WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?
THE REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN THE BHAI BALA JANAMSAKHI
TRADITION AND THE WOMEN'S ORAL JANAMSAKHI TRADITION

by

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Abstract:

The janamsakhis are a Sikh literary tradition, which consist of hagiographies concerning Guru Nanak's life and teachings. Although the janamsakhis are not reliable historical sources concerning the life of Guru Nanak, they are beneficial in imparting knowledge upon the time period in which they developed. The representation of women within these sakhis can give us an indication of the general views of women of the time.

A lack of representation of women within the janamsakhi supports the argument that women have traditionally been assigned a subordinate role within patriarchal society. Due to this subordinate position, they have not had access to written forms of expression; thus, their voices have not been heard, affirming the status of women as a muted group in society. Men, as the dominant group with access to the written word, have been able to make their experiences and opinions heard through written means. The result has been a literature which is 'political', in that it promulgates specific views about women, and 'male', in that it concentrates upon the masculine, masculine characters, masculine plots and masculine perspectives.

A reading of the Bhai Bala Tradition, the most popular of the janamsakhi traditions, results in the determination that this literature is firmly rooted as a 'male' and 'political' literature. This conclusion is all the more apparent when comparing the written Bhai Bala Tradition to the oral women's janamsakhi tradition in the District of Jalandhar, in the Punjab. A firm division between the public and private spheres is very evident when comparing the two traditions. Males have exercised control over the written tradition, so that the stories contained within this tradition emphasize the public sphere, where men dominate and the focus is upon adventure oriented plots which take place away from the domestic world, which is familiar to women. In contrast, in the women's oral tradition, because they are exercising control, the emphasis is upon the private sphere, where women dominate and the focus is upon stories concerning the domestic world and the women's realm.

The women's oral janamsakhi tradition is evidence that, though they may be denied a voice through the written world, women can succeed in finding a voice through alternate means of expression. Through these oral stories, women are able to voice their opinions and frustrations.
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Ranbir Johal
Many a child has participated in the family tradition of the bedtime story. My siblings and I also participated in similar rituals with our mother. We listened to countless stories told to us. My mother would entertain us in the evening picking stories from her memory banks – stories about her childhood in her village in India, stories from the Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and so on. However, the most frequent and numerous among these stories were stories about the Sikh gurus and their families; and again, the most numerous among these were the stories about the first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak Dev ji. One such story was about the great love between Guru Nanak and his sister, Nanaki:

Then after leaving from there he went elsewhere. And there they had said to him, you stay here. And he said the task for which I had come, that has been accomplished and now I must go elsewhere, we are not going to stay any one place. And they went on and night fell and they sat there. And he told Mardana, there is a village there and if you can get anything there then see. He went to one or two houses and got some roti and they ate those and went to sleep. And he sleeps and he feels as if Nanaki ...and over there, Nanaki is making roti and she is thinking my brother. And while she is making the roti one rose a great deal. And before, old women used to say that if a roti rises very well then that means someone is very hungry. Or someone with a lot of love is remembering. And she said, “this roti rose a lot, perhaps my brother is hungry.” And she said, “If he was here then I would quickly give him the roti.” And over there, he is all-knowing anyways and he realized that his sister had remembered him. And when it was a little later – he was in one village and she was in another and he had gone very far away so there was a difference in time between the two as well. And he said to Mardana, when it was morning, that, make preparations, we’re going there, to visit Nanaki. And they said how can we travel that much in such a short time? You’re saying we have to be there in such a little time. And he said, you close your eyes and open them when I say. And they sit in their bhakti and are singing hymns and he says you close your eyes and read this prayer, and he read it himself too and when they opened their eyes, within an hour they reached there. And when they opened their eyes, they said, “We really have reached here.” And they went and knocked on Nanaki’s door. And Nanaki said to Sulakhni, “Bahu [Daughter-in-law], someone is outside, you look, I am making roti and you go and open the door.” And she goes to open the door – No, she says “Bahu, you look” and meanwhile, their servant goes and she comes back and tells Sulakhni, “Bahu, Nanak has come.” Sulakhni laughs that, “How could Nanak have come this early? There was no knowledge of where he was or when he was going to come.” And she does not believe it and meanwhile Nanaki calls to her that the door has been opened but no one has come in. “You Bahu go and look to see who it is.” What would the servant know who it is? She was thinking that it was probably her mother or father or other
relative. And Sulakhni does not speak and she goes over there as well. And when she
goes to see, Nanak touches her [Nanaki's] feet. And she says, do not touch my feet.
And he says, “you are my elder sister. Whoever I may be but it is my respect.” And she
said, “No, you are connected to God and so are elder than me.” And he says, “No, you
are my elder sister and I am just your brother at this time. Do not say this to me that I
should not touch your feet.” And he touches her feet and then they sit and she asks them
what they wish to eat and drink. And she asks how they came to visit, for he had not
given any message of coming. And he said, “Did I not tell you that when you remember
me with love, I will come to see you then.” And she said, “But I remember you every
day, why today?” And he said, “No, you remembered me in such a way today that I had
to come.” And she asked what he wanted to eat or drink. And he said, “Bring that roti
by which you had remembered me.” And he said, don’t lie now, tell me. And she said,
“Really, a roti had risen and I had said, Oh, that my brother was here.” So they ate and
she said, “Spend the night.” And he said, “No, you had said this much that he eat and I
completed my duty and ate and now I must go.”

This is the type of story, which the Sikh tradition terms a janamsakhi and this was my
first exposure to the janamsakhi tradition.

The janamsakhis are a Sikh literary tradition, which began during the life of the
first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak, and continued after his death. The janamsakhis are
hagiographies concerning Nanak’s life and teachings, which began as an oral tradition
during the lifetime of Nanak, and were first compiled and recorded in the early
seventeenth century. There are many different versions of the janamsakhi; however,
these different versions do share a number of general features. They all consist of a
collection of anecdotes (sakhis) written in prose, and each sakhi usually incorporates
quotations from the Adi Granth, the sacred text of the Sikhs.

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1 This story and other stories mentioned or quoted from the women’s oral tradition may be found in one of
the Appendices. This particular story was told by Storyteller C and is to be found in Appendix III, Story
11.
2 Guru Nanak was the founder of the Sikh religion and the first in a lineage of ten gurus. Although all
gurus are considered to be equal and all have hagiographical traditions associated with them, the first and
the tenth gurus (Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, respectively) are the best known with the majority of
stories having been written about them. According to McLeod, it is only Guru Gobind who can rival Guru
Nanak in popularity. However, of the two, it is Guru Nanak who leads, by far, in the amount of stories
which have been written about his life. W. H. McLeod. “The Hagiography of the Sikhs” in According to
Most devout Sikhs generally view the janamsakhis as biographies of Nanak, and it is in this form that they are recited to most Sikh children. Perhaps another reason why so many regard them as biographies is because there no other biographical sources on the life of Nanak are available; Nanak's own writings provide only brief glimpses into his life. A more accurate statement would define janamsakhis as hagiographic accounts, because of the high concentration of myth and legend. It is believed that after Nanak's death, people recalled various stories and facts about him and these anecdotes were probably circulated orally. However, over time, these anecdotes were embellished and changed; details presumably were added and omitted according to the narrators' imaginations.

There are several janamsakhhi traditions, including the Bhai Bala Tradition, the Puratan Tradition, the Miharban tradition, the Adi Sakhis and several lesser traditions (including the Gyan ratanavali and the Mahima prakas). Although the janamsakhhi hagiographical tradition is generally used by the Sikh panth (community) as sources of information about the life of Guru Nanak, a more adequate function of these sakhis is to provide us with information about the Sikh panth at the time period in which they originated. This includes shedding some light on the attitudes of the society of the time towards women.

It is worth noting that the stories in these published traditions differ greatly from the stories that I had been told by my mother. One such story recorded in the written tradition about Nanak leaving his job and family in Sultanpur, differs greatly from the

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one that I told above. In this story, taken from the Bhai Bala Tradition, Nanak decides that he must leave on an *udasi.* In the story, Nanak speaks specifically to Nanaki's husband, Jai Ram, about leaving. He does not direct his comments to Nanaki herself and Sulakhni, his wife, is not mentioned at all in the story. In the Bhai Bala Tradition, the entire dialogue between Nanaki and Nanak and the incident concerning the roti filling with air are omitted. When I began to read the janamsakhis in their written form, I was astonished to see that female characters were rarely, if ever, mentioned. And when they were mentioned, these female characters did not enjoy as strong a position as their male counterparts. They were cast into marginal roles.

As I read these stories I wondered, "Where were all the stories that I had heard in my childhood?" They were barely ever mentioned, if at all. Then I discovered these stories again. In the months of February to April 2000, while in the Punjab, I had the opportunity to record janamsakhis told by various women in the villages of Jullundhur. The stories they told were not all exactly the same stories which I remembered hearing. Even though the women still recounted many sakhis concerning Nanak's adventures during his *udasis,* the female component in these stories was much stronger than in the written traditions. Undoubtedly, this shift in focus to feminine concerns is due to the fact that they were composed by female authors for a female audience. The attention paid to female characters in these stories made their absence in the written janamsakhi traditions all the more noticeable.

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4 Surinder Singh Kohli, ed. *Janamsakhi Bhai Bala.* [Chandigarh: Punjab University Publication Press, 1990], p65. The majority of the stories of the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi Tradition, which are referred to in this thesis are taken from this edited collection of sakhis.

5 *Udasi* is the term given to Nanak's travels which he undertook to disseminate his teachings.
This thesis will compare anecdotes from the written Bhai Bala Tradition and the women's oral tradition. When there are many extant janamsakhi traditions available, why did I choose the Bhai Bala Tradition? There were two reasons for this. First, it is the most popular of all the extant janamsakhi traditions and, secondly, of all the traditions it contains the most references to female characters.

The popularity of the Bhai Bala janamsakhi amongst the Sikh panth is clear when one ventures out to buy a janamsakhi. If one were to ask for a copy of a janamsakhi at a bookstore in the Punjab today, then invariably one would be handed a copy of the Bhai Bala version. It is the Bhai Bala version of the janamsakhi which has dominated the market ever since the janamsakhis first began to be printed. An examination of this tradition provides us with an opportunity to reveal how the Sikh panth of the time generally viewed women and their role in society.

The Bhai Bala Tradition contains the most references to Guru Nanak's family life. These sakhis take place within the domestic realm and this is where the bulk of the female characters in the janamsakhi tradition are found. Although all janamsakhi traditions make references to Guru Nanak's family, it is the Bhai Bala janamsakhi which leads well ahead of the others in both referring to and naming female family members. McLeod gives us evidence of this in Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, where he lists the relatives mentioned in the four main traditions. It is only in the Bhai Bala janamsakhis that Nanak's mother, sister and wife are named. As well, many other relatives, both male and female, are introduced. McLeod lists all of Nanak's relatives that are mentioned in the Bhai Bala tradition:

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Father: Kalu, or Mahita Kalu, a Bedi khatri and patvari of Rai Bhoi di Talvandi
Mother: Tripata
Maternal grandfather: Ram, a Jhangar khatri
Maternal grandmother: Bhirai
Father’s brother: Lalu
Father’s brother’s son: Nand Lal
Mother’s brother: Krishna
Sister: Nanaki
Sister’s husband: Jai Ram, a Palta khatri
Sister’s husband’s father: Paramanand
Wife: Sulakhani
Wife’s father: Mula, a Chona khatri and patvari of Pokho Di Randhavi
Wife’s mother: Chando Rani
Sons: Siri Chand and Lakhmi Das

In the Puratan janamsakhis, the only relatives that are mentioned are his father, a Bedi Khatri of Rai Bhoi di Talvandi; his sister’s husband, Jai Ram; his wife’s father, Mula, a Chona Khatri and his two sons Lakhmi Das and Siri Chand. It is interesting to note that Nanak’s mother, sister and wife, while referred to in this tradition, are never named. In the Miharban Tradition, Nanak’s father, his brother-in-law, Jai Ram, his father-in-law and his sons are named along with his mother (she is known as Tipara in this tradition) and his wife (she is known as Ghumi in this tradition). However, Nanak’s sister, Nanaki, is not mentioned at all, although her existence is indicated through a reference to Jai Ram as Guru Nanak’s bahanoī. In the third of these traditions, the Gyan-ratanavali, Nanak’s father, his sister’s husband, his father-in-law and his sons are again all named. However, here, whilst Nanaki and Tripata are named, his wife, while referred to, is again not named.

It is clear from these few references that, in comparison to the other traditions, the Bhai Bala Tradition contains sakhis, which make more reference not only to female

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7 Ibid, pp102-3.
8 Brother-in-law = sister’s husband
characters, but to the domestic sphere in general. However, even these references are limited, especially when comparing them to the sakhis told by women in the Punjab today. The scant reference to women becomes all the more apparent when one examines the women’s oral stories, in which domestic and family concerns form the core of most of the stories, and women appear more prominently.

The two stories mentioned above are atypical of the types of stories, which occur in the women’s oral tradition and the written Bhai Bala tradition. The woman’s story places a great emphasis upon the relationship between Nanak and his sister Nanaki, whereas the written tradition minimizes Nanaki’s presence. In the Bhai Bala Tradition, although we do see a privileged relationship between Nanak and Nanaki, this relationship is not portrayed in as nearly as emphatic a manner as it is within the women’s tradition. In the written tradition, when Nanak first decides to resign from his job and leave upon an *udasi*, it is to Jai Ram that he directs his decision, ignoring Nanaki. In another anecdote taken from the Bhai Bala tradition, Nanak does take leave of Nanaki when he is about to set off for another *udasi*\(^{10}\). However, even in this story (which does not appear in all versions of the Bhai Bala tradition), there is not the same exchange between the brother and the sister that occurs within the women’s oral tradition. Furthermore, Sulakhni, Nanak’s wife, is not mentioned at all. From the two examples we can deduce that there are two types of stories: the women’s story and the men’s story. Because patriarchal society has traditionally muted women while giving men access to the written word, it is the men’s stories, which have been published.

Before comparing anecdotes from the written Bhai Bala Tradition and the women's oral tradition, I shall first give a brief introduction to the janamsakhi tradition, highlighting its functional utility and introducing the various janamsakhis traditions, followed by an introduction of the women's oral tradition. In the next chapter I discuss the concepts surrounding the silencing of women within the written domain in general and within the Sikh tradition in specific. Chapter four deals with the theories surrounding the classification of world literature as a predominantly "political" and "male" literature. In other words, it is a literature, which contains designs upon its readers by promulgating specific views and by focusing upon the masculine. This examination of the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi Tradition classifies this tradition as a master masculine narrative. This classification is made all the more evident when doing a comparison of the Bhai Bala written tradition with the women's oral tradition. The two different forms are compared according to four categories:

1. The number of female characters and the frequency in which they appear.
2. The plot and the content of the stories.
3. Women as active agents.
4. Empathy for female characters and perceptions.

The final chapter examines how women, who have traditionally been rendered "voiceless", do succeed in finding a voice through alternate means of expression. Chapter Four alludes to this success in alternate modes of expression with the examination of the women's oral janamsakhi tradition, as well as with reference to another South Asian tradition. We see that women do find other ways to give themselves a voice and an example of this is found in the songs of Brahmin women in Andhra Pradesh who give the Ramayana (a traditional Indian epic) a retelling by emphasizing
female characters and feminine content in their own song versions of this epic.\textsuperscript{11} Although women in South Asian traditions are generally restricted to the domestic sphere, and kept away from the public, they succeed in giving their voices a form from within their own realm.

I also examine how different voices result in different stories. Not only do “men’s stories” differ from “women’s stories”, but stories will also differ amongst different groups of women. Rachel S. Meyer states that “changing perspectives and desires continually retell [a story] as it travels through different women and movements.”\textsuperscript{12} Different backgrounds and experiences result in a difference of perception and, consequently, in different stories. This difference of perception is already clearly established with a comparison of the written Bhai Bala and the oral women’s tradition. Women are rendered a subservient and secondary position in the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi Tradition, whereas in the women’s oral tradition they enjoy stronger and more frequent roles. The uncovering of this oral tradition shows some basic differences between oral and written genres with the janamsakhis as a specific example.

