sant (these terms designat-

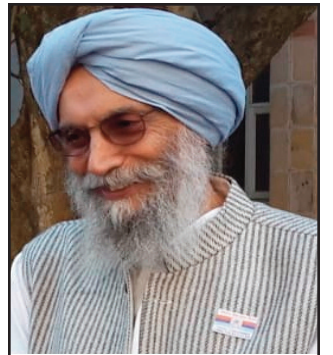
ing their respective adherents). These master categories were intended to provide a more textured understanding of bhakti as a style of spiritual commitment, and that in turn was narrativized as bhakti laihar, the bhakti wave, which included Bābā Nānak as an active practitioner and effective proponent. Conceptually speaking, this wave soaked the Punjabi air that my generation breathed.

In the period stretching from the celebrations of the 500th birth anniversary of Baba Nanak in 1969 to the 350th birth anniversary of the tenth Sikh guru, Gobind Singh, in 2016, there seems to have been little significant change in Punjabi thinking about this bhakti wave, either at the scholarly or at the popular level, and this is true both within the Sikh Panth (Sanskrit "path," but in Sikh literature the term means "community") and among Hindu groups with which it is in regular contact. As Bābā Nānak's birth was celebrated, he was often re-

when it jelled.. Similarly, I myself have emphasized the need to re-examine the existing image of Nānak as a mystic immersed in bhakti, so as to account more adequately for the robust sense of activism he exhibited during the twenty-some years he spent founding the Sikh Panth at Kartārpur (Creator's Town).

In the pages that follow, I will pursue that line of thinking, but with a special aim: to show that what Bābā Nānak said and did actually constituted a protest against the sort of bhakti he thought was being lionized in the world to which he belonged. Time and again he tried to separate himself from that milieu. As for the power dimension, I will take this in the literal political sense and show how the exercise of worldly power played a critical role in Bābā Nānak's formation. The question of what power he was trying to generate in the community of Sikhs he established at Kartārpur will hover

idently caused them to want to establish their independence as a family unit. Around 1490, Nanak and his wife and children moved to Sultanpur. There he obtained an accountant's job in the district administration under the control of Daulat Khan Lodhi (d. 1526), who was an uncle of the emperor in Delhi and a major figure in his own right. Sultānpur lay on the main route between Lahore and Delhi and as well on pilgrimage routes that connected the Punjab to Hindu temples in the Himalayas. Visitors of many backgrounds must have been a common sight. Around 1500, Lodhī was appointed the chief of the province of Lahore, with the apparent consequence that Nānak left his job, sent his wife and children back to Talvandī, and spent the next two decades travelling with his Muslim handyman, a man named Mardānā, who was also a gifted musician. He played the rebec. Nanak sings of "the sea shore, rivers, pilgrimage centers,



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(Prof GS Mann, Dr. Ronki Ram and Dr Jaspal Kaang
with the Research students of Dept of
Guru Nanak Sikh Studies, PU, Chandigarh (December 2017))

membered as part of this bhakti wave, which had the effect of positioning Sikhs as an offshoot of the larger Hindu community. Gurū Gobind Singh, in a somewhat similar way, was said to have revived an old Kshatriya ethos endemic to the local soil and by that means to have obstructed the complete conversion of the people of Hindustan to Islam.

Thanks to the labors of a number of scholars, we now have a much more nuanced sense of the details of the lives of many of these saints, the contexts in which their poetry was created, and the way in which their poetic corpuses evolved over time. Jack Hawley's groundbreaking study of the genealogy of the notion of the bhakti wave—or more familiarly, in its pan-Indian form, the bhakti movement—has brought into focus the relatively recent consolidation of this powerful construct; he has also underscored and the role that non-religious factors played in causing this notion to flourish, both in the time when it first appeared and in the course of the last century

over the chapter as a whole. Was it an independent bhakti wave that Bābā Nānak unleashed, or was it something else entirely?

What do we know about Baba Nanak?

Let us begin with the basics. Nānak was born in 1469, in a family of Hindu Khatrīs (a regional caste group involved in trade) in Talvandi, a village established by a Rajput convert to Islam. His father, Kalu Bedi, worked as a revenue collector for the village Muslim chief, and also owned land there. This indicates his educated, affluent, landowning background and suggests that he must have had a basic exposure to Islam, especially since a mosque lay at the center of the village.