The majority of the janamsakhis recounted in the Bhai Bala Tradition center around the public sphere – away from the home and a sphere from which women are specifically excluded. Consequently, we see a focus on the masculine – male-oriented plots, male characters and male concerns. The few women characters mentioned in the written Bhai Bala tradition appear infrequently. They are restricted to the stories that take place in the domestic sphere, and such stories are not plentiful. When women

characters do make an appearance they are denied the opportunity to express their voices and they are not painted in a very positive light. Nanak’s sister, Nanaki, is an exception to this, as she appears more frequently than any other female character, but even her appearances are limited. Although initially it appears that Nanaki enjoys an esteemed position in the Bhai Bala Tradition, a more thorough reading indicates that her position is not as influential as one may suspect at first. Male characters such as Jai Ram and Rai Bhullar, a prominent male figure in Talwandi, constantly overshadow her. When Rai Bhullar appears in the same sakhi as Nanaki, Nanaki is silenced and more attention is given to Rai Bhullar’s words. Similarly, Nanaki is cast aside in favour of Jai Ram whenever Jai Ram makes an appearance in a sakhi, thereby reflecting a general patriarchal attitude.

In contrast, most of the stories told by women focus on the domestic realm and attribute more importance to women characters, so that they appear more frequently and enjoy stronger roles. Nanaki, especially, is rendered a particularly strong character in these sakhis. Many of the important male characters that overshadow Nanaki in the Bhai Bala Tradition do not even appear, or are present in a much more diminutive role in the women’s oral stories. The importance allocated to Nanaki within both the written and oral traditions indicates that Nanaki is considered to be a central character and a role model for women. The fact that this woman is often silenced by men within the written tradition, but dominates in the oral tradition is a reflection of the difference in attitudes towards and perceptions of women.

13 Talwandi was the name of Nanak’s birthplace and the setting for the anecdotes concerning the events that occurred during his earlier years.
Many stories in the oral tradition have clearly developed from within the women’s realm. We hear of women’s experiences and see a focus on matters that are of interest to women but may be ignored by men, such as detailed stories about weddings. In addition, stories, which are familiar to both the written and the oral traditions, are told from a different perspective, because it is a woman who is telling them to a female audience. For example, any oral stories about Sulakhni paint her in a sympathetic light, in contrast to the negative image of Sulakhni that one encounters in the Bala Tradition.

The Bala Tradition allocates women a secondary position in society. The fact that the narrators, compilers and copyists of these sakhis were all male explains why women rarely appear in these sakhis and do not play a predominant role. It also explains why the majority of the sakhis recorded in the Bala tradition focus on plots in the public sphere, involving adventures in far off places. Stories, which give information about Nanak’s personal and home lives, which is where most of the female characters are present, are very few in comparison. When the tables are turned, and it is the women who are the storytellers, the shift is also from the public to the domestic, we discover stories centered around the home, the women’s realm, where women enjoy stronger roles. We hear stories where women have found a strong voice and are able to express their own thoughts, opinions and frustrations.
CHAPTER II: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE JANAMSAKHI TRADITION

The Functional Utility of the Janamsakhi Tradition

Despite the general unreliability of the janamsakhis, scholars are forced to turn to them for biographical information on Nanak due to a lack of other sources. When doing this, it is imperative that the scholar distinguishes between hagiography and biography and is able to separate historical information from legend. For example, although it was known that Nanak spent many years travelling, the names of all the places that he visited were not known. Storytellers would add in the names of places that they thought Nanak would visit, so that information would be added not because it was reliable but because it was thought possible.\(^\text{14}\) Eventually these episodes (sakhis) were put on paper for the first time in the 17\(^{\text{th}}\) century.

Although many of the stories that are told in the janamsakhi must have evolved from real incidents, most of the events are obscured by myths and wonder stories. Even when all the wonder stories are taken away, the janamsakhi do not offer an accurate account of Nanak’s life. They provide only an interpretation of Nanak’s life, “an interpretation springing from the piety and commitment of later generations.”\(^\text{15}\)

W. H. McLeod states that the janamsakhi cannot be regarded as biographies or uncritically used as sources for Nanak’s life. Their proper definition is that of hagiographic accounts of Nanak’s life and this distinction has to be understood for the proper appreciation of the janamsakhi. The janamsakhis do not originate in the guru’s actual life, but, rather, in the myth that derives from that life.\(^\text{16}\) Donald G. Dawe agrees

\(^{16}\) Ibid, p9.
with McLeod upon this point, quoting Harbans Singh who suggests that the "janamsakhi accounts tell their story in the language of myth and legend."\(^{17}\) Despite the problems associated with the janamsakhis, they have traditionally been used as historical sources.

M. A. Macauliffe was the first to use the janamsakhi as a historical source for information on Nanak’s life in the early 1900s.\(^{18}\) Even though the janamsakhis have a lot of shortcomings as historical sources, scholars have continued to rely on them for almost all their information concerning Nanak’s life, because there is no other way to reconstruct his life. Nanak’s own works contain, at best, mere hints about his personal life and external evidence about Nanak is not only scarce, but untrustworthy as well.

One such non-Sikh source, which contains references to Nanak, is the *Dabistan*, by Mohsin Fani. However, this is still not a contemporary source, it is only as old as the oldest janamsakhi. In addition, it does not contain biographical information about Nanak; instead it is more of a description of the general understanding of Nanak during that period.\(^ {19}\) Another external source is Mahipati’s, *Bhaktalilamrit*, written in 1774. This text refers to Nanak as one of the “greatest bhagats” and the information about him is nothing more than a collection of legends.\(^ {20}\) Various Muslim accounts are also rejected because they are seen as attempts to denounce Nanak, or to claim him as a fellow believer in Islamic teachings.\(^ {21}\) Because of this scarcity of reliable sources, scholars are forced to rely upon janamsakhis for almost all of their information concerning Nanak’s life.


McLeod feels that there are many problems involved in interpreting the janamsakhis as accurate biographical sources. The first problem concerns Nanak’s life and teachings, which McLeod feels will suffer as a result of the misinterpretation of the janamsakhis. If the janamsakhis are treated as accurate historical sources, we will be accepting interpretations of Nanak’s life and mission as facts, and doing so will distort our interpretation of his works.22

McLeod illustrates this point with an example. In one sakhi, Nanak is said to have ‘disappeared’ in the River Bein, emerging again only after being submerged in the river for three days. Upon his emergence from the water, Nanak is said to have uttered the following statement, “There is no Hindu, there is no Musalaman” and to have dressed in clothes that were a mix of Hindu and Muslim styles. Other janamsakhi features reinforce this image and leave the impression that one of Nanak’s fundamental intentions was to draw Hindus and Muslims together. McLeod states that this image has influenced the interpretation of Nanak’s works and is probably the cause of the incorrect notion that his works represent a conscious syncretism, which sought to blend Hindu and Muslim beliefs. Therefore, the risks that accompany the misinterpretation of the janamsakhi are great.23

Another problem, resulting from the acceptance of the janamsakhis as valid historical sources, is that the janamsakhis, themselves, suffer. The janamsakhis’ real value concerns the later panth, which is the time period when the janamsakhis were recorded. Since the janamsakhis were produced within the context of the developing

21 Ibid, p10.
panth, they can impart a great deal of information concerning Sikhism's earlier period of development. They represent the Sikh community of the time: their beliefs and ideologies, including their attitude towards and treatment of women. However this value cannot be recognized if the janamsakhis are treated only as sources for Nanak's life.

The third problem that McLeod associates with an overemphasis of the janamsakhis as historical sources is the danger that "Sikhism as a whole may come to be associated with the kind of marvels and miracles, which are the janamsakhi stock-in-trade. Problems with this particular feature of the total Sikh tradition may well carry over into other areas.... Seemingly harmless stories can be lethal to one's faith." 24 McLeod meets with criticism upon this point, however, by Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh.

Singh agrees with McLeod upon the point that the janamsakhis have been generally ignored and recognizes McLeod's work as the sole exception to this rule. She also agrees that to use the janamsakhis solely for biographical details, do them grave injustice. Singh feels that the "mythic dimension" of the janamsakhi is still neglected. 25 She acknowledges that the janamsakhis are myths, however she asserts the importance of mythologization in Sikhism. For example, she also refers to the sakhi when Nanak enters the River Bein and emerges, stating, "There is no Hindu, there is no Musalaman". Singh feels that the Sikh tradition's identity is due to this sakhi, because of its presentation of "Ultimate Reality as a totally formless and transcendent being." 26 Singh further states that "[t]he salient features of the myth projected in the janamsakhi are [that] Nanak had an intense revelatory experience; ... his response to that experience was in the form of

23 Ibid, p21.
24 Ibid, p22.
ardently joyous poetry; ... in his poetry he formulates his conception and perception of Ultimate reality as total unity; and ... soon after he set out, he was recognized as the "founder" of a new religious community."\(^{27}\)

McLeod states that the janamsakhis reflect the beliefs, attitudes and needs of the Sikh community of the time period in which they developed (the late 16th and early 17th century)\(^{28}\). He feels that these needs encouraged the development of the "wonder stories" which are a prominent feature of the sakhis. Such stories are a compelling need in the popular piety of all religions and the janamsakhis provided a natural response.\(^{29}\) Another need of the Sikh community was that of cohesion.

The primary function of the janamsakhis, from the late 16th to the early 18th centuries, was that of "panthic cohesion"\(^{30}\); the maintenance of the Sikh community's cohesion during the pre-Khalsa period. It was the person of Nanak himself, as well as his teachings, which held together the early panth (the first half of the 16th century). This personal authority of the guru was the primary cohesive agent, continuing through all successor gurus, until Guru Gobind's death in 1708. However, Nanak's personality was projected through the janamsakhis as well as through his successors. The janamsakhis filled this cohesive role because they provided Nanak as a single focus for the common loyalty of the panth. Loyalty to a person is an effective means of maintaining sectarian or communal cohesion and that is why the guru's personality always receives the janamsakhis' primary attention. Even when later janamsakhis developed commentaries

\(^{26}\) Ibid, p332.
\(^{27}\) Ibid, p341.
\(^{29}\) Ibid, p12.
\(^{30}\) W. H. McLeod, \textit{Early Sikh Tradition}, p238.
and an interest in doctrinal issues (i.e. the Miharban), they always related these issues directly to Nanak's image.  

Loyalty to the first Guru was the constant, which helped to hold the community together through the social and economic pressures of the 17th and even the early 18th century. A decline in the janamsakhis tradition occurred, however, when Guru Gobind died and confusion resulting from the events of the 18th century "forced a radically different situation upon the Panth." 

The needs of the Sikh panth changed in the 18th century as a result of the dominant Jat constituency and conflict with the Muslims. These needs were met by "recourse to distinctively Jat patterns and to institutions, which explicitly distinguished the Sikh from the Muslims." Gradually the Khalsa rahit (Code of Discipline) was developed. Its features included uncut hair (which was a Jat custom) and the prohibition of tobacco and halal meat (which was anti-Muslim). There were also regular assemblies in dharamsalas. All these served to strengthen the community's cohesion. All of these replaced the janamsakhis as a source of community cohesion because the sakhis could no longer meet the needs of the Sikh panth of the time; substitutes were needed and found.

Although the janamsakhis cannot be used as reliable historical sources for the life of Nanak, they can be used today to impart historical knowledge on the time in which they evolved, the 17th and 18th centuries. They are important supplements to the few Persian/European accounts of the time period. The Janamsakhis provide us with a glimpse into the rural society and its components (i.e. landless labourers, landowners,

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31 Ibid, p245.  
32 Ibid, p246.  
33 McLeod, Early Sikh Tradition, p247.  
34 Refers to a Sikh place of worship.
fakirs etc) among other things. From numerous references to *dharamsalas* we can see that these buildings provided a "distinctively Sikh cultural center" and through their descriptions we are also given glimpses of panth meetings and curtains. The janamsakhis are also used to promulgate messages of Sikhism; or what the writers interpreted the various messages to be. Each sakhí incorporates within its structure a *shabad* (hymn), which reinforces the moral that the sakhí is trying to teach.

More specifically, and more importantly, for us, we can see that the janamsakhis also indirectly present us with messages about the society of the time. Their presentation of various women characters gives us an indication of what people felt was the proper position and proper behaviour for women of the time period. When examining these sakhís, we must also remember who wrote them. Men wrote the janamsakhís for a male audience. So, if the sakhís have a slightly misogynistic tone, this observation helps to explain why.

The Different Janamsakhi Traditions

**Bhai Bala Tradition**

The first of the various janamsakhi traditions is the Bhai Bala Tradition, so termed because the stories in this tradition are attributed to Bala Sandhu. Bala supposedly found and transcribed Nanak's horoscope and in the process it became "a chronicle of Nanak's life." McLeod states that the Bala Janamsakhi exercises a tremendous amount of influence "in determining what has generally been accepted as the authoritative account of Guru Nanak's life." Although this is the least reliable of all janamsakhi traditions, as a historical source, it reigned supreme as the most accepted janamsakhi tradition until

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1872 and the discovery of the Puratan tradition. And to this day it is the most popular of the various janamsakhi traditions. One of the reasons for its popularity amongst the Sikh community is due to the belief that it was written by Bhai Bala, a companion of Guru Nanak. The Sikh panth fondly welcomes this account because it was said to be dictated by Bhai Bala himself in the presence of the second guru, Guru Angad, so that all the tales are told from “first-hand experience.” This theory for the origin of the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi has little basis in fact, as there is no certainty about the existence of Bhai Bala.38

There are two other theories for the origin of the Bhai Bala janamsakhis. The first is that an earlier janamsakhi of unknown origin was interpolated by the Hindalis. The Hindalis (also known as the Niranjanis) were a heretical sect, who contested the leadership of Guru Hargobind and participated in a mutual enmity with the Sikh panth throughout their existence.39 The first theory of interpolation of an earlier text was popularized by Santokh Singh, an early nineteenth century Sikh hagiographer. By suggesting that the Hindalis had made their own insertions into an earlier text, Santokh Singh was thereby able to allow for a comfortable continued presence of the Bala

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38 It is generally understood that Bhai Bala, a Sandhu Jat, was a childhood companion of Guru Nanak. But he is not referred to in any other janamsakhi. Within Bhai Gurdas’ first var, there is a reference to Mardana, but none to Bala. Bhai Gurdas’ eleventh var, mentions the names of prominent Sikhs from the time periods of the first six gurus, but there is no mention of Bala here, either. Nor is he referred to in either the Puratan or Miharban janamsakhis [to be discussed below]. Kirpal Singh, *Janamsakhi Parampara*, p.xvii.
39 Bidhi Chand was the son of Baba Hindal of Jandiala. Baba Hindal was a loyal convert to Sikhism under Guru Amar Das and was rewarded for his great service by being appointed to a position of great authority in the community. However, Bidhi Chand married a Muslim woman and was condemned by the Sikh community, which led to his rejection of the faith. Bidhi Chand consequently rivalled Guru Hargobind’s claim to leadership and led his sect out of Jandiala, which became a centre of opposition to the Gurus. The enmity between the Sikh panth and the Hindali sect continued through “the period of Muslim persecution in the eighteenth century [when the] Hindalis disclaimed the title of Sikh ... [and gave] their active support against the Khalsa”, until the sect eventually declined into insignificance. The group was called the
tradition within the Sikh community, by explaining away the denigratory references towards Nanak which the Hindalis had included. Santokh Singh (as many after him have done), simply omitted the offensive material and used this version as the basis for his work, *Nanak Prakas*.

Karam Singh vigorously supported the second theory, that the Bhai Bala is entirely an original work of the Hindalis, in his book *Kattak ki Visakh*. This theory suggests that the Hindalis composed this work in order to aid them in their struggle against the orthodox Sikh community. McLeod rejects these two theories and suggests a third, that the earliest existing versions of the Bala janamsakhis may represent a mid seventeenth century janamsakhi which was interpolated by the Hindalis. However there is no manuscript evidence in support of this theory and if such a janamsakhi did exist then the Hindalis must have made use of it as soon as it emerged.  