Also, his father's occupation must have meant that he was at least to some extent versed in the ways of revenue administration. He married a woman named Sulakhanhī, a Khatrī like himself; they shared the same family background and social status. Soon afterward they had two sons, Sṛī Cand and Lakhamī Dās, which ev-

and the big markets" that he visited during this phase of his life (Gurū Granth 156:19, hereafter GG) .

Shortly after the invasions of Mīr Bābur (1483-1530), the ruler of Kabul who later became the first Mughal emperor—these invasions of the Punjab began in the late 1510s—Nānak returned to his family, acquired a piece of land some thirty miles north of Lahore on the banks of the Ravi river where its enters the plains, and there established Kartārpur, gathering a group of predominantly Jat families.

He assigned himself the title Bābā and spent the final years of his life guiding these people he named the Gurmukh Panth or Sikh Panth. Sikhs are learners; Gurmukhs are those who turn their faces toward the divine; Panth, literally path, is a community.

Thus Baba Nanak intended to fashion a community of followers that would collectively bear the weight and privilege of divine wisdom. At Kartārpur he created the

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institution of the sacred book (pothi), instituted a ritual routine that would turn upon three prayers a day, and ultimately assigned a Gurmukh or Sikh named Angad (d. 1551) the responsibility of guiding the Panth when he could no longer do so himself.

Bābā Nanak was also a poet; he created over nine hundred compositions. The significance of this poetic corpus for understanding the mind behind it cannot be overstated. He was clear about the need to commit one's ideas to writing so that they would be preserved (GG 566:1). He therefore organized Gurmukhī ("[of] Gurmukhs"), a distinct script, to clothe his poetry, and compiled these poems into a text known in scholarship as the *Guru Harsahai Pothi*. The canvas of his poetry is extensive, and he offers there a sustained commentary on the social, political, and religious life of the times in which he lived. As for the language of Baba Nanak's compositions, his successors labeled it an "auspicious language" (*subhakhā*, M5, GG 611:19). The author of the *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, a mid-seventeenth century source, however, labels it as the language of the Jats. Jats were originally nomads, but they had been practicing settled agriculture since around the thirteenth century in the northwest of Hindustan.

Baba Nanak's writings, when taken together with the earliest biographical writings about him, stand apart from those that generally serve as the basis for scholarship on bhakti as practiced in the period when he lived. They give us a body of information about his person, family, and interactions with other people that is unusually detailed. These materials probably have a more straightforward connection to historical fact than those that report on the activities of any other bhakti figure of his time. His founding of a town, filling it with persons considered by others to be beyond the pale of caste (Jats), and creating a set of rudimentary institutions to bring coherence to their lives put him in a class of his own. There are extensive records about the lives of a few religious leaders who were roughly his bhakti contemporaries, but these accounts seem less firmly grounded in what most people today would recognize as history.

Bhakta and Bhakti in Baba Nanak's Thought

The corpus of Nanak's poetry that has come down to us contains 93,302 words in the canonical collection we know as the *Guru Granth* or *Adi Granth*. The latter title is popularly used in current scholarship, but it is useful to remember that this designation for the Sikh scriptures began to be regularly used in the late nineteenth century. In the *Guru Granth* the term bhakta—in its Punjabi form—appears 32 times (singular: 3; plural: 19; others: 10). Nanak's preference for its plural form reflects his tendency to see bhaktasin groups rather than as individuals—not that

he thought of them as always acting communally, but he thought of them as a category, a collectivity. His description of them can be summarized as follows. Bhaktas are countless in number, they appear in all ages, and they are distinct from the worldly people (*sansaris*). They stay immersed in meritorious thoughts, trade in truth, have no worries, exude a certain fragrance, enjoy divine protection and bliss (the messengers of death cannot reach them), and are destined to sit at the gates of the divine court after they die (GG 4:1; 145:14; 148:11; 227:19; 354:2; 416:10; 439:7; 468:2; 567:5; 688:16; 721:13; 877:13). Clearly this is a positive image.

In the literal sense, the activity of the bhaktas constitutes bhakti and all the elements mentioned above are relevant for bhakti too. Yet in Nanak's poetry the term bhakti also has a degree of autonomy that can be seen in its 142 occurrences. Bhakti is described as a divine gift that removes fear of death, brings comfort, opens the door to liberation, and implies an experience of immersion in the divine name (*nam*), which brings a sense of carrying the feelings of divine fear (*bhai*) and love (*bhau*) in one's heart (GG 60:1, 76:9, 154:14, 221:8, 227:1, 243:11, 354:2, 413:13, 468:18, 685:15, 831:9).

A close look at the above references related to bhakta and bhakti suggests that sometimes Baba Nānak is accepting the ways in which the terms bhakta and bhakti were popularly understood in his time, while at other times he is repositioning them so that they play a role in his own modes of thinking. Take, for instance, the relationship between bhaktas and ordinary human beings (*sansaris*). On the one hand Baba Nānak represents these two groups as quite separate groups, apparently adopting a distinction that was uncontroversial in the world in which he lived. Yet on the other hand he seems to call this dichotomy into question. For him the metaphor of a lotus provides the most appropriate representation of a meaningful life, which is implicitly to position the bhaktas of this world in conversation with the *sansaris* around them. The roots and leaves of the plant are an organic part of the marsh that is society; if taken out of the medium that nourishes them, they will instantly wilt. The delicate flower above, while it has certain autonomy of its own (GG 938:21), nonetheless rests firmly on its stalk. Similarly, the life of a successful human being has to be firmly entrenched in the practice of serving fellow human beings (*vici duniya sev kamaie, ta dargeh baisanh paie*, GG 26:1). We should all appreciate the beauty and multiplicity of the world (*purkhan birakhan tirathan tatan meghan khetanah, dipan loan mandalan khandan varbhandanah, andaj jerag utbhujun khanhi setajan*, GG 467:4), yet simultaneously keep ourselves above the confusions that arise in daily life. To do this, we

should immerse ourselves in the divine name and hold the Creator in our hearts.

Baba Nanak uses two closely connected metaphors to describe the relationship of love that connects the bhakta to the Creator. The first involves the physical love and deep longing that exist between bride (*suhagan*) and groom (*kant*, the word appears 11 times); the second extends this into the relationship between a wife and her husband (*khasam*, which appears 57 times). He prefers the latter stage. Since it entails total dependence on the part of the wife, an eternally giving nature on the part of the husband (*datar*), and a shared sense of responsibility toward each other, the marital relationship seems to him a more appropriate depiction of the love that connects human beings to the divine than the bride-groom relationship which precedes it. Many other bhakti poets, though not all, saw it the other way around.

Baba Nanak's uncompromising belief in the unity of divinity also sets him apart from some of his peers. It means that, for him, the bhakti addressed to gods of the Hindu pantheon is really an exercise in futility. How can devotion offered to beings who are part of the creation and subject to its problems bring any result (*rogi brahma bisanu sa rudra*, GG 1153:16; *pahanhu nir pakhalai jal mahi bhudaih tehi*, GG 637:9)? While the beliefs and practices associated with prevalent modes of bhakti among the Nath Yogis and the Vaishnavas arouse his satire (*kan parhai kia khājai bhugati*, GG 953:4; *udi udi rava jhatai pai, vekhia loku hasai ghari jai*, GG 465:10), the Jains and their iconic worship and beliefs provoke his deep disdain. He ridicules the Jains for the way they are always thinking about eating the right things and keeping themselves clean (GG 150:2, 1285:11).

Baba Nanak is thus evidently familiar with usages of the terms *bhakta* and *bhakti* that were current in his region and time. He appreciates some of the beliefs and practices that he associates with these words, but he clearly disapproves of others. Strangely, however, the position of these concepts in his mode of thinking has not been given as much attention as it should. In the pages that follow, let us try to improve upon this situation.

Suppose we begin with the way in which Baba Nanak addresses himself. He is emphatic about being "an ordinary human named Nanak" (GG 350:3; GG 721:7); "a human being the certainty of whose life is restricted to the current breath, with no knowledge of whether the next one might come or not" (GG 660:11). At some point in his life, however, he noticed that people around considered him "crazy" or "lost," "a helpless being" (GG 991:8), while he saw himself as "an inspired bard," "a drummer who announces the divine truth" (GG 142:24; 566:7). Or he may offer us a mixed image, in which

we can feel his confidence in the strength of his Sovereign—a strength in which he shares as a bonded slave of the divine (*banda*, GG 990:27; *gola [m]*, GG 991:10; *dhadhi*, GG 150:23; *divana*, GG 991:14; *shair*, M1, GG 53:15, and 660:14). In this mode he is "a dog at the gate of the divine abode with the responsibility to relay the commands issued inside" (GG 350:4). There are forty-odd verses in which he calls himself Bābā, a term that is likely to have accrued to him after the establishment of Kartārpur. In all these modes of conceiving himself, however, there is no inclination to use the term bhakta. Nor does he register any awareness of the historical bhaktas of his time or of their songs and poetry.