Whichever of these theories may be true, there is little doubt that the Bhai Bala janamsakhi tradition is a Hindali version of the life of Guru Nanak. This is due to occasional disparaging references towards Guru Nanak, which are included in the early Bala manuscripts. Such references could hardly be the work of a loyal disciple. In addition, within these same earliest Bhai Bala janamsakhis, several episodes are included which seem to exalt Baba Hindal at the expense of Nanak. Among these is a proposition that Kabir, Nanak and Hindal were all participants in a "threelfold apostolic succession" which began with Kabir and culminated with Hindal. Another story appearing in some of Hindalis because Bidhi Chand's claim to the leadership was advanced in the name of his father, Baba Hindal. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p23 and McLeod, *Early Sikh Tradition*, p17.

the earlier manuscripts actually seems to suggest that Nanak once asked Angad to grant him seigniorial rights over his daughter.\footnote{Ibid, p17.}

Due to this Hindali involvement, it seems ironic that the Bhai Bala would be the most popular of the janamsakhi traditions, but because the Sikh panth generally believes that it was Bhai Bala Sandhu who was responsible for the existence of this tradition, the Hindali involvement is generally ignored. In addition, the versions of the Bhai Bala tradition, which are available to the Sikh panth of today, generally do not contain the aforementioned disparaging remarks or anecdotes.

There are two main recensions of the Bhai Bala janamsakhi available in manuscript form; Recension A and Recension B. The main difference between the two is that the second includes sakhis concerning Nanak’s death. McLeod also refers to four printed editions of the Bhai Bala janamsakhis. The Bala Lithographed Edition A contains 90 sakhis, the Bala Lithographed Edition B contains 311 sakhis (both A and B were printed in 1871), the Bala Lithographed Edition C (printed in 1890) contains 495 sakhis and the Bala Letterpress Edition which still sells well today contains 183 sakhis. The number of sakhis in this popular edition are reduced through the amalgamation of earlier sakhis.\footnote{Ibid, pp 21-22.}

\textbf{Puratan Tradition}

The Puratan Tradition was the first tradition to give the Bhai Bala Tradition any competition. The Puratan Tradition is so termed (Puratan means ancient) because it was erroneously believed to be the oldest of all versions when first discovered in 1872. McLeod states that while it may be accurate to say that the Puratan version is the oldest
of all existing accounts (although still disputed), it is an error to suggest that the Puratan
tradition represents an 'original' janamsakhi.43 As in the Bala Tradition, the Puratan
Tradition consists of more than one manuscripts which are connected, these being the
Colebrooke Janamsakhi44 (also known as the Valaitvali45 Janamsakhi), the Hafizabad (or
Macauliffe-vali) Janamsakhi46 and the Prachin Janamsakhi47.

The Puratan Janamsakhis “seemed to provide an answer for those who regarded
the Bala version with embarrassment”48 because it seemed to offer a more rational
account of Nanak’s life. Although the Puratan also contains miracle stories, they are not
as fantastic as those of the Bala tradition. In addition, it has a “coherent travel
itinerary”49 which discusses the direction of Nanak’s travels50. It was this coherent travel
itinerary which appealed mostly to an educated class. Although this was a mistaken
belief, the Puratan was still used as a source for many works on Guru Nanak. Generally
it can be said that while the Bhai Bala Tradition has remained the favourite janamsakhi in
popular opinion, the Puratan Tradition has been favoured among the education opinion.

43 Ibid.
44 This manuscript was discovered in 1872 by Ernst Trumpp. In 1869, the Punjab government
commissioned Trumpp, a German missionary, to translate the Guru Granth into English. Trumpp wished
to learn more about Nanak’s life and, upon his return to Europe in 1872, the India Office Library in London
forwarded him some manuscripts which included this previously unknown one. It had been presented to
the Library of the East India House by H. T. Colebrooke, a famous indologist in 1815 or 1816.
45 So termed because it was discovered abroad (known as valait in Punjabi terminology) in England.
46 This Janamsakhi was first published in 1885 by M. A. Macauliffe. Macauliffe had been loaned this
Puratan manuscript by a Gurmukh Singh of Oriental College, Lahore in 1884. Gurmukh Singh had found
this manuscript in the town of Hafizabad, Gujranwala District. Ibid, p25.
47 This manuscript belongs to the private collection of a collector, Seva Singh Sevak of Tarn Taran and
represents a later and greatly expanded Puratan collection. Although most of the stories in this manuscript
are derived from Puratan material, it also includes material from other sources, including the Miharban and
49 Ibid, p22.
50 The Puratan Tradition depicts Nanak as first travelling East to Assam, then South to Sri Lanka, then
North to Mt. Kailash, and West to Mecca before finally settling down in the Punjab.
The Adi Sakhis

The Adi Sakhis were first uncovered in pre-partition 1947 by Dr. Mohan Singh Dewana in Punjab University in Lahore. Four manuscript copies were also discovered on the India side and a printed edition of this text was eventually published by Professor Piar Singh of Punjabi University, Patiala in 1969. The term Adi Sakhis (Original sakhis) is misleading, however, because it implies that it is the original sakhis. Although the version it presents is old it represents only an "intermediate stage in the growth of the janamsaksis"\textsuperscript{51}. The original collection of the Adi Sakhis is considered to have been compiled during the seventeenth century and to incorporate material from earlier sources, including the Miharban Janamsakhi\textsuperscript{52}.

Miharban Janamsakhi

The Miharban Janamsakhi was first discovered in 1940 in the village Damdama Sahib, and is an incomplete tradition, as only three of the six pothis have been located. The authorship of this recension is attributed to Sodi Miharban, son of Prithi Chand who was the eldest son of the fourth guru, Guru Ram Das. When Guru Ram Das’ younger son (Arjan) was named the fifth guru, Prithi Chand contested the appointment and consequently led his own group of followers, known as the Minas (scoundrels). Because of the "tainted history" of this recension, the Miharban janamsakhi was regarded as heretical and consequently, no great effort was made to locate this manuscript. This tradition differs from other janamsakhi traditions because this janamsakhi is presented as a series of discourses (gosts) rather than as a collection of sakhis, which is the case in the

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p24.
\textsuperscript{52} W. H. McLeod. \textit{Early Sikh Tradition}, p32.
other traditions. The earlier part of this janamsakhi is similar to the Puratan tradition in
that it contains an ordered travel itinerary, but after that the two traditions diverge.
Although the familiar anecdotes are present here as well, Nanak almost always uses these
anecdotes as a way of delivering “a lengthy discourse expounding one or other of his
hymns.”

**Lesser Janamsakhi Traditions and Individual Works**

The Gyan Ratanavali janamsakhi tradition is traditionally attributed to a famous Sikh
martyr, Bhai Mani Singh, who was executed in 1738. It is doubtful, however, that Bhai
Mani Singh was the author of this tradition. The Gyan Ratanavali janamsakhi augments
the Var of Bhai Gurdas including much material from the Bhai Bala tradition and is dated
about the early nineteenth century.

The Mahima prakas tradition represents a janamsakhi collection, which developed in
or near Khadur (the village of Guru Angad). This tradition divides into two versions: the
prose version (the mahimas prakas varatak) and the verse version (the mahima prakas
kavita). The mahima prakas differs from other janamsakhi traditions in that it does not
concentrate solely on Guru Nanak, but recounts the lives of succeeding gurus as well.

The Var I of Bhai Gurdas is a poetic account, which narrates anecdotes of Nanak.
Bhai Gurdas (a relative of the third guru) was an early collector of anecdotes (his career
spanned from the time of the 3 guru to the 6th guru).

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54 Bhai Mani Singh is said to have composed this janamsakhi at the request of some Sikhs who were
concerned that groups such as the Minas were misinterpreting the Adi Granth. Bhai Mani Singh is said to
have suggested the Var of Bhai Gurdas as a janamsakhi for them to refer to. However, the group of Sikhs
requested him to write an expanded commentary on it. To which Bhai Mani Singh agreed.
The LDP 194 and B40 Janamsakhi are the only two janamsakhi manuscripts that do not belong to a distinctive janamsakhi tradition and are so named for their library catalogue numbers. Both these janamsakhis are closely related to other traditions (especially the Puratan and the Adi Sakhi Traditions).

**The Women’s Oral Janamsakhi Tradition**

When first undertaking my Master’s thesis, I had planned to examine the representation of gender in two different janamsakhi traditions; the Bhai Bala and the B40. At first, the Bhai Bala janamsakhi tradition appeared to allocate women a much stronger position in the sakhis, whereas the sakhis in the B40 possessed a misogynistic tone. However, my original hypothesis that women characters in the Bhai Bala tradition were well represented and enjoyed esteemed roles, began to weaken as I read the janamsakhis recorded in the Bhai Bala Tradition in greater detail. Although women appeared more frequently than in the B40 Tradition, they were still quite neglected and overshadowed by male characters. Most of the stories, as previously mentioned, concentrated on events which took place during Nanak’s travels away from his home, so that there was a minimal focus upon the domestic sphere. This especially surprised me because I remembered my mother telling me stories where female characters such as Tripta, Nanaki and Sulakhni actually had active roles in the stories and there were many

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57 I arrived at this conclusion due to stories such as the following about “The Country Ruled By Women”. In this story Nanak and Mardana arrive at a land that is ruled entirely by women. Mardana expresses a desire to see this country and does enter it, although Nanak advises him against it. Upon his arrival there, the women turn Mardana into a ram. When Mardana does not return, Nanak goes in search of him and immediately recognizes that the ram is Mardana and restores him to his proper self. It is then that the women recognize Nanak stating, “This is no man ... [he] must be God!” and fall at his feet crying, “Sir, we have suffered much from the absence of men. Free us from this suffering”. W. H. McLeod. *B40 Janamsakhi*. Pp 89-91. While there is also a mention of a land ruled entirely by women in the Bala Janamsakhi, this misogynistic tones are much more evident within the B40 Tradition.
more stories that had taken place in the domestic sphere. "Where were all the women in
these stories," I asked myself.

When we turn our attention towards the present day oral tradition, we see that our
question; "Where are the women?" has been answered. They are here, in the women's
oral tradition.

Some of the janamsakhis, which have not had a chance to be recorded, are those
sakhis that have originated with women. Although originally all the janamsakhis were
orally told and transmitted by males, a separate tradition of tales told by women also
emerged. I was given the opportunity to uncover a hidden women's oral tradition and
record some of the janamsakhis told by Sikh women in the Punjab during the months of
February to April 2000.

After an extensive reading of the written traditions, I still had not encountered the
stories that I was searching for, the stories that I remembered being told to me in my
childhood. I decided then to approach other people and see if they were familiar with
stories where women played a more active role. I asked various students at the university
hostel, at Punjabi University in Patiala, where I was residing, if they knew any
janamsakhi stories, whether they had had such stories told to them by their parents or
grandparents. Many of the girls stated they were not very familiar with the tradition other
than through the stories they had read during primary school in their readers. Others
stated that although they could remember being told these stories (usually by their
grandmother) when young, they could not recall any story in great detail. All of the
people did suggest that I ask older people as "they were probably the only ones who were
familiar with such stories these days."
When I first mentioned that I wished to record janamsakhi stories told by women I was introduced by acquaintances to different women in the city of Patiala who were considered to be very familiar with the janamsakhi tradition. These women were from the Sikh religion and belonged either to the Jat or Dakhan\textsuperscript{58} castes. All these women were well educated and most either worked outside of the home, or were retired from their jobs. They all led very active lives, which were not restricted to the domestic sphere.

I was brought to the first woman’s house by her niece who explained that her aunt was a very religious woman, who prayed a lot and knew everything there was to know about Guru Nanak. She was a housewife in her late fifties, and held both a BA and an MA in Economics. She was fairly affluent and led an active life, mostly revolving around the gurdwara and bimonthly prayer meetings with her group of friends. When I arrived at the house the first thing that I noticed was a copy of the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi lying on the table in the sitting room. The woman told me that all the stories I would need I could find in that book. I mentioned that I was already familiar with the stories in that book and that I wished to hear stories that she could tell me herself. However, she stated that there was no need for her to tell me any stories because the stories she knew were all taken from this book. I did eventually persuade her to share a few stories with me, however, as she had herself stated, the stories were all ones familiar to the Bhai Bala

\textsuperscript{58} The Jats are a prominent caste within the Punjabi Sikh tradition. Traditionally they are farmers, but boast a great deal of prestige and strength because of their landowning status. Although the urban Jat women whom I interviewed came from a farming background, many had never lived in the village near a farm. They had been brought up and educated within the city. Their parents had lived and worked in the city and they and their husbands did the same. The Dakhans are another caste within Punjabi Sikh tradition and were traditionally known to be shopkeepers. They were traditionally more educated than the Jats. The urban Dakhan women whom I interviewed also worked outside the home and led lives similar to the Jat women.
tradition, with very little female representation and focus on stories. Sometimes during our storytelling session, she would forget a detail and stop in the middle of the story, expressing her desire to check the detail in the book. When I discouraged her from doing so and asked her to just keep telling the story from memory, she complied, but the next time she forgot a detail, she told me, “Just wait a minute, while I ask your uncle” (meaning her husband).

When I approached other women in Patiala, it was always with a similar outcome. Either they apologetically told me that they did not remember any janamsakhi stories and had nothing to tell me, or they told stories, which they admitted were taken directly from the Bhai Bala janamsakhis. Another woman, to whom I was introduced, was very forthcoming with her stories. She was in her early sixties, and a retired teacher. After I entered her house and we completed the usual formalities, including the required cup of tea, this woman immediately launched into story after story. However, again, I was disappointed to discover that I still had not heard the stories that I was expecting to hear. This woman’s stories focused on Nanak’s adventures away from his home, just as the other women’s stories had done. There was little reference to Nanak’s personal life, other than the initial story, which all the women began with, about Nanak’s birth. When I asked this woman where she had heard these stories, again I heard the, by now, all too familiar reference to the Bhai Bala Tradition.

The city of Patiala, however, was not the only place where I collected janamsakhi stories told by women. When I visited my mother’s native village of Mahala, in the District of Jalandhar, I mentioned to my aunt that I was interested in hearing some of the stories, which my mother had told me in my childhood. She herself said that she could
not remember many stories, however, there were other women within the village who were more familiar with such stories. Upon hearing the stories told by these women, I realized that "this was where the women had been hiding".

I interviewed various Jat Sikh women in the villages of Mahala and Bara Pind in the district of Jalandhar. It was still difficult at first to convince some of the women to tell me these stories. Oftentimes when I approached a woman she would say, "What do I know of such stories?" or "You should ask someone else who knows more". This was despite the fact that their children and grandchildren assured me that their mother/grandmother did know such stories, that they themselves had heard them tell these stories. However, I collected many more stories from the women in these villages than I did from the women in the city of Patiala. These women were also, typically, the eldest females in their households enjoying their roles as mothers and grandmothers. They were less educated than the women in Patiala, and possessed rudimentary reading and writing skills, but most had little or no formal education. Those who had been to school had not attended past the fifth standard. They were all housewives whose lives revolved around their homes and families.

Because they were members of farming families, they had many duties related to the farm as well as to the household. Although most of them had passed the greater weight of the workload onto their daughters-in-law, they still had a great deal of work to do during the day which kept them restricted to their home, the farm, or to the homes of nearby neighbours. Their duties included milking and feeding the water buffalo, making dung cakes, taking meals to their husbands and sons in the fields, and so on. However, the evening meal and dishes were usually taken care of by their daughter(s)-in-law,
during which time they could relax a little with their own grandchildren. This was the
time period during which they usually told their grandchildren the janamsakhi stories.
However, these days, with the introduction of cable television and VCRs to most villages,
children (especially the elder ones) were not as interested in listening to such stories as
other children had been in the past. The women confessed that they themselves were
more interested in what was occurring in popular television serials or the latest video
rental than in telling such stories. The evening storytime ritual had been much more
prominent and popular in the past, when there was no television. It was then that these
grandmothers had been little grandchildren themselves, listening to their own elders tell
them these stories.

Three women were especially prolific in their tellings of the janamsakhi stories.
Most other women told me only a handful of stories and only after much prodding. In
addition, the women told many of the same stories. Rather than refer to each of these
stories separately, I have chosen to refer only to three informants because their cache of
stories includes all of the stories, which were told by the other women. I shall refer to
these three women as Storytellers A, B and C. Storyteller A was 50 years old, and from
the village of Mahala in the District of Jalandhar. She had completed schooling up to the
fifth standard and was better educated than many women of her age in her area.
Storyteller B was from the village of Bara Pind in the District of Jalandhar. She was 64
years old and had attended school up to the third standard. She had also immigrated to
Calgary, Alberta about ten years ago after her youngest son was married there and now
usually spent six months in India and six months in Canada. Storyteller C was also from
the village of Mahala, in the District of Jalandhar. She was 56 years old and had also
attended school up to the third standard. The stories these women told me were the same stories they told their grandchildren or had previously told their own children.