The label for a human being whom Baba Nanak wishes to praise is not bhakta (used 32 times and always restricted to single verse or so) but as we have seen, *gurmukh*, "facing the guru," which in this context means orienting one's face toward the divine. *Gurmukh* appears 411 times in his poetry. One of the passages in which he elaborates on the meaning of this term extends to eighteen stanzas of six verses each (GG 941-943). In a similar vein we might consider the weight borne by the term bhakti in his writings. It appears 142 times, but when one considers Nanak's use of the term *nām*, which is in some ways comparable, we see that that concept is for him much more important. *Nām* appears 634 times in his poetry. So far we have translated the term *nām* as divine name, but its significance needs to be further clarified. Bābā Nānak believes that the Creator came into being and brought forth his *nam* (I would interpret the term here as meaning essence), and then went on to create the world (*qudrat*). The Creator placed his essence—his *nam*—in the world (*apinai apu sajjio apinai racio nau, duyi qudrati sajjai kari asanh ditho chau*, GG 463:6). This is his way of saying that the world inheres in the divine essence.

Because *nam* is thus so deeply built into the structure of the world, an enlightened or awakened being (*sujag*) necessarily also bears the *nām*. This is the first and most important element of such a person's being, but he or she also practices *dan* (giving) and *isnan* (bathing), and offers bhakti to Hari (Sanskrit Hari, a common designation for Vishnu; *namu danu isnanu drirhu hari bhagati sujage*, GG 419:7). These four terms designate four aspects that are essential to the good life: a realization of the divine immanence in the world, a commitment to help those who are in need, the resolve to practice personal purity as a marker of respect to the creator of the body, and finally, devotion to Hari. Given the emphasis on *nam dan isnan* as a cluster in Baba Nanak (*namu danu isnanu na manmukhi titu tani dhurhi dhumai*, GG 596:5) and its popularity in later Sikh literature and living, it is not unfair to argue that bhakti is at the

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bottom of this hierarchy of four values.

What is the nature of the experience of bhakti addressed to Harī, as mentioned above? For most of the people who surrounded Nānak, I think, this would imply that Harī or Vishnu is the supreme deity. For Nānak, however, Vishnu is not a legitimate object of human devotion (*rogi brahma bisanu sa rudra*, M1, GG 1153:16), and as a result this linguistically straightforward interpretation has to be rejected. What then are we to make of its meaning for Nānak? A second possibility would be to restrict the range of interpretation to meanings that can be expected if Baba Nanak considered himself to be part of a subset of bhaktas that we might call sants, that is, people who address their devotion to a deity conceived as being without attributes (*nirgun*). Though used neither in scholarship nor by Baba Nanak himself, the term *santī* (sant-ism) is available in the poetry of his successors to designate such a path (M3, *isu jag mahi santi dhanu khatia*, GG 1092:3; M5, *santi mantu dio mohi*, GG 206:4; *kaula bapuri santi chali*, GG 392:24; *agianu andhera santi katia*, GG 530:5; *santi ih bidhi jati*, GG 677:16; *hari santi mangalu gaia*, GG 747:19; *santi jita janamu aparu*, GG 889:23). If we were to read this label back into the time and terms of Baba Nanak himself, we could interpret his use of the term Harī as signaling his acceptance of a nirgun deity—God without form.

But does he? There are actually problems in what we have just said. In Bābā Nānak's poetry the term *sant* appears 28 times (singular: 1; plural: 27); most often it is used as an adjective pertaining to *jan* ("people," 6 times) and *sabhā* ("assembly," 9 times). A close look at these, however, provides no basis to support the distinction between sants and bhaktas that is widely accepted in current scholarship—the distinction I have repeated just above. Rather, these terms are used interchangeably, and Bābā Nānak has no qualms in addressing the Nath Yogis, devotees of the god Shiva, as sants. He offers his salutations to their "assembly" (*sant sabha jaikaro*, GG 938:8).

Nor is there any evidence to establish that the concept of the nirgun deity enjoys any special significance in Baba Nanak's poetry. The term *nirgun* appears only four times in his poetry (note how infrequent it is). Two of these references could indeed be taken to refer to the deity without attributes (*nirgun ram*, GG 222:3; *avigato nirmailu upje nirgun te sargunu thia*, GG 940:21), but the other two connote the absence of good qualities (again, *gun*) among human beings (*ham papi nirgun kau gunu kariai*; *nirgun deh sac bin kaci*, GG 228:13, 1274:15). And even the first of these usages deserves a second look. One of these may appear in a discussion with the Nath Yogis and the context of conversation clarifies that he is using terminology that

is familiar to them and is not proposing a theological position of his own. Only one of these four usages remains, then, and it seems obvious that a single phrase in a corpus of poetry comprising over 93,000 is hardly sufficient to declare Baba Nanak a proponent of nirgun bhakti—at least in his own terms of reference.

The key difference between Nānak's conception of the divine and that of, say, the Nath Yogis is that Nānak's vision is very active. We can see this in his understanding of cosmogony. There are four stages. First there was a primeval void (*arbad narbad dhundukara*, GG 1035:13); then at some point in time not known to human beings the Creator created (*sajia/racia*) himself and his *nam*; in the third stage the Creator brought the world (*qudrat*) into being and happily became immanent in it (*apinai apu sajio apinai racio nau, duyi qudrati sajiai kari asanh ditho chau*, GG 463:6); then, as a fourth stage, once the creation began to function he took up the role of being its sovereign (*khasam, malik, sāhib*). In the time in which we live, he runs the world with commands (*hukam*) based on justice (*nai*), and displays, in addition, his grace (*nadar*). It is the final stage of this vision that fires Nānak's imagination. He sings of the divine command that runs the world, raises hills in deep rivers and bring patches of dry land under deep waters (*nadia vichi tibe dikhale thali kare asagah*, GG 144:16). In my view, this way of thinking bears a strong relationship to Nānak's vision for Kartarpur. He wanted it to replicate as many divine attributes as possible—beauty and richness as to its landscape, majesty in regard to the perennial river that flows out of the hills to nourish it, and so forth.

I hope it is clear from what I have said so far that to understand the beliefs and activity of Bābā Nānak through the terminology of bhakti and related concepts is deeply misleading. A fresh approach is required. What I suggest is that rather than moving from bhakti inward, as happened so often in my childhood, we move from Bābā Nānak outward, focusing first on what was central in his own thought and then trying, as a second step, to understand that centrality in relationship to other ways of thinking that were prevalent in his time.

Let us begin by returning to the term *Harior hari*; in Gurmukhi or Punjabi these are equivalent, since capitalization is not employed. First and foremost, it is interesting to underline that Baba Nanak uses *Hari/hari* 677 times in his poetry, so clearly he cares about it deeply. Yet among these many mentions, the nominative form of *Harī* appears only six times. All the other usages are oblique—to, of, or from *Hari*, which carries the implication that *Hari* as the object of Nānak's bhakti is an extremely active entity. Sometimes Bābā Nānak expresses his sense of the immanence of *Harī* in the world in an interesting way. In Punjabi the

term *hari*, when used as a feminine adjective, can mean "green," and he understandably employs this to describe the color of vegetation. By that token, however, it can also be a general marker of freshness. Hence one hears of a mother's "lap turning green" (*god hari ho gaī*) with the birth of a baby. Thus Baba Nanak's *Harī* is literally the chlorophyll in the leaves, and similarly the source of life in human beings. *Hari* is sovereign of all that is green (*soi maula jini jagu maullia haria kia sansaro*, GG 24:1)

In a parallel way we can reconsider how the word *bhakti* functions within Nānak's idiolect. Based on our earlier discussion, we know what it is not. It has little connection with the bhakti that yearns for personal bonding with the object of one's devotion, and it carries no autonomy as a path to liberation. Here it might be helpful to underline that the Farsi/Islamic term *bandaghī* (slavery, devotion to the master) had been around for centuries before Baba Nanak came on the scene. In Farid (d. 1173), the graves are calling the seikhs to perform *bandaghī*—the death may not be far (*akhin sekhan bandaghi calanhu aj ke kali*, GG 1383:1). Simultaneously, the person who follows the qualities associated with *bandaghi*—he is learned but does not show it, he has all the strength but does not put it to use, he shares with others no matter little he has with him—is called a *bhakta* (*ko esa bhagatu sadai, Farid*, GG 1384:26). By his time, the use of the terms *bhakti* and *bandaghi* were in all probability interchangeable.