Although these women still related many stories that concentrated upon Nanak’s adventures away from the home, a large proportion of their stories focused on events from within the domestic sphere. They laid more emphasis upon stories taking place in the home and were concerned with Nanak’s family life. In addition, female characters were well represented within these stories, whilst many of dominant male characters, such as Jai Ram and Rai Bhullar, who were dominant within the written tradition were barely present at all.

The two groups of women whom I interviewed were separated by an urban/rural divide, which resulted in a difference of educational levels and lifestyles. The urban group of women was better educated; they had all graduated from plus 2 (the equivalent of high school) and many held university degrees. They led active lives, which frequently took them out of their homes, either professionally or socially. Most also could afford servants who took care of the bigger household tasks (such as sweeping and mopping the floors, or doing the laundry), so that they had more free time and were able to venture out of the house frequently. These women had also been told janamsakhis in their childhood but most of the stories that they remembered well were ones that they had read from books, usually from a version of the Bhai Bala Janamsahi. Oftentimes while telling a story if they forgot a detail they would say, just wait a minute while I look this up in my book.

Within the second group, few of these women had received any formal education and those who had had not advanced beyond the fifth grade. These women told me that
they had been told these stories in their childhood – by their grandmother or mother or some other woman in the household. Storyteller C, the emigrant to Canada, was the only one to state otherwise. She stated that although she had originally been told such stories by her own dadi (paternal grandmother), now, in Canada, she usually heard the stories told by the granthi\footnote{Sikh priest} at her local gurdwara, which she attended regularly. An examination of her stories shows that this exposure to a male perspective most assuredly had an influence upon the content of her stories as well. Although the stories she tells still have a female perspective and contain many references to female characters, the majority of the stories she told me focused upon the adventure plot.

In the following chapters I will examine the stories told by the women of the first group, who were from the villages and possessed little education, since these sakhis are from the “true” oral tradition, and not oral regurgitations from the written Bhai Bala Tradition.
CHAPTER III: THE SILENCING OF WOMEN

Women as Muted Groups Within the Written Tradition

Men have had every advantage of us in telling their story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands.60

This comment by Jane Austen’s literary character Anne Elliot in her novel Persuasion, speaks volumes about the problems women have faced when trying to communicate their feelings and experiences to others. Because women have never held power in a patriarchal society, they have never had control of or access to the modes of communication in society, which includes access to the written word. As a result, women have been rendered a muted group.

Through the influence of patriarchy, society discounts the words and consequently perceptions and opinions of its subordinate members. Women, as such a subordinate group, have difficulty making their voice be heard and are rendered muted. The muted group theory was first proposed by Edwin Ardener. Ardener suggests that society is a social hierarchy which consists of dominant and subordinate groups. It is the dominant group which holds power and, consequently, has control of the communication system. In a patriarchy the dominant group enjoying power at the high end of the hierarchy is male, therefore, it is males who will dominate society’s communication system. Men are articulate, and women, who are placed in subordinate positions, are rendered inarticulate, or mute. Ardener states that:

We may speak of ‘muted groups’ and ‘articulate groups’ along this dimension. There are many kinds of muted groups. We would then go on to ask: “What is it that makes a group muted?” We then become aware that it is muted simply because it does not form part of the dominant

communicative system of the society – expressed as it must be through the dominant ideology, and that ‘mode of production’, if you wish, which is articulated with it.  

Ardener points out that “because the arena of public discourse tends to be characteristically male-dominated and the appropriate language registers often seem to have been ‘encoded’ by males, women are at a disadvantage when wishing to express matters of peculiar concern to them”  

However, he points out that women can express themselves and their ideas in “forms other than direct expository speech, possibly through symbolism in art, myth, ritual, social speech registers, and the like.”  

Cheris Kramarae further expands upon this theory of women as a muted group, emphasizing the idea that language is man-made, and that women have to adapt to a man-made language in order to communicate effectively. Because dominant groups, i.e. men, have formulated the words that women will be using, this language will not serve the needs of women and other subordinate groups as effectively as it serves the needs of its creators. Women, due to their subordinate position in society, experience life differently from men, and, consequently, their perceptions are also different from those of men. “However, the words and norms for speaking are not generated from or fitted to women’s experiences. Women are thus “muted”. Their talk is often not considered of much value by men – who are, or appear to be, deaf and blind to much of women’s experiences.”

Therefore, frequently and consistently, it is the experiences of the men, “the articulate group”, which are told and heard, whilst those of women, “the muted group”, remain

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63 Ibid.
hidden. Patriarchy propagates inherent divisions in society, restricting men to a public
domain and women to a private domain, so that access to the other domains is limited and
exposure to the other's words and experiences is also thus limited.

Kramarae states that the muted group theory makes three basic assumptions
regarding the relationship of women and men:

1. Women perceive the world differently from men because of women's and men's
different experiences and activities rooted in the division of labor.
2. Because of their political dominance, the men's system of perception is dominant,
impeding the free expression of the women's alternative models of the world.
3. In order to participate in society women must transform their own models in terms of
the received male system of expression.\(^{65}\)

These three assumptions pertain to the patriarchal Punjabi society as well. Here, too,
men and women have traditionally been designated different roles and tasks in society,
with women being restricted to the domestic sphere and men enjoying more freedom in
the public sphere. As a consequence of this division of labor, women and men will
undergo different experiences and have differing perceptions of the world. However, it is
rarely that one will hear about the women's experience because the men's perception
dominate. This silencing of women is present not only in Punjabi society at large, but in
the janamsakhi tradition as well. There is an irony to this because the janamsakhis are a
literary tradition within Sikhism and many have considered Sikhism to be a religion,
which exalted the status of women.

\(^{65}\) Ibid, p3
The Lack of Representation of Women in the Sikh Tradition

It has been argued that Sikhism is “the most neglected of India’s religious traditions;”66 within this neglected tradition the janamsakhi tradition has been one of the more neglected topics, and the topic of women in the janamsakhis has rarely been addressed. The fact that the topic of women in the janamsakhis has rarely been addressed is not surprising when considering that women have generally been underrepresented in the Sikh tradition. Doris Jakobsh comments upon this in her article, “The Construction of Gender in History and Religion: The Sikh Case”, when she states “the guiding principle within Sikh history is silence with regard to women.”67

There have been a few exceptions to this rule. Jakobsh cites M. K. Gill’s, The Role and Status of Women in Sikhism in which the author focuses on the wives of the Sikh gurus, and fleetingly questions the indifference of Sikh historians to these women. Jakobsh also comments upon the fact that this silence with regard to Sikh women is not surprising when considering that history has always been written from a male’s point of view. As the dominant group in society, males have always heavily influenced the writing of literature and history. The dominant group will exercise control over what to include or exclude from the books; and invariably, women have almost always been excluded. Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh’s work, The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent is another exception to this rule of silence regarding women, although this work concentrates primarily upon the sacred scriptures of the Adi Granth.

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This underrepresentation of women within the Sikh tradition is especially ironic when one considers that many Sikh scholars have lauded Sikhism to be a religion, which endeavours to allot women a position in society which is equal to men. Shashi Bala is one scholar who holds such views, arguing “Guru Nanak appeared at a time, when there was complete disintegration not only social and political but also moral and spiritual.”

Some feel that this disintegration included the fall of the status of women, which Nanak made an attempt to rectify through his teachings. Upinder Jit Kaur claims that dominant religions of the time, such as Hinduism and Islam, placed women in a subordinate position, and Sikhism introduced teachings that were in opposition to this. Kaur argues that although women in India had once held a stronger status in society, enjoying the right to education and participation in religious rituals, they were “reduced to the status of slave ever since the establishment of Brahmin’s dominance and enforcement of Manu’s code.” She suggests that it was the Manusmriti, which “laid down the fundamental and outrageous doctrine of women’s perpetual subjection.” She further states that such attitudes were characteristic of other Indian religions as well, including Jainism and Buddhism, but that “Sikhism made a radical departure from Hinduism by demolishing the iniquitous barriers that the Hindus society had erected between man and man, and between man and woman.” These two scholars are representatives of those who seek to claim that Sikhism was unique in its high regard of women, however both Bala and Kaur

70 Ibid, p76.
71 Code of conduct written by the Brahmin Manu, which stipulated that women were not allowed to study the Vedas or to perform sacrificial rites.
72 Ibid, p76.
73 Ibid, p77.
are very selective in their representation of other religions of the time, and neglect to mention that passages which place women in a subordinate position also exist within Sikhism.

Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh is another scholar who holds views similar to that of Upinder Jit Kaur. Singh feels that an examination of the writings in Sikhism supports the hypothesis that Sikhism has allotted an esteemed position to women:

Within the Sikh scriptural corpus the feminine principle is especially significant, and furthermore in the writings of the Sikh Gurus, pride of place is given both to the female person and to the female psyche. Ikk Oan Kar (One Being Is) is the core representation of the Sikh faith: the numeral I (Ikk or One) celebrates the existence of That which is beyond gender, space, time, and casualty, and refers directly to the Ultimate Reality, to Being Itself. Yet this One is sensuously addressed and cherished in the Sikh holy writ as mother and father, sister and brother – thus as both male and female.\(^74\)

Singh argues that the Sikh vision of the transcendent as a formless being without masculine attributes is original from the traditional views. God is not the traditional Judeo-Christian God where God is seen as a father figure (i.e. God is described in masculine terms or associated with masculine images).\(^75\) Kaur Singh states that even the terms used for God in Sikhism are not necessarily gender-specific. These terms include, Akal Purakh (Timeless Being), Kartar (Creator), Parmatma (Great Soul), Alakh (Ineffable – beyond language and description) and Nirankar (Formless). Kaur Singh

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\(^75\) This idea of a formless being is one which Singh elaborates upon as being very significant. The image of God in Sikhism is that of a formless being, in contrast to a religion like Hinduism were the gods and goddesses all have specific forms. The three major gods of the Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) all have specifically male forms. And the god Krishna, the most prominent god featured in the Bhagavad Gita, is a dark-skinned male. In contrast, however, the image of the Transcendent which Nanak encounters when he is submerged in the River Bein for three days is not that of a God with a human form. More specifically, and perhaps, most importantly, it is not God with a male form. God is not a handsome, dark-skinned young man as per the Hindu tradition. Nor is God an elderly father figure with a flowing beard as is commonly seen in the Judeo-Christian religion. God is without form, without characteristics. God existed before the creation of the universe, before the beginning of time, in a void, without attributes. He is without any sign (niranjan) and he is neither female (nar) nor male (purakh). Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent*. 

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points to certain verses contained within the Adi Granth which seem to glorify women.

One such example is the often cited verse:

    From the woman is our birth;  
    In the woman's womb are we shaped.  
    To the woman are we engaged;  
    To the woman are we wedded.  
    The woman, yea, is our friend,  
    And from woman is the family.  
    If one woman dies, we seek another;  
    Through the woman are the bonds of the world.  
    O, why call woman evil who giveth birth to kings.  
    From the woman is the woman;  
    Without the woman there is none;  
    Nanak, without the woman is the  
    One True Lord Alone.\textsuperscript{76}

However, within this discussion, Kaur Singh neglects to mention \textit{nirguna} traditions where God is also formless and overlooks many contradictions within the Sikh texts.

The occasional misogynistic references, which Upinder Jit Kaur touted as being present in other religions of the time, are present in Sikhism as well. There are discrepancies in the writings of Nanak and in the Adi Granth. For example, although Kaur Singh claims that God is viewed in non-gender specific terms, many of the names do come with gender classification. The term \textit{Akal Purakh}, which Kaur Singh had lauded as a term which was not gender specific does contain masculine connotations, because \textit{purakh} means man. God is also referred to as the \textit{Sahib}, the \textit{Patshah of Patshahs}, the \textit{khasam} and the \textit{kant} – all of which are masculine terms.

Jakobsh argues that Kaur Singh’s claim of feminine dominance in the Sikh scriptures, “is contestable, since the Ultimate in the Sikh scripture, the Adi Granth is almost exclusively conceived in masculine terms, \textit{Akal Purakh, Karta Purakh, Purakh}

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
meaning ‘man’ in Punjabi.”

She also comments upon the fact that numerous passages in the scripture associate women with *maya*, and that men are ridiculed for the same characteristics (obedience and subservience) which are exalted in women. She refers to the verse, “From the woman is our birth…” (quoted above) stating that this verse, “supposedly indicative of Guru Nanak’s positive evaluation of womanhood, points instead to an appreciation of woman given their pivotal role in the procreative process.”

Jakobsh also points out that the view towards women in this verse is very similar to that of the writer of the *Brhaspatismrti* written in the 4th century CE. The writer is commenting upon the discrepancies between the inheritance rights of sons and daughters when he states: “A daughter is born from [the same] human bodies as does a son. Why then should the father’s wealth be taken by another person.”

Therefore not only does Sikhism possess discrepancies in its supposedly progressive attitudes towards women, but the characteristics which were lauded as unique to Sikhism by scholars such as Upinder Jit Kaur, are also present in other religions of the time.

In addition, values, which are commended in men, are condemned in women. A “good” woman is one who is subservient and docile, whereas, men who are “obedient to their womenfolk/Are impure, filthy, stupid.” Even the verse “Of women born, of women conceived …. why speak ill of those who give birth to kings?”, does not exalt women to an extremely high status. This verse does not necessarily allocate a stronger

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78 Ibid, p29.


position to women. The speaker is a male, so that the perspective is male; and it is
woman’s ability to give birth to kings, or male progeny, which is being exalted.

Other passages also indicate patriarchal attitudes. For example, *maya* (material
world/illusion) is one thing which all must avoid, as it stands in the path to liberation.
However, in the line “There’s pleasure in gold/silver/women/scents/sweets/flesh” women are included in a list of objects, which are to be avoided because they are *maya.* In another passage, many items are mentioned which cause men to forget God. These include pearls, diamonds, thrones, armies, power, and beautiful women. In still another
passage, among the objects of attachment are included the conjugal bed and beautiful
women. They are a source of attraction for males, and therefore women are a part of
*maya.* Even the contestation that the idea of the *sanyas* (renunciation of the material
world) is lauded in Hinduism (as well as in Jainism and Buddhism) cannot be leaned
upon heavily when one considers that Nanak too left his family for years at a time during
his udasis and lived the life of a sanyasi.

Amarjit Grewal argues that although Sikh ideology does open a way for the
struggle for women’s freedom, women could not be freed so suddenly in a male
dominated society, which had for years subjugated women. In keeping with the ideas of
Ardener and Kramarae, Grewal argues that the language, which the Adi Granth is written
in, is a “language of a male society”, and because of this, *Braham* (God) is presented in a
male form, whereas the soul is presented in a female form. From this, one can see that
without man (God), woman (soul) has no life. A woman’s salvation is described as being
attained in the following ways: that she dress and adorn herself for her man, that she
serve him and that she be subservient to him and place herself at his feet. A woman had
no purpose in life other than this. Grewal emphasizes that throughout the Adi Granth, the relationship between a man and a woman (or a husband and a wife) is shown in terms of a relationship between a master and a slave. The man (or husband) is free; however the position of the woman is worse than that of a slave.  

Although Sikhism did endeavour to better the position of women in some respects, it would be an error to concede to the idea that Sikhism was radically progressive in its attitude towards and treatment of women. W. Owen Cole suggests that “Sikhism did permit women to be missionaries and teachers during the period of the ten Gurus but to go further and encourage the belief that a woman might be a guru” would be incorrect. Cole warns us against the tendency to see Guru Nanak primarily as a social reformer. The mission of proclaiming God’s word to his age was more important than improving the status of women to such a radical degree.  

Even if one were to acquiesce to Nikky Guninder and Upinder Jit Kaur’s arguments and agree that Sikhism was relatively advanced in its treatment of women, especially for the time, this attitude is not reflected in Punjabi society. Whatever the scriptures of the Guru Granth Sahib may have stated, these teachings were not always accepted or actively pursued by the Sikh panth. Jakobsh refers to Clarence McMullen who discusses this concept when discussing normative and operative beliefs.

McMullen makes a distinction between normative and operative beliefs when he discusses religious beliefs and practices. He describes normative beliefs as those “which are officially stated and prescribed or proscribed by a recognized religious authority,

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81 Adi Granth quoted in J. S. Grewal ibid.
which can be a person, organization, or an official statement."\textsuperscript{84} Inversely, operative beliefs and practices are those, which are "actually held by people."\textsuperscript{85} It is these operative beliefs which are being reflected when we see women not being represented in Sikh history and literature, including the traditional janamsakhis. The compilers of the janamsakhi tradition put aside the normative beliefs in favour of the operative ones.

The janamsakhis are one source through which the operative beliefs of the Sikh panth may be viewed. Although the normative beliefs as outlined by the gurus or the \textit{Adi Granth} may have been one of a progressive attitude towards women\textsuperscript{86}, the janamsakhis most certainly do not reflect such a view. Their reflection was of the society’s actual beliefs about and practices towards women.

The views expressed in the sacred writings of the Sikhs, such as, the \textit{Adi Granth}, are very significant because the Sikh panth has been termed a “textual community” – a community whose “social and religious activities are centered around a text and who seek to order their everyday life in close correspondence to what the text actually prescribes or what they believe it lays down”\textsuperscript{87}. Oberoi states that it is not essential for all members of a textual community to be literate, and thus to be familiar with the text, as long as there are a few literate members who can convey the text to the rest of the community. Thus


\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, p5.

\textsuperscript{87} Although it may be argued to what level the Sikh gurus actually took their elevation of women, they did contribute a great deal to improving the status of women. Many of the gurus wrote and taught against the ideas of female pollution, sati, female infanticide, etc and Guru Amar Das even appointed a number of women missionaries.

the interpretation of a select literate few (who are, inevitably, male) is what the rest of the community will imbibe. A few, male members of the Sikh panth who had access to the written word compiled and recorded the janamsakhis into the written recensions with which we are familiar today. Their interpretation of these sakhis (what stories and characters were important enough to be recorded, what representations of women were to be put forth) is what the rest of the community would eventually become more familiar with. Because the recorders of these janamsakhis were male, the result was a male literature; i.e. one dominated by male characters, male-oriented plots and male perceptions.

When referring to the janamsakhi tradition, Jakobsh too comments upon the scant attention paid to females within the janamsakhis. She states “[w]hile claiming full authority on the life and works of Guru Nanak the janam-sakhis give rather meager information regarding the female members of his family. While giving minimal insight into Guru Nanak’s familial relationships, they do however speak volumes about the insignificance awarded the women of his family by their very incongruity with regard to these women.” An examination of the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi tradition helps us to arrive at the same conclusion: that women are severely underrepresented within this written tradition, and that it is a literature oriented upon the masculine. This determination becomes all the more apparent when comparing the sakhis present in this tradition written by males to the sakhis present in the oral tradition composed by females.

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CHAPTER IV: THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE BHAI BALA TRADITION AS A MASCULINE NARRATIVE

In a patriarchal society, men have invariably held power, which includes access to the written word. As a result, women have generally been designated a muted group in society. Women have rarely had the opportunity to make their voices heard, especially in the written domain. The power of the pen, too, as Jane Austen’s Anne Elliot stated, has traditionally been restricted to the male.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar comment upon this particular issue by asking the question, “Is a pen a metaphorical penis?” They answer their own question by stating that the pen has traditionally been a “male tool”, one which is “inappropriate and alien” for women. Gilbert and Gubar also quote Gerald Manley Hopkins who wrote in a letter in 1886 that an artist’s “most essential quality … [is] masterly execution, which is a kind of male gift, and especially marks off men from women, the begetting of one’s thought on paper, on verse, or whatever the matter is.”

This holds true for Punjabi society too, where the daughters of a family were traditionally less educated than their brothers. In this society the power of the written word was held by an elite group of men. This was certainly the situation surrounding the collection and recording of the janamsakhis. It was traditionally men who were educated and able to read and write, therefore, the recording and compilation of the janamsakhi texts was naturally in their hands. The men decided which stories were important enough to include within the written recensions, and which characters and plots were

90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
important to emphasize within the stories themselves. The result is a literature dominated by the masculine; masculine characters, masculine plots and masculine images. Men have continued to successfully promulgate their own experiences and beliefs in literature, so that the result is a "political" and a "male" literature.

When Judith Fetterly makes the statement that "Literature is political," this observation may seem simple enough, but has far reaching consequences. If a literature is political, then it means that it also houses its own political agenda. The writers of this literature attempt to achieve something through their piece of work – to promulgate their own personal views as universal truths to their readers. Fetterly determines that literature is political based upon the observation that all the major pieces of literature in American fiction "constitute a series of designs on the female reader, all the more potent in their effect because they are "impalpable"", or in other words, imperceptible. That is, readers approach these pieces of literature expecting to encounter nothing but "a good read" however, they are, while reading, being accosted by a series of designs which are imparting upon their minds a type of thinking that is being pushed as "normal" (a universal truth). Fetterly goes on to state that the perception that literature speaks "universal truth" is only a pretense. When only one idea is seen as legitimate, and only that idea is encouraged and transmitted "... then we have the conditions necessary for that confusion of consciousness in which impalpability flourishes." By examining American fiction in terms of how attitudes toward women have shaped their form and

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93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
content, we are able to “make available to consciousness that which has been largely left unconscious”\textsuperscript{95} and thereby change our understanding of, relation to and effect of these functions upon us.

In the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi Tradition, as well, a single view of women is presented. They are seen as secondary to men and it is only their relation to a male figure that accords them any importance. Although women characters in the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi are most assuredly more in number and more frequent than other janamsakhi traditions, their appearance is still limited. Nanak’s mother, Tripta, his sister, Nanaki and his wife, Sulakhni, are not the only women characters who appear in the Bala Tradition, but they are the only women of significance, and this is only because of their relation to Nanak. It is not uncommon in Indian traditions for women to be defined by their relations to men, and the centuries old observation in the \textit{Manusmriti} about the dependency of women upon male figures,\textsuperscript{96} certainly holds true in the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi Tradition.

This concentration upon the masculine leads us to Fetterly’s second observation, that “American literature is male.”\textsuperscript{97} I will make the generalization that not just American literature, but world literature in general has been predominantly male, thereby making it necessary for the reader to identify as a male in order to read it. We see this statement is indeed true when relating it to our specific topic of the janamsakhi literature. In the Janamsakhis, not only is the central figure, Nanak, male, but the majority of figures who play a prominent role in the sakhis are male.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid, xii.
\textsuperscript{96} Manu has stated, “In childhood a woman is dependent upon her father, in youth her husband and in old age, her son”.
\textsuperscript{97} Fetterly, Judith. \textit{The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction}, pxii.
Fetterly comments upon how “male literature” neither permits the participation of women nor allows them to remain detached. It insists on its universality at the same time that it defines that universality in specifically male terms. Fetterly uses the American folk tale of Rip Van Winkle in order to elaborate upon this idea. Rip Van Winkle constantly shirks his work whilst his wife nags him. Even though this desire to avoid work and authority is a “universal” desire that is applicable to all people, whether men or women, the male writer turns it into a specifically male desire. Van Winkle’s wife represents work and authority, so that this female presence “is what one must escape from, and the “one” is necessarily male”. In this way, women’s experiences and sentiments are again excluded from the written literature.

Carol Christ, in her article, “Spiritual Quest and Women’s Experience” has observed a similar pattern in the Bible. Christ argues that in this text of major influence the woman’s voice is rarely, if ever, heard. Carol Christ has stated that:

Her word [Mary’s] never became flesh and dwelt among us. Perhaps no one ever asked her what she was thinking. Perhaps she never heard stories which could give her words for her own experience. Perhaps the man who wrote the gospel narrative simply could not imagine what it felt like to be in her position. Whatever the reason, her experience and the experiences of other women have not shaped the sacred stories of the Bible.

Christ states that this results in a tradition where women do not have a voice. The experiences and feelings which we hear about are those of men, women remain neglected. In the Bala Janamsakhi, whilst we do have a female figure enjoying some exposure and degree of importance, it is still the male figures and images which permeate the sakhis. Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh also mentions Adrienne

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98 Ibid.
Rich’s comment, in “Transcendental Etude”, that women suffer estrangement because of the “omission of feminine expression”. Women are alienated from this literature because it concentrates on issues and symbols pertaining to the masculine, ignoring the feminine.

The janamsakhi literature, too, can be classified as a male literature because of its androcentric characteristics; they are dominated by male characters, male-centered plots and male perceptions. Janamsakhis can also be categorized as a political literature because it contains designs upon the reader by promulgating stereotypes of how women should behave. These stories tell the readers, in gendered terms, which personality traits are desirable and which are not. They propagate and emphasize only one way of thinking as the correct way. They do not explicitly describe what proper conduct for a woman is, but these ideas are implicitly understood when one is reading the sakhis. For example, a woman who is discontent with her marital situation and persists in maintaining a sullen disposition is immediately understood as being an undesirable daughter-in-law. When a member of the audience reads or hears these stories, he/she will internalize these ideas even if he/she is not immediately aware of the ideas that are being promulgated.

Just as attitudes towards women have shaped the content and form of American fiction, so have similar attitudes towards women shaped the content and form of the traditional janamsakhi literature. It is because women held a subjugated position in society (and in the minds of these writers/compilers) that women characters in the janamsakhis rarely appear. And when they do appear, they have a lower position than the male characters. Rarely, if ever, do we encounter a female character who is not confined

to the shadows, and speaks her own voice. This unquestionably endorses the idea that a quiet and submissive woman (i.e. a voiceless woman) is ideal.

Written literature everywhere in the world has predominantly been male, and this characteristic is all the more evident when comparing a literature written and controlled by men with a tradition that is controlled by women. Women in other South Asian traditions find alternative venues to make their voices heard. This occurs in villages in Andhra Pradesh where Brahmin women pursue an alternate form of expression through their own oral tradition. V. N. Rao introduces us to songs on the Ramayana theme sung by these women which “tell a Ramayana story very different from the familiar one attributed to Valmiki.” Here is an example, similar to the one we shall be examining, of women using an oral avenue in order to give a new perspective to a familiar tradition. These retellings allow women to express themselves and communicate what they have to say as women.

The Brahmin women who sing these songs are segregated from men, and lead relatively sheltered lives of obedience and modesty. Similar to Punjabi Sikh women of the present day oral janamsakhi tradition, most of these women have not been formally educated, and have had little exposure to English education and urbanized life. They sing these songs within the domestic sphere, where the presence of men is restricted.

Rao states that it is quite apparent that women composed these songs, because of the feelings, perceptions and cultural information that the songs convey. Not only are

18. Autumn 1990, p11..
101 The Ramayana is a popular Indian epic which concerns the events of the life of Rama, Prince of Ayodhya, an incarnation of the god Vishnu.
103 Ibid, p127.
104 Ibid, p118.
the composers women, the songs are geared towards a female audience. In addition, many of the songs speak about the merit that women will receive by listening to or singing these songs. These songs have themes oriented around female interests and, consequently, are very different from the traditional literary *Ramayana* stories.

The women’s oral janamsakhi tradition in the villages of the Punjab, also introduces versions of the janamsakhi stories with a greater feminine content, where more female characters enjoy more prominent roles, and familiar situations are presented from a woman’s perspective. Although a majority of the stories told by these women still revolve around Nanak and other male acquaintances, with little (if any) reference to female characters, there are still a number of stories with women at the forefront. Certainly there are more stories than the ones that we have been able to access in the written tradition. The women have a voice here – they are compiling and articulating and, consequently, their female characters also have a voice.

A comparison of the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi tradition and the women’s oral janamsakhi tradition supports the characterization of the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi Tradition as a male and political literature. The categories according to which we shall compare the two traditions are the number of female characters and the frequency in which they appear, the strength of the female characters, the stories and their plots, and the empathy that is presented towards female characters and their situations.

A: The Number of Female Characters and the Frequency Of Appearance

One of the characteristics that classifies a literature as “male” is the predominance of male characters and a lack of female representation. In Christ’s
words, this is a tradition where “the daughters do not exist … and only the son and male images and symbols pervade.” This is the first criterion by which we shall examine the two different janamsakhi traditions. As previously mentioned, although women characters appear more often in the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi their appearance is still limited and not accorded any great significance.

The first female character to whom we are introduced in the Bala Tradition is the midwife (daee) who helps to deliver Nanak. It is interesting to note that Mata Tripta is not even directly mentioned in this sakhi concerning Nanak’s birth. We hear only from the midwife discussing the baby, commenting that, “Many a child has been born by my hand. But never has such a baby been born.” Tripata is also overlooked in the janamsakhis pertaining to Nanak’s early childhood years, although this is usually the period where a mother’s presence is most noticeable. Instead, it is the father, Mata Kalu, who is constantly referred to. It is always Kalu who sends Nanak on an errand, or Kalu who scolds Nanak. We often read of Kalu’s frustrations with Nanak, his instructions and lectures to his son, and his discussions with others about Nanak. However, Tripta is not a participant in any of these activities. When Kalu does chide Nanak, we do not read of Tripta’s presence at Kalu’s side, either chiding or supporting Nanak. If there is ever a female character present at these times, then it is the character of Nanaki, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Mata Tripta’s appearances are more frequent in the Miharban janamsakhi tradition, but her role does not consist of much more than listening to Nanak’s discourses.

105 Carol Christ quoted in Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh’s “Bridal Symbol in Sikh Literature”, p11.
She is present in these sakhis merely as a tool, she is a launchpad which will give Nanak the opportunity to embark upon a lengthy discourse, explaining a shabad (hymn) or some other matter. The writer of the sakhi will, typically, introduce Mata Tripta, and mention her joy at seeing her son, Nanak, after a lengthy separation. She then reproachfully asks Nanak why he was away for so long, or asks him a question requesting an explanation. Nanak usually replies by reciting a shabad, and then enters into a lengthy discourse explaining the shabad and/or the subject surrounding it. At this point, Tripta fades into the background as she silently listens to these ‘gosts’ (discourses).

Sulakhni, Nanak’s wife, is also rarely mentioned in the Bhai Bala janamsakhi. In our first encounter with Sulakhni her presence is only alluded to, she is not referred to specifically. We only hear that “‘दली से वे सिट भेंजें मलदनपुढ़ आये।’” [Bringing the palanquin, they arrived in Sultanpur on the fifth day].\(^\text{107}\) It is only through the mention of the word “doli” [palanquin] that the audience is to understand that Sulakhni has been brought to Sultanpur. Sulakhni is mentioned indirectly in a number of consecutive sakhis, however, we still only hear of her, not from her. The first substantial reference to Sulakhni, occurs when Kalu meets with Sulakhni’s father, Mula Chand, after Nanak returns to Sultanpur. In this meeting, Mula Chand complains about Nanak to Kalu. However, even in this sakhi, we only hear of Sulakhni secondhand. Her roles in the stories remain passive, she is never an active agent.

The few instances when we do hear from Sulakhni directly, are when she complains to her mother, Chando Rani, about the status of her married life. This dialogue introduces yet another female character, Chando Rani, to the scene, but Chando Rani is

\(^{107}\) Ibid, p79.
limited to only four appearances in the Bhai Bala janamsakhi. She initially appears in the sakhi to listen to her daughter, talk to Nanak and Nanaki, and then to chide her daughter, talk again with Nanaki, and disappear again.

Nanaki is an important exception to the rule of minimal female representation. However, even her presence is minimal, as she is restricted to stories that occur within the domestic sphere. The majority of the sakhis recorded in the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi revolve around the “adventure” plot, away from the home, in the public sphere. Women usually do not appear in these sakhis, because the public sphere excludes women. If a woman does occasionally appear in these sakhis, then it is as the wife of a man who has a major role to play within the story. In these cases the women are rarely heard from directly, and are never named. Tripta, Nanaki, Sulakhni and Chando Rani are the only women who are ever named in these sakhis.

Male characters dominate throughout the Bhai Bala tradition. Mata Kalu, Rai Bhullar and Jai Ram are all frequently referred to and Rai Bhullar and Jai Ram, especially, are exalted as great men who understand Nanak and recognize him as “a man of God”. We are already familiar with Mata Kalu as Nanak’s father. Rai Bhullar is a prominent landowner in Nanak’s childhood village and a dominant character within the Bhai Bala written tradition. He is the first person to recognize Nanak as an enlightened being and appears in many sakhis to defend Nanak and attempt to explain to Kalu that Nanak is not an ordinary son, but a man of God. Jai Ram is introduced into the sakhi tradition as Nanaki’s husband, and quickly overshadows her presence in the sakhis. Later, in the sakhis concerning Nanak’s adventures during his udasis, it is Mardana,
Nanak's companion, with whom the audience becomes familiar. And whom do Nanak and Mardana encounter during these adventures? It is almost exclusively men.