As we have seen, Baba Nanak does not use the epithet *bhakta* for himself, but he does call himself *banda*, a servant, and a number of additional terms evoke the same spirit—terms to which I have already referred: *adami, manas, janu* (variants for human being marked by the frailty of its existence), *cakar* (servant), *dhadhi* (singer associated with low status in regional society), *tabal-baz* (public announcer, a low level position job in the village hierarchy), *vecara* (helpless), all implying a clear sense of dependence on the creator. To cap them all off, we have *Baba*, "an old man." All of these terms, and especially the last, express a profound realization of human limitations and the consequent obligation to serve the Creator and creation (e.g., *tu dana sahibu siri mera khijmati kari janu banda tera*, GG 990:26). Epithets such as *karta and kartar* (creator, used 124 times), *sahib* (sovereign, 114), *shah and patishah* (lord, 63), *khasam* (master, 57), and *hukamī* (commander, 32), all names for the divine, point to the Creator's control on the creation. Humans, as his subjects, owe their allegiance to the divine, and they pray to him for answers to their needs (*jis da dita khavanha tisu kahiai sabasi, nanak hukamu na calai nal khasam calai ardas*, GG 474:26). The term *ardas* (prayer/supplication) appears 26 times in Nanak's poetry and is derived—perhaps significantly—from

the Farsi word *arz* (appeal) rather than from an indigenously Indic vocabulary (*saca arzu saca ardasi*, GG 355:16).

It is hard to know whether Nanak's reading of *Hari* is self-consciously a rejection of the way other people in his world used the term, or whether the connotations associated with *bandaghi* were part and parcel of his understanding of bhakti, but the shift of tone and reference, when compared with much of the bhakti utterance that seems to have been circulating in Nanak's world—as he reports it—is genuinely worth notice. A bit playfully, in the context of this volume, I would like to think of this as a protest against bhakti. Certainly it is an articulation of a very clear sense of the divine as creator—rather than, say, lover or a participant in some more indefinite theater of superior beings. Here we have a sense of the divine as a person who wields power and intervenes directly in human affairs—nothing more opaque than that.

Two powerful turning points in Nānak's life are helpful for appreciating what is involved. In the first we sense the power of a direct moment of divine intervention in the normal state of affairs. As Baba Nanak says,

I, an unemployed bard, was assigned work.

"Speak praises day and night," came the order.

The bard was summoned to the true palace

And was honored with a mantle of praise.

The nectar of the true name became his food.

Whoever might wish to have such food will attain comfort.

The bard sings and spreads the divine word.

This experience of being "given employment" seems to have caused Baba Nanak to leave whatever routine life he might have been following at Sultanpur and to embark on his travels (GG 939:26). He is a servant of the Person who has intervened in history to give him, as it were, a job. Assuming that servant's role was the first turning point in his life.

The second turning point in Baba Nanak's life was somewhat different. This time his life changed in response to his perception that divine power has been expressed in the affairs of earthly power. We can see this in four compositions—a total of 27 stanzas—that comment on the invasions of Mīr Babur. Babur's attacks in the Punjab began in the late 1510s and culminated in the capturing of Delhi in 1526, so we are able to pinpoint the moment of these verses' composition with relative confidence. In these four compositions Nanak describes how Babur's army, in search of booty, turned the landscape into "the city of the dead" (*maspuri*) with "brutalized women and widows" haunting the graveyards (GG 418:5). He denounces the cruelty of the invading army toward the local people

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Baba Nanak and the Bhagati Movement



Prof. GS Mann and Writer Amarjit Chandan



Prof GS Mann at Columbia University, New York 1995
(Picture by Amarjit Chandan)

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in the strongest possible terms, but at the same time he credits Bābur for taking good care of his own people in Khurasan. In his eyes, Babur's benevolent rule in Khurasan stood in contrast to the attitude of the Afghans in Delhi, who disregarded the welfare of their people during times of peace and failed to protect them in war. On this basis, Nanak seems to expect that the life of ordinary people will improve once the warfare is over, and in some indirect but nonetheless definite way, he sees the divine hand behind these dramatic events.

This shift in regional history seems to have caused him to make a radical revision in his conception of what would be expected of him in the years ahead. If the vision of his ascension to the "divine abode" set him to singing songs of divine magnificence, which he broadcast to those who met him, the realization that the Mughal invasion was actually a divine intervention in history seems to have allowed him to return to a routine life. The horrors of Babur's attacks were not random, Baba Nānak was convinced. Rather they presaged a new political era in Hindustan—as indeed history shows they did. This sense of a fundamental shift in historical forces seems to have enabled Bābā Nānak to envision a comparable mission for himself: the task of ushering in a new religious dispensation that would parallel the political one. Rather than traveling about and observing the beauty and complexity of the divine creation, he turned his efforts toward bringing comfort to the people around him and putting their lives on the right track.

It was Babur's attacks, I believe, that impelled Bābā Nānak to found a new panth, thereby creating a world that would stand apart from

the senseless carnage he had observed. Gone now, it seems, was the period in his life when he was content to issue faith-based pronouncements as he traveled the roads of northwest Hindustan. Gone too were his conversations with fellow seekers of truth. From this point on, Bābā Nānak determined to create a new center of power, a stable institution for which his family would serve as the nucleus. Having seen the workings of Bābur's power, he returned home and attempted to translate his reactions to the wielding of worldly power into concrete action. At Kartarpur, at least, if not in other areas as well, he hoped to supplant the sorts of institutions that shaped the world in which he lived. Later Sikh literature distinguishes sharply between the religious authority of Bābā Nānak and the political authority of Mīr Bābur, and it makes sense that this clear distinction should be made, but there was a hidden connection, too.

There is no space to describe how Baba Nanak's modes of thought and action got routinized in the days after he had died. Suffice it to say, merely, that it did not take long before bhakti in its conventional sense was back. Guru Amardas (1551-1574), the third Sikh guru, was a Vaishnava before he joined the Sikh Panth, and perhaps he could not exactly leave his Vaishnavism behind him when he did. He mentions Nāmdev and Kabīr in his own poetry (*nama chimba kabiru julaha* M3, GG 67:13), and he made efforts to have the poetry of these and other bhaktas collected during his visits to Hindu pilgrimage centers. Finally, he took the monumental step of appending a set of selected compositions attributed to the nirgun bhaktas to the volume of poems that Baba Nānak had begun to develop—

provided, of course, that they echoed Sikh thinking. This was the start of a process we might call the bhaktification of the Sikh Panth. Staying aloof from it in times that followed has not been easy.

I hope I have been able to show, however, that Baba Nanak himself stood at quite some remove from all this. For him, bhakti was only a relatively limited aspect of the sort of life he envisioned and tried to establish. Indeed, his teachings and actions can be read as a protest against the common bhakti perspectives he believed he heard being voiced around him. Abuses of worldly power (by Babur) and the hope for something better (at Kartarpur) played a significant role in impelling Bābā Nānak to move beyond such bhakti commonplaces. Worldly power showed him that a new channeling of power—divine power—was the need of the moment, and he believed he had been chosen to do the job. Bhakti would become an aspect of the community he sought to create, but not an overwhelmingly important one—unless, that is, we revise our sense of bhakti such that it is able to encompass the work and words of a person like Baba Nanak. Is bhakti big enough to do that job?

1. John Stratton Hawley, *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

2. "Guru Nanak's Life and Legacy: An Appraisal," in *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice*, ed. Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 116-60; "Baba Nanak and the Founding of the Sikh Panth," *Brill's Encyclopedia of Sikhism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2017).

3. The *Guru Granth* exists as a stan-

dard text with 1430 pages. The designation GG 156:19, for instance, refers to page 156 and verse 19. In the case of Nanak, only the page numbers and the verse numbers are provided, but references to the compositions of his successors include the designations beginning with M2 (Angad), M3 (Amardas), and so on. All references to the *Guru Granth* are from *Shabadarth Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. 4 vols. (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1969).

4. J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib, eds., *Sikh History from Persian Sources* (Delhi: Indian History Congress, 2001), 63.

5. Irfan Habib, "Jatts," *Brill's Encyclopedia of Sikhism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2017).

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