The focus of the janamsakhis shifts from men to women when we encounter women's oral traditions and discover the prominence of female characters. Rao's research on women's songs on the Ramayana, has demonstrated that when women have the opportunity to exercise creative control over stories, they will focus upon female characters. It is characters, such as Rama's mother, Kausalya and his wife, Sita, who become more important and enjoy more frequent appearances in the women's songs than they do in the traditional Ramayana stories.\footnote{108}

Similarly, in the women's oral janamsakhi tradition, female characters enjoy more recognition and appear more frequently. For example, Tripta's role within the women's oral tradition is not especially dominant, but she is mentioned more often and in greater detail than in the written tradition. In spite of the fact that most stories refer to her only in passing, there are a few sakhis where she plays an active role, whether it is engaging in dialogue with Nanaki or defending Nanak to her husband Mata Kalu. Nanaki remains a more prominent character than Tripta, within this women's oral tradition, but Tripta is no longer hidden. Her presence is always evident, especially in the sakhis concerning Nanak's early childhood. Mata Kalu's comment in one story that "[both] you mother and daughter spoil him more"\footnote{109} bears testimony to the fact that Tripta is indeed a participant

\footnote{108} The content of the songs prove that women are at the forefront here. Songs concerning Kausalya's pregnancy and her caring for her children are prominent as well as stories detailing Sita's puberty, wedding and married life. These songs also allocate an especially strong position to characters who are not considered as important in other traditions, such as Santa (Rama's elder sister). V. N. Rao. "A Ramayana of Their Own".

\footnote{109} Appendix III, Story 3. This story is a familiar one, which concerns the attempt to educate Nanak in a school. Because Nanak would repeatedly speak up and disagree with the teacher, the teacher complained to Mata Kalu stating that he could not teach the child. In anger, Kalu brought Nanak home and beat him. When Nanak tries to
in these sakhis. She is placed next to Nanaki as a defender of Nanak. When Mata Kalu complains that Nanak does work, Tripta actively argues with Kalu, stating “…we will send him somewhere to do some work … it is only if you tell him to do some work that he will do so” thereby laying the blame for Nanak’s idle state upon Kalu. Tripta is not as overshadowed by Mata Kalu as she is in the written janamsakhi, because Mata Kalu is also only minimally referred to within the oral tradition.

The appearances of other prominent male characters, such as Rai Bhullar and Jai Ram are also diminished within the women’s oral tradition. Rai Bhullar rarely appears within this tradition and the one storyteller who did refer to him could not remember his name at all. Jai Ram, who always seems to overshadow Nanaki in the written tradition, also barely appears in the women’s oral tradition and, of the storytellers who did refer to him, none could recall his name.

In all the oral stories concerning Nanak’s childhood and family life, the storytellers keep Nanaki in the forefront. Nanaki enjoys a strong presence in the written tradition but her presence was always matched, and overshadowed, by the presence of strong male characters, such as, Mata Kalu, Jai Ram and Rai Bhullar. Even though Nanaki’s character is presented as more enlightened than Mata Kalu, the introduction of characters such as Rai Bhullar and Jai Ram reduce her importance in this respect, because they too recognize Nanak to be a man of God. And it is Mata Kalu, Jai Ram and Rai

explain to his father that there is no point in his going to school “whatever the master is going to teach me, I know more than that”, Kalu beats Nanak even more. And Nanaki speaks up in defense of Nanak telling him that our boy is not a “boy” but a sadhu or a sant and that is why people get jealous and make grievances about him.

“The father becomes angry with Nanaki too, saying you always defend him and that is why he gets spoiled. When the mother also says something, he says you mother and daughter spoil him more. And the poor mother again cries again saying, God gave me a boy but at every point there are always complaints/grievances [about him].”

10 Appendix I, Story 3
Bhullar who appear in more sakhis than Nanaki. However, here, in the oral tradition, 
Nanaki dominates the stories concerning Nanak’s childhood and family life. Nanaki is 
the one character, after Nanak that appears the most frequently in the stories told in the 
women’s oral tradition.

B Female Characters as Positive Active Agents

The few times when women do make an appearance in a sakhī in the written Bala 
Tradition, they are not presented as strong characters, they are not often heard from 
directly and they often do not play an active role in the story. Sulakhni is silent 
throughout the sakhīs. The first time that she does speak, she makes her discontent 
apparent, though she is not able to do anything about it. She asks her father, “Where have you given me? ... [he] does not give any care to household matters”. The plight of Sulakhni is such that her father, 
Mula Chand, argues with Jai Ram, stating, “You have drowned my daughter”. The extent of Sulakhni’s unhappiness is also apparent when, 
in the next episode, Mata Chando [Sulakhni’s mother] argues with Nanaki on behalf of 
her daughter. Sulakhni’s position as a married woman is such that she cannot argue on 
her own behalf, so it is her mother and father who must speak for her; voicing her 
interests and concerns.

Nanaki, in contrast, is presented as relatively strong female character in the Bhai 
Bala janamsakhīs. She is a constant presence in the sakhīs concerning Nanak's home life,

111 Appendix II, Story 13. 
113 Ibid.
and is his staunch supporter and defender. Whenever Kalu scolds Nanak, it is Nanaki who speaks on Nanak's behalf. She is also one of the few to recognize Nanak as an enlightened being. Therefore, initially, it appears that Nanaki enjoys an esteemed position within the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi tradition. Some scholars, such as Surjit Hans, even argue that Nanaki's role is such that she is shown as dominating over Nanak. Hans proposes that Nanaki actually has the "upper hand" within the Bala Janamsakhi tradition. He feels that the personality of Guru Nanak is compromised and blemished in this tradition and, consequently Nanaki emerges as a stronger character. Hans suggests that Nanaki's status is such that she shares Nanak's divine glory. However, if one examines these sakhis, and looks beyond the one or two anecdotes where Nanaki is enjoying a dominant position, then one can see that Nanaki's position is not as strong or exalted as Hans claims. The Bala Janamsakhi is quick to state that Rai Bhullar and Jai Ram were two others who recognized Nanak as Parmesar, a form of God, and Nanaki is overshadowed by these male characters in many of the sakhis, especially by her husband Jai Ram.

Although Nanaki is allotted an important position, in comparison to other women, as the defender of Nanak, we see that, as a woman, she is still subordinate to men. She is identified, after all, as "Nanaki, daughter of Kalu," [Nanak, daughter of Kalu]. Her identity is always described in terms of her relationship to a male figure, such as her father or her husband.

114 We first see a reference to a dominant female character (that of Nanaki) in the "Sacha Sauda" sakhi. In this sakhi, Mata Kalu gives Nanak some money to invest in any worthwhile business venture. When Nanak returns home, Kalu asks him what he did with the money and Nanak replies that he has fed some fakirs. Kalu is so enraged at this latest stupid action committed by his son that he slaps him. At this point Nanaki intervenes, falling at Kalu's feet and "freeing" Nanak:

.And Nanaki, daughter of Kalu, fell at Kalu's feet. So, respected Father [consider this mistake as mine] and forgive me for this mistake. Nanaki freed Nanak.

115 Surjit Hans. A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature. P204-5
husband. However, it seems that initially Jai Ram is defined in terms of his relationship to Nanaki. This makes it seem as though Nanaki’s identity is secured as a powerful and independent figure. After all, one automatically defines Jai Ram as “Nanaki’s husband” identifying him in relation to a woman. Yet, when we analyze this further, we can see that although Jai Ram is important only in relation to Nanaki, Nanaki herself is important only in relation to Nanak. Ultimately, both Nanaki and Jai Ram are defined through their relationships to Nanak.

In addition, Nanaki’s importance is diminished by her husband’s presence. The introduction of Jai Ram to the sakhis lowers Nanaki’s “esteemed” position. Thus far, Nanaki has been on a pedestal as one of the few who recognizes Nanak as parmesar, but now her position is lowered because Jai Ram also reveres Nanak. Significantly, once Jai Ram and Nanaki are married, as a wife, Nanaki cannot be presented in a higher position than the husband. This would result in the wife being in an “unnatural” state of power, as defined by Judith Fetterly. The introduction of Jai Ram does not even result in a completely equal standing between Nanaki and Jai Ram. There are many instances when Nanaki is eclipsed by Jai Ram’s presence. Jai Ram’s regard for Nanak is shown when Jai Ram and Nanaki are married, and Nanak accompanies them to Jai Ram’s home, as is the custom. When Nanak indicates that it is time for him to leave, it is Jai Ram who insists that Nanak stay. And when Nanaki decides that she should accompany Nanak back home, she has to ask her husband for permission and justify her request. When Nanaki

116 "हूँ ने राम लविजा मे हुमाँ हूँ हिन्दीमा रायी बबड़। रामज नी हूँ विषम गोबर मे ज्युमाँ रायी क्षेत्र। औ रामजी नी मे हूँ आविषक नी हूँ दिम रायी मे।" [and then] Jai Ram said, I will not say goodbye to you. [Respected] Nanak, you stay just here, I will not send you [let you go]. [Respected] Nanaki told/said to Jai Ram, Send me this time.
asks Jai Ram to “send her now”, it is clear that she is not enjoying any autonomous state of power.\footnote{Send me now, because, as a matter of fact, I am very afraid. For whenever I dream, I dream this. Whatsoever comes out of his mouth, that happens. Therefore, I say this to you because of this. Ibid, p63.}

After Jai Ram enters the sakhis, it seems that Nanaki can undertake no independent actions. Her husband must echo everything she says or does in order to assign it any validity. For example, at one point when Nanak comes to visit, Nanaki falls at Nanak’s feet. When Nanak objects to this stating that Nanaki is the elder and he should fall at her feet, Nanaki responds by stating that this would be true if Nanak were a man, but he is a form of God.\footnote{“Send me now, because, as a matter of fact, I am very afraid. For whenever I dream, I dream this. Whatsoever comes out of his mouth, that happens. Therefore, I say this to you because of this. Ibid, p63.}

Immediately after this incident, Jai Ram comes home, and Nanak arises to touch Jai Ram’s feet and thus show his respect. However, Jai Ram grabs Nanak’s hands, and prevents him from doing so. Instead, he himself touches Nanak’s feet. When Nanak objects to this, Jai Ram states that he is not observing the relationship between two brothers-in-law, but that he recognizes Nanak as \textit{parmesar}, and is observing the relationship as thus.\footnote{“Sister Nanaki fell at [Nanak’s] feet. Then Nanak said, [bebeji] You are older, I will [fall] at your feet. You fall at my feet. Nanaki said, Respected Brother, you speak truth – but [that would only be true if] you were a man. You appear as Parmesar [God]. Ibid, p65.}

\footnote{“Sister Nanaki fell at [Nanak’s] feet. Then Nanak said, [bebeji] You are older, I will [fall] at your feet. You fall at my feet. Nanaki said, Respected Brother, you speak truth – but [that would only be true if] you were a man. You appear as Parmesar [God]. Ibid, p65.}

By thus “honouring” Nanak, Jai Ram’s recognition of Nanak seems to diminish the significance of Nanaki’s respect for Nanak.
Since Jai Ram also recognizes and shows his regard for Nanak, there is nothing significant or extraordinary about Nanaki being a woman and recognizing Nanak as a form of god.

Nanaki’s secondary position is apparent in other sakhis when Nanak’s family discusses his situation. Mata Kalu entrusts Nanaki and Jai Ram with the responsibility of Nanak. However it is evident that Kalu has allocated this responsibility more to Jai Ram than to Nanaki. Although Nanaki makes suggestions and contributes to the conversation, Mata Kalu always addresses his concerns directly to Jai Ram, never to Nanaki. This seems to contradict Sukhi Hothi’s suggestion that, when Nanak did not fill Mata Kalu’s expectations, Nanaki took over responsibility of the family’s affairs as if she was Mata Kalu’s son. Instead, it is as if Jai Ram is the “surrogate son”.

When Mata Kalu complains to Nanaki and Jai Ram that they have not done anything about Nanak either in terms of employment or marriage, Nanaki speaks in defense of Nanak. Again, Jai Ram immediately echoes her sentiments. In addition, only Jai Ram addresses topics of significance and it is only to Jai Ram that Kalu expresses his concerns. For example, upon leaving Nanaki and Jai Ram’s house, Kalu specifically tells Jai Ram to look after Nanak, and inform him immediately if there is any news involving Nanak. Although Nanaki is also there, and has assumed responsibility for her brother, Kalu does not acknowledge her presence, nor does he feel it necessary to involve her in operations.

Jai Ram said “Nanak ji, you understand the relationship between a jeeja [sister’s husband] and a saala [wife’s brother].” I know you as Parmesar. It is my good fortune that you have arrived here. Do not do anything; sit comfortably [without worry]. [Just] carry on. Ibid, p65.


121 ... देख पढ़ नै कब निंद्र रजत सरव सी वज्रस्त्री धेय श्रीं खुशुख धरार बलाती। अठें पढ़ तररे तुँ लस्तल किङ लबार। बङ्कू से भेंल टरस बिलू अवर बनाये लली।” ... look son Jai Ram at the time there is any news about Nanak, inform me immediately. And keep son Nanak in sight. Because whatever money there is – he should not lose [it] anywhere.
this conversation concerning Nanak. It is Jai Ram who mentions Nanak’s marriage, and proposes Mula Chand’s daughter as a possible match for Nanak. In spite of the fact that Nanaki speaks first, Jai Ram still emerges as the victor – as the more important character, with the stronger position and statements. Again in this instance, the woman is completely ignored. Kalu does not deem it necessary to consult her about such things. Nanaki is still not in a position of power, and no one is willing to give her that power.

Nanaki is denied power, in other situations as well. When Nanak’s reputability is questioned and he is suspected of causing the business monetary losses, it is Nanaki who summons Nanak to come and see her so that she can discuss this matter with him. However, when Nanak finally decides to leave his job, it is Jai Ram whom he informs about his resignation, not Nanaki. The reason for this could be that Jai Ram is the one who is specifically connected with the job – not Nanaki. However, even when Jai Ram falls at Nanak’s feet and Nanaki begins to cry saying, “... नीसर नी हुए उँगर पुता तेजिस्वा है।” [Respected Brother, first kill me and only then leave for elsewhere] Nanak is still shown as speaking specifically and only to Jai Ram. Nanaki’s presence is not acknowledged. Even at this point Nanak speaks to Jai Ram specifically saying, “... नीसर नी हुए उँगर पुता तेजिस्वा है।” (Respected Brother-in-law, now the story is complete).

S. S. Kohli. Bhai Bala Janamsakhi, p68.
122 उँगर हुए उँगर पुता तेजिस्वा है। Then Nanak said to Jai Ram. Respected Brother-in-law, now we give thanks to you. Give the responsibility to someone else. Ibid, p70.
123 उँगर फिसला और घर बाहर नाही। And Jai Ram fell at [his] feet and Nanaki began to cry. Ibid, pp70-1.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid, p71.
In contrast, the female characters in women’s oral traditions enjoy stronger portrayals as positive active agents. According to Rao, in Valmiki’s *Ramayana* the women are not as significant, and, at times, are even portrayed as evil. However there are no evil connotations associated with women in the songs sung by these women. Nor are the women in these songs shown as submissive and helpless. Rather, they are portrayed as strong and vocal. However, at the same time, women in these songs never step beyond bounds. Rao emphasizes that:

Women in these songs never openly defy propriety: they behave properly, even giving themselves advice that the male masters of the household would accept and appreciate. The tone of the songs is innocently gentle, homely and sweet – no harsh or provocative language, no overt or aggressive opposition to male domination.

Women still always abide by the rules that society has set for them. Daughters-in-law behave properly in front of mothers and sisters-in-law. Although many women criticize Rama, Sita herself never shows opposition to Rama or to any of her other superiors, remaining the quiet and obedient wife and daughter-in-law. It is Santa who intervenes on behalf of Sita in these songs, or another woman who has the authority to do so (such as Rama’s mother). Although women are most assuredly the dominant characters in these songs, the composers of these songs are quick to assure the superior position of Rama. Every song starts off with a laudation of Rama before the story itself is begun.

A similar phenomenon takes place with the women’s oral janamsakhi tradition. The women in the oral tradition are depicted in stronger terms than in the written Bhai Bala Janamsakhi Tradition. Nanaki’s initial exalted position diminishes with the

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126 An example of this is Rama’s stepmother Kaikeyi who is instrumental in banishing Rama to the forest for 14 years.
introduction of Jai Ram in the written tradition, but she maintains a strong presence throughout the oral stories. These stories lay a greater emphasis upon Nanaki’s bond with Nanak.

Jai Ram is not even named in most of these stories, and his appearance never restricts Nanaki to the background. Whereas in the Bhai Bala tradition, Jai Ram was portrayed as engaging in direct dialogues with Nanak and Kalu, affirming his importance, in the women’s oral tradition it is with Nanaki that Nanak conducts most of his direct communication. It is to her that he addresses most of his concerns, and to her feelings that he is most sensitive. One story, which concerns Nanak’s employment, contains a portrayal of the sensitive relationship that Nanak and Nanaki share. Complaints reach Nanaki’s husband (who remains unnamed in this story) about Nanak’s work there, he is told that Nanak is plundering the store. Nanaki’s husband quarrels with Nanaki about her brother’s irresponsibility. Nanaki retains faith in her brother and confidently tells her husband, “do not listen to people and quarrel, go to your store, and see if your supplies have finished, or if you have too little money.”  

Nanaki will never entertain any doubts as to the credibility of her brother’s character. In this story, too, Nanak speaks specifically to Nanaki, and the love between the two is apparent from the following passage:

And Nanaki was crying, “You’re leaving because you’re angry with me.” However Nanak told her, “I have no anger with you. I worked here for a bit now I’ll go elsewhere.” He said, “I have no anger for you. I have love for you. Whichever day you remember me, I will come to you right then.”

Nanak and Nanaki’s privileged relationship is repeatedly shown in passages such as these.

128 Appendix I, Story 4.
In a similar manner, Tripta is also portrayed in stronger terms within the women’s oral tradition. As previously mentioned, in one story when Mata Kalu again complains about Nanak, Tripta responds by telling her husband, “It is only if you tell him to do some work that he will do so,” thereby successfully defending her son by laying the blame upon her husband’s shoulders. Tripta is also lauded as being one of the few people to recognize Nanak as an enlightened being. Some of the women storytellers specifically refer to the fact that the people to first recognize Nanak were women. The midwife who delivered him, his mother and sister were the first to recognize him, whilst his father never did so. The women’s oral tradition also explicitly states that Nanaki played the most significant role in Nanak’s life. Nanaki’s exalted position in the women’s tradition is evident in statements such as the following: “The biggest praise is Nanaki’s. He stayed with Nanaki, Nanaki fed him, Nanaki bathed him – Nanaki did not consider him a brother, but parmatma [higher soul]. Nanaki recognized that he’s not my brother, he’s a great soul”.

C The Stories and their Plots

An examination of the plots of the stories contained within the written and oral janamsakhi traditions shows us that the public sphere, dominates in the men’s written tradition, whereas the private sphere is emphasized within the women’s oral tradition. Carolyn Heilbrun comments upon the fact that women have traditionally been without stories because they have been banned from the adventure plot which occurs within the

120 Ibid.
130 Appendix I, Story 3.
131 Appendix II, Story 13.
132 Appendix II, Story 22.
public sphere and women have traditionally been restricted from this sphere and from this plot:

Why do I say Penelope is without a story? Because all women, having been restricted to only one plot, are without story. In literature and out, through all recorded history, women have lived by a script they did not write. Their destiny was to be married, circulated; to be given by one man, the father, to another, the husband; to become the mothers of men. Theirs has been the marriage plot, the erotic plot, the courtship plot, but never, as for men, the quest plot. Women have been tempted into romantic thralldom, and then married, like the heroines of our great novels of the 18th and 19th centuries, or like the heroines of Harlequin romances. Their story was over.133

Men, who are the “monopolizers” of the quest plot, may do anything and literature tells us everything they have done. In contrast, women have only had one type of plot available to them, the marriage plot. The women’s compositions, however, concentrate on plots, which have women at the helm. These plots revolve around issues that are of interest to women. We also see, within the two traditions, a firm division, between the public and the private spheres. The men’s written tradition will emphasize the sakhis which occur in the public sphere, which is the men’s realm, while the women’s oral tradition, tends to focus upon the private sphere, where the women are firmly placed within a domestic realm.

In the Bhai Bala Janamsakhis tradition, it is the adventure plot, which dominates. W. H. McLeod discusses the principal story forms used in the written janamsakhi traditions. Among these are narrative anecdotes, narrative discourses, didactic discourses, heterodox discourses and, to a lesser degree, codes of discipline.134 Our focus

134 For more information on the various janamsakhi forms please refer to W. H. McLeod’s *Early Sikh Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1980), pp 82-105.
is on the narrative anecdotes because this is the form that dominates in the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi (indeed it dominates in all janamsakhis except for the Miharban Janamsakhi, in which the sakhis take the form of discourses). McLeod describes the narrative anecdote as “the janamsakhi par excellence,” and states that it is especially suited to the needs of hagiography because it “provides ample scope for an unending series of decisive actions, pointed epigrams and evidences of divine approval. These are the obvious concerns of the janam-sakhi hagiographers and their extensive use of the anecdotal form is a predictable consequence.”

The narrative anecdotes themselves come in four different categories: the moralistic anecdote, the chimeric fairy tale, the devotional legend and the aetiological legend. The moralistic anecdote takes the form of an especially short, succinct sakhī and points to a particular moral. Examples of the moralistic anecdote in the Bala Janamsakhi include the “Sacha Sauda” sakhi and the “Lalo and Bhago” sakhi. These sakhis have a specific role to fulfil which is to give a moral in order to teach the audience a lesson.

The chimeric fairy tale is characterized by the inclusion of magicians, beasts, and other such figures. Although these characters occur in all the janamsakhi traditions,

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137 Ibid.
138 Literal translation would be “True Deal” but a better translation would be “Best Bargain.” In the story, Kalu gives Nanak money and tells him to conduct the best possible business deal with the money. Nanak comes across some hungry holy men and decides to use the money to feed them, asking what better bargain could there be than this?
139 In this sakhī, during his travels, Nanak visits the house of a poor carpenter Lalo and remains with him for several days. One day a Khatri, in honour of his deceased ancestors, invited one hundred thousand Brahmins to a feast and decided to invite Nanak as well. Nanak at first declined the invitation but after insistent demands he also came. When asked why he would refuse the foods of such a rich feast to dine with a poor carpenter, Nanak took Lalo’s plain roti in one hand and the Khatri’s fried puri in the other. When he squeezed both hands, from the roti came milk and from the puri came blood.
140 W. H. McLeod. Early Sikh Tradition, pp84-86.
McLeod states that there is a particular fondness for them in the Bala tradition. Examples of the chimeric fairy tale include adventures Nanak encounters during his travels. McLeod provides us with two examples of such tales: the story about the Monster’s Cauldron and the story about the Country Ruled by Women [also known as the KamRup women].

Both these stories occur in the Bala Tradition. In the first story, Nanak is traveling in a jungle and is captured by a raksas (monster). The monster heats a cauldron of oil, and intends to boil Nanak in it but the oil grows cold as soon as Nanak touches it. As a result of this miracle, the monster becomes a disciple of Nanak. In the story concerning ‘The Country Ruled by Women’, Nanak and Mardana are again travelling in the jungle when Mardana becomes hungry and tells Nanak that he needs food. Nanak tells Mardana where to find food, but advises him to be careful as that is an area ruled by women with great magical powers. Inevitably, Mardana comes across these women, and is turned into a sheep by them. When Mardana does not return, Nanak goes in search of him. Upon entering the territory ruled by these women, Nanak sees the sheep and recognizing him as Mardana, restores him to his true self. The women are amazed by Nanak’s powers and fall at his feet asking for his forgiveness and pleading with him to free them from this ‘manless existence’.

McLeod feels that the janamsakhis’ basic purpose is expressed with great directness in the form, which is termed the devotional legend, because this form, by illustrating the power possessed by Nanak, serves to confirm his divine status. The devotional legend occurs in three different forms as well: the wonder story, the apologetic anecdote and the sectarian narrative. The wonder story revolves around supernatural phenomena that point to Nanak’s divine status. Examples of the wonder

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141 Ibid, pp88-89.
story include the stories when a ruined crop is restored, or when a cobra provides shade. The second form of the devotional legend is the apologetic anecdote which itself occurs in two forms, the positive and the negative. In the positive form the apologetic anecdote will support statements made by Nanak by including direct statements from God. In the negative form it will involve encounters with Muslims and Hindus or other groups whose beliefs and teachings seemed to be in contrast with the teachings of Nanak. The third and last form of the devotional legend is the sectarian narrative. This is also a form of an apologetic anecdote, but in this case the anecdote does not concern the wider Sikh community, but instead the specific beliefs of a segment of that community.

The final and rarest form of the narrative anecdotes is the aetiological legend. These anecdotes include “popular etymologies, local legends, and at least one explanation of a natural phenomenon.” Examples of the aetiological legend include the sakhi, which explains how the second guru, Guru Angad received his name. One of the most popular aetiological legends is the one associated with the story of Panja Sahib. According to this story, Nanak and Mardana were wandering in the forest when Mardana became thirsty. Nanak told him that he would find some water on a nearby hill, however, a man, Vali Qandari, who was jealous of the guru, controlled the spring on that hill. In this sakhi the young Nanak is approached by a cobra and Rai Bhullar and Mata Kalu are fearful that the cobra will attack the child. However, to their amazement, the cobra does not attack Nanak, but, instead rises up and provides him with shade.

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142 In this story, Nanak is assigned the chore of looking after some oxen. While Nanak is sitting under a tree in meditation, the oxen wander into the next field and destroy the neighbor’s crops. The neighbor complains to Mata Kalu about Nanak’s carelessness and Mata Kalu is upset at his son’s latest mishap. However, Rai Bhullar tells the others to go and look at the crop and they shall see that nothing is amiss, and, indeed, when the men go back to the fields they see that the destroyed crop has been restored.
143 In this sakhi the young Nanak is approached by a cobra and Rai Bhullar and Mata Kalu are fearful that the cobra will attack the child. However, to their amazement, the cobra does not attack Nanak, but, instead rises up and provides him with shade.
145 Ibid, p91.
146 According to this story, Guru Angad was originally known by the name Lahana.
hill. He refused to give Mardana any water, and suggested that his guru should provide him with water. When Mardana came down from the hill and informed Nanak of what had passed, Nanak moved a stone with his foot and a new spring of water appeared. Vali Qandari’s spring dried up and, in a rage, he hurled a huge boulder down towards Nanak. Nanak merely raised his hand to stop the boulder and it is said that the imprint of Nanak’s hand can be seen on the rock even today. This is why that place is known as Panja Sahib.\[147\]

All these janamsakhi forms appear in the Bhai Bala Tradition, and an examination of these forms gives us a general idea of the types of stories present in the written tradition. It is stories revolving around the “adventure-plot”, in the public domain that make up the majority of the sakhis. Whether they are a moralistic anecdote, a chimeric fairy tale, a devotional legend or an aetiological legend, one thing that these have in common is that their plots occur in the public sphere, away from the home and the women’s realm. They revolve around matters, which do not pertain to the domestic sphere. The majority of the stories occur in the public sphere, away from the women’s realm, and involve adventures where Nanak and Mardana encounter different people in different, unfamiliar parts of the world. Stories involving an element of danger and excitement (such as those about Vala Qandari or Sajjan Thug) are those, which are deemed important enough to be mentioned and discussed in the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi.

All of these stories have a function, either they show the divine power of Nanak through the performance of a miracle or the conversion of a lost soul, or they teach a specific lesson to the sakhi audience. Although references are made to Nanak’s family

\[147\] I have summarized this story according to the version appearing in the Bhai Bala janamsakhi, it differs a little from the version which McLeod summarizes when discussing the aetiological legend in *Early Sikh*
life (especially in sakhis concerning his earlier childhood), the majority of the sakhis revolve around the adventure plot. Stories about Nanak's childhood are glossed over quickly, and no great detail is given concerning Nanak's engagement or marriage. Any information about his married life with Sulakhni involves few appearances by Nanak. The only detail that these stories provide is a depiction of the "quarrelsome and petty ways" of women.\textsuperscript{148} Stories from the domestic domain are restricted; the focus is on the public domain.

Because women are banned from the public sphere and restricted to the domestic, their compositions will have a different content and focus because they will be discussing events that are familiar and of interest to them. The women's oral song tradition of the Ramayana focuses on events, which are of interest to women.\textsuperscript{149} There are virtually no songs focusing on the adventure plot. Omitted are the popular stories about Rama's battles with demons or his courageous deeds. Instead, these women's songs focus on topics that are of more interest to the female composers and their female audience. Besides songs about weddings and the rituals and ceremonies surrounding them, there are songs about pregnancies, childcare, and detailed moments from Rama and Sita's private married life. All the songs are firmly situated in the domestic sphere.

The female influence is seen in the content of the women's oral janamsakhis. Although all the women did tell their share of adventure stories, there was a focus on the domestic domain. Women compose stories about what they know, and this is what is happening here. Since they are restricted to the domestic world, women will share stories

\textsuperscript{148} When examining these stories, the women, namely Chando Rani and Nanaki talk back and forth, but Nanak says nothing, remaining silent. He is never shown as becoming directly involved in such mundane and unimportant matters – those are left for the "womenfolk".
that are similar to events that they have encountered in their own life experiences within the private sphere.

Every woman begins her collection of janamsakhi stories in the same way that the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi traditionally begins, with the story of Nanak’s miraculous birth. But a major difference in the content is that Tripta is actually mentioned in the women’s versions of these stories. The women storytellers feel that Tripta is important enough to be mentioned in the story; while the male recorders of the written janamsakhi tradition felt that her presence was insignificant enough to warrant her omission. The women then usually immediately launch into stories about Nanak’s childhood. Whereas the written traditions fly through the stories about Nanak’s early childhood without much attention to detail, it is these stories on which the oral traditions focus most of their time and detail.

Stories about Nanak’s sweet disposition also appear in the women’s’ oral tradition. Women often refer to how, as a child, Nanak would often give his own belongings away to others, and could never bear to see anyone in grief. There is one story about how Nanaki brings a box of sweets for Nanak one day when he is still a young boy. Rather than ripping the box open and immediately eating the sweets as most young children do, he thanks Nanaki for the sweets, and tells her that he will share these sweets with his friends. This behavior pleases Nanaki immensely, and she commends his nature to their mother Tripta.\footnote{V. N. Rao. “A Ramayana of Their Own,” pp118-119.}

There are also more stories concerning Nanak’s marriage, in sharp contrast to the one or two in the written tradition, which make a passing mention of Nanak’s marriage, but do not go into it in any great detail. One especially entertaining and detailed story

\footnote{V. N. Rao. “A Ramayana of Their Own,” pp118-119.}
about Nanak’s marriage to Sulakhni concerns his arrival in Batala with his marriage party. As is the practice in traditional Punjabi weddings, Sulakhni’s sisters and friends have gathered to accost and tease the groom. The storyteller gives an animated account of how the girls burst into laughter upon seeing the simple groom arrive without the pomp and splendour usually associated with the baraat or junj (groom’s bridal party). The girls make comments about the absence of a band and about Nanak’s plain attire, commenting, “Is this a groom or a beggar?” They continue to harass and tease Nanak, but are unsuccessful in agitating him.

The girls are upset about these unsuccessful attempts and they decide to pull the ultimate prank. Nanak is seated beneath a “kachchi kand,” and the girls conspire to walk behind the wall and push it down upon Nanak. Since the mud wall was freshly built and has not had a chance to harden it will easily fall upon Nanak, leaving the groom covered in dirt from head to toe. However, an elderly woman overhears the whispered planning, and she warns Nanak of the girls’ impending antics. Nanak tells her not to worry, that not only would this wall not fall this day, but also that it would not fall any day ever. And even today, hundreds of years later, that same wall is still standing there today. The story is as follows:

So she found a girl for him – Sulakhni. And after seeing the girl she sent a message to them and to his nanakai – Nanak’s. And the wedding they did in Batala – first there was just a jung ghar but now there’s a gurdwara there. And in Batala, where they had the jung ghar there was a kachi [fragile wall]. And when they took Nanak to get married, he said I am not going to go very dressed up, the way I am dressed now that is how I am going to go. I’m not going to go the way other people go, getting all ready and decked out. When he goes there, then the girls who get together and look at the

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150 Appendix III, Story 6
151 This story is termed the “Kachi Kand” [Fragile Wall] Sakhi
152 Mother’s relatives
153 Junj ghar is where the groom and his wedding party would stay when they arrived at the bride’s village for the wedding. Every village had one and, in the past, the groom’s party would stay in the village for 3-4 days and the junj ghar is where they would stay.
154 Something that is not baked or ripe – is not firm.
groom’s party, they laugh a lot, saying that the groom looks as if they grabbed a beggar from somewhere, the ones who go around begging, the fakir types. And they go and say to Sulakhni too that the groom – his clothes and attire are like a faqir’s too, his clothes are like that too and he looks like a faqir to us too. And then they decide amongst themselves – before when girls got together they would do a lot of teasing, sometimes they would say sing us a song, or do this or that, to the groom. Or they would see, when they sat the groom down they would seat him in such a spot that he would fall. They would tease him and want to embarrass him. In those times, they also knew (the ones who had come to get married) that they were going to do these antics. And they said when you are going to see the girl off, and you have to seat the groom down, then this wall that there is, let’s seat him by that wall. We’ll put the cot down by that wall and from behind we will push the wall. The wall is quite small and he won’t get hurt that much, we’ll just push it down onto him. And an old woman heard this, one of the ones who was there to do work. Hearing this she went to tell him that if the girls put your cot down in front of the wall don’t sit there because they are going to throw the wall down on you. For them, they thought, that if we tell them this then they’ll give us money. But Nanak was wise himself and he knew that she had come to get money and he said Maee, do not worry. The wall is not going to fall. And she said how is the wall not going to fall? It is fragile, it will fall with the slightest push. He said, after today the wall will not fall, it will become that strong. And the laagan, chamari she says, No I keep telling you that they have made a plan and the wall is going to fall. And he said, no I am going to sit right there where they seat me, but after today the wall will not fall. And when they [the girls] go there, they laugh a lot and all the girls get together behind the wall. And he asks them, why are you [girls] standing behind, if you want to say something, come in front and say it. And they say we don’t want to come in front, we want to stand behind here. And he said if you ever want to attack someone then don’t do it from behind, do it from the front. Or you can change my side. And the girls began to laugh saying, what is the faqir doing? Then they say are grooms supposed to be like that? You have the appearance of a faqir. And he said grooms are not supposed to be like that, well sisters-in-law (saaliya) are not supposed to hide behind either. They come in front and do their talking. They wanted to throw the wall on him, that was why they did not come in front and he kept saying this to them again and again. Then he said, the task for which you are standing, that is not going to happen. And they asked for what task are we standing? And he said, that much force is not going to come into you as you have come into. And they said, what force have we come to show here? He said you have come to show it, but your force is not going to show. Either you can come out front now, or you can try and show your full force. They said we’re not going to come in front and he said then put your full force into it. They said what force are we going to be doing here? He said, whatever thing you are going to be using your force on, put it on that. And they don’t believe him, they think he is just talking, what force are we going to have to use? So they don’t come in front. And at first Nanak had not wanted to sit there either, he had said come in front, but then he said, okay, whatever makes you happy. And he sits down. When he sits, they become very happy that he has sat down on the cot, because first he was just talking. When he sits then they push it from behind and the wall becomes so firm that nothing happens to it, it really does not fall. So after they push with all their strength etc. and it does not fall then he asks, Your strength has been used up, now come in front. And they said, we did not use any force. And he said, you did but it did not work for you. And they ask, how did you know that? He said this wall that you had wished to topple today, it will never fall. You had wanted to topple it onto me, but it will not fall on anyone else either. And even today it is there and there is a gurdwara built

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155 Endearing term for an older woman
156 A worker who would receive money during ceremonies on special occasions.
157 Scheduled caste workers who would typically work with dead animals and leather.
there at Baba Batala. And the wall is still in the same state and it is such a powerful wall that it has not fallen to this day.\textsuperscript{158}

This long, detailed story is in marked contrast to the written janamasakhis where there is only a brief reference made to the actual wedding. In the sakhi from the written Bhai Bala tradition, the only indication that the wedding has taken place is when the narrator refers to Sulakhni’s \textit{doli} (palanquin) being brought home. A few references are made to relatives gathering for the wedding, however, other than this, little mention is made of Nanak’s wedding. Indeed we never hear about the events surrounding the actual ceremony itself. In the women’s version of this story the audience has an opportunity to hear about all the details.

In other women’s versions of this story we find a similar pattern. Nanak’s \textit{baraati} (men in his wedding party) are described in detail as simple men who did not boast splendidous attire, and arrived without the pomp and gaiety normally associated with a groom and his \textit{baraat} (wedding party). In another story the groom’s wedding party is described as being comprised of very simple men, some who were lame, and others who were blind. They were people who sang hymns and participated in prayers. This woman storyteller described the bride’s family as somewhat embarrassed by the simplicity of their son-in-law’s wedding party.\textsuperscript{159}

In a story concerning Nanak’s childhood, a ceremony is going to be performed which will purify the kitchen. A Brahmin is invited to the home in connection to this ceremony and also to tie a sacred thread upon Nanak. Nanak refuses to have the thread tied upon him saying that he does not believe in such matters. The Brahmin is insulted and leaves. Kalu is again very upset at Nanak because he insulted the Brahmin and

\textsuperscript{158} Appendix III, Story 8
because now the kitchen will not be purified. The story also contains a description of how it was important to purify the kitchen because the women of the household could enter it again only after it had been cleansed. Until this was done, the household could not resume its normal activity. The explanation of the purification of the kitchen and the importance attached to it are not factors typically mentioned in the Bhai Bala tradition. However, because it is a woman telling this story, we see more attention paid to such domestic matters. Women, because they are more familiar with the domestic scene, will naturally draw upon details and plots that are connected with the private and domestic world.

In the Bhai Bala written janamsakhi tradition, such attention is usually not paid to the rituals and traditions, which belong to the domestic sphere. As members of the public sphere, the male writers are not participants in and thus not familiar with the environment and events pertaining to the women's realm. Discussions about rituals and traditions, which come in the form of these stories, are topics of interest to women and thus find a prominent place in their stories.

In another story, [recounted in the introduction] when Nanak is leaving on an udasi, Nanaki is portrayed as being very upset and asking him not to leave. She even comments, "Look at bahu, you are just married and you will be leaving her as well." Nanak tells Nanaki that even though he is far away he will still remain with her. He tells her, "Bebe, whenever you remember me (wish for me to be with you) I will come." Some time later, while Nanaki is making rotis and one of the rotis rises (fills with air)
especially well, Nanaki comments, "Look at this roti. It must have been made for my brother. If only he were here to eat it."

At that same instant, Nanak becomes aware that Nanaki has remembered him. He comments to Mardana, "नानक ने मेरा याद किया", ("Nanaki has remembered me") and instructs Mardana that they must go home to her at once. When Nanak and Mardana arrive, a servant opens the door. When Nanaki asks who it is, the servant answers that it is Nanak. This reply is overheard by Sulakhni and makes her laugh heartily at the silly servant. For how could Nanak, who has been gone for so many days, so suddenly appear? But when Nanak enters and Nanaki and Sulakhni see that it really is Nanak they are overjoyed. Nanaki brings him in and asks him what should be brought for him to eat. Nanak responds, "Bring that very roti which you had remembered me by." An astonished Nanaki asks Nanak how he could know that and Nanak replies, "Remember, I told you, all you have to do is remember me and I’ll be right here."

This story, with its setting in the domestic sphere and main plot development consisting of a rising roti, does not and would not appear in the written janamsakhi tradition. Its content is within the women’s realm, and is too mundane to be included alongside the adventure-oriented plots situated in the public sphere that form the crux of the written janamsakhis. But because the familiar kitchen setting, places it firmly within the domestic sphere, this story appears in the women’s oral janamsakhis. For women will write about what is familiar to them.

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163 Term usually used to address an elder sister (can also be used to address any older woman).
164 In Punjabi culture whenever a roti rises very well it means that someone is especially hungry.
D Empathy for Female Characters and Situations

Another distinctive characteristic, which differentiates the Bhai Bala written tradition from the women’s oral tradition, is the tone used within the stories. Issues, which are of concern to women, seem to be ridiculed in the Bhai Bala tradition. When the women discuss any matter concerning the household or family life they are portrayed in negative terms. When Sulakhni’s mother, Chando Rani exclaims to Nanak, “... ਹੈ ਸੁਕੀ ਸੀ ਤੁਂ ਜਰਦੀ ਪੈਣ ਟੀਂਟ ਤੀ। [...] and [she] said to Nanak, O from where have you been born for my daughter?] the fact that “... ਤਰੁਂ ਮਨੁ ਮੋਂ ਘੇਸੇ ਸ਼ਾਂ ਦੁਕਾਨੀ ਲੁਚੀ ਬਰਵਾਂ ਚੇ। [Nanak did not say a word; but remained silent] paints an even more illustrious picture of Nanak. The women are shown as quarrelsome and petty, always fighting and complaining about some matter. In contrast, Nanak is wise and enlightened – not to be bothered by such trivial matters. He is portrayed as being above these worldly matters. As Nanaki once told him, “You are not made for these worldly matters. You are a friend of fakirs”. He is to concern himself with topics of more importance and spiritual matters. Cheris Kramarae points to a similar phenomenon when she remarks “Many cartoons in popular magazines portray men as showing incredulity at the inexplicable things women are saying.” In this written tradition, women’s discussions and complaints are shown as inane.

166 ... ਕਈ ਸੀ ਤੁਂ ਜਾ ਪੁੱਤਰ ਦਾ ਕੁਹਾਣਾ ਹੈ। ਤੀਜ਼ ਕਫ਼ਾ ਆਹਨਾਂ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਹੈ ਕੇਵੇਲ ਕਫ਼ਾ ਹੋਂਗਾ। ਹੈ ਹੋ ਸੀ ਨਜ਼ਾਰਾ ਹੋਣ ਲਗਣ। ਹੈ ਇਕਾਈ ਹੋਣ ਲਗਣ। Respected Brother, you are God’s ‘roop’. Please eat whatever is available, whether tasty or otherwise. Do not get entangled in mundane matters. You are not [made for?] these worldly nets. You are the friend of fakirs. S. S. Kohli. *Bhai Bala Janamsakhi*, p66.
There is no empathy shown towards any situation concerning female interests. The despair that Sulakhni feels in a new home with an inattentive husband is clear, even if we do not yet hear Sulakhni directly and specifically speaking of her woes. The despondency of Sulakhni’s situation is also evident in that Chando Rani feels it warrants a confrontation with Nanaki. However, despite being a woman, Nanaki does not empathize with Sulakhni’s situation or attach any importance to Sulakhni’s complaints. The male compilers of these janamsakhis are of course not ones to empathize with a woman’s plight, and so they portray these complaints as nugatory. Nanaki dismisses Sulakhni’s and Chando Rani’s concerns, stating that Nanak is not a thief, adulterer, or a gambler, and has committed no bad deeds. She tells Chando Rani that the only reason Sulakhni’s complaints could be warranted were if she was hungry or without clothes or jewellery.

In the written tradition, rather than eliciting empathy for Sulakhni’s plight, this story instead paints a negative picture of Sulakhni. Nanaki diminishes Sulakhni’s complaints by emphasizing that Sulakhni receives everything she needs and is always treated well. Nanaki also points out that she makes herself blind to any of Sulakhni’s misbehaviour and is always careful to speak respectfully to her and to address her as

[She] stated, “Why have you begun to do that you have begun to bother other’s daughters. Do you not have the fear of God? You do not explain to your brother. Nor do you worry about your sister-in-law, nor do you enquire about your sister-in-law’s state. Neither does the bhanoiya (sister’s husband) explain to the sala (wife’s brother). What is in your minds? Tell me this.
Ibid, p80.
Bhabhiji, not by her name. She states that despite all the allowances she makes for Sulakhni and the respect that she shows towards her, Sulakhni does not behave as a proper daughter-in-law should. She comments on Sulakhni’s inappropriate behavior, complaining that even when she calls for her, she will not come. And if she does ever come then it is in anger and to fight.

Chando Rani does not fully empathize with her daughter’s position either. After her discussion with Nanaki, Chando Rani feels ashamed that she has made complaints about a man like Nanak. She chides Sulakhni, asking her why she is persisting in giving this good man a bad name. Rather than fighting to improve her daughter’s situation,

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169 Meaning that Nanaki treats Sulakhni with such respect that she will not even address her by name, only as sister-in-law. And she does so even though being the elder in the relationship entitles her to the right of calling Sulakhni by name.

170 यह अभी शेष नही अब असीम बिंगिंग नही है मे माता के मे है विला माता के। बिंगिंग में जीत उसी प्राप्त नही सा करी राजी जेडी एक तू राजी बजता। रहते है ज्यादा है ज्यादा उत्तर कुर्वे हूं देशे ये मे ही अभी करारी जिपी अभी करारी बिंगिंग करते मे बदले। अभी जिंवी दुखायें देशे है उसी पी तीजी जिंवी जिंवी जिंवी जिंवी जिंवी जिंवी। अभी अभी अभी हूं मूह कहीरा हुं ते राजी ज्यादा ज्यादा है ते रहते है ज्यादा राजी बजता है। अभी दी छाड़ पहले है ते मे माता अभी [मे नी, मे नी] द्वारा है। द्वारा बिंगिंग मे है मे मे नी / बदले हैरा माता लाली।

Then Nanaki said, “Listen Aunt, even if I explain to Brother, what should I explain? My brother is neither a thief, nor an adulterer, nor a gambler – nor does he commit any bad deeds. If he does anything, then it is giving charity to those who are naked and hungry; even that he does from his earnings and from his own earnings he may do whatsoever he wants. Aunt, you should give us complaints, only if your daughter was being naked or without clothes – only then would your complaints be warranted. And if you wish to bother those who eat and drink well, then that is your choice. It does not suit our mouth [if we say anything to Nanak]. We have never said anything to Sulakhni. Listen aunt, in the place of jewellery and in the place of clothes she receives jewellery and in the place of clothes she receives clothes. In the place of being blind, I am blind and I always say speak respectfully. I have never called her anything besides sister-in-law from this mouth.

Ibid, pp80-1.

171 अभी अभी अभी है। मे ने व्यतीत नाम देती या अभी अभी अभी। अभी या ते तू तू तू तू तू तू तू। अभी या ते तू तू तू तू तू तू तू तू। अभी या ते तू तू तू तू तू तू तू।

Aunt, Sister-in-law [Sulakhni] is also quarrelsome. If I ever [send for her], even then she does not come. It is only when she feels like coming that she will come. If she ever does come, then she comes with great anger and to fight. Even then, I say this to myself that she is younger than me. I also say that she is my sister-in-law. I always speak respectfully to her. And she is the daughter of a good Khatri. She shall eventually become wise. We are not going to plead with anyone.

Ibid, p81.

172 जेडी रे नाम बढ़ा ते उस्टे ध्याने रे ध्याने ध्यानें जेडी जेडी जेडी (जेडी) बिंगिंग बिंगिंग है। “
she tells Sulakhni that she should be more subservient and keep her head bowed, in other words, to remain subservient, timid and docile. Because Sulakhni lacks obedience and subservience, she is a contrast to the ideal Indian wife and daughter-in-law. The proper role for a wife is that of a Sita-Savitri who quietly abides by her husband’s every act and utterance, never uttering the mildest protest. Sulakhni, in contrast, is an undesirable wife because she constantly expresses discontentment with her husband.

When we examine Nanaki’s conversation with Sulakhni’s mother, we can agree with Fetterly that “literature is political” and “literature is male.” It is because the writers of these janamsakhis were males who do not understand or empathize with a woman (and her role and her life), that we see such views. Thus the writing expresses specifically male sentiments when Nanaki is portrayed as loudly protesting Sulakhni’s behaviour. Rather than have Nanaki and the readers empathize with Sulakhni’s situation, the male perspective in this story turns the situation around with Chando Rani’s concession that her daughter is, indeed, behaving in an unreasonable manner. Therefore the correct character for women is one that is submissive to all other relations in the household.

Rao discusses the issue of one situation being seen in two different lights. He comments upon this phenomenon when he discusses what he feels are the two most significant stories in Valmiki’s Ramayana. The first story concerns the birth of Ram and his brothers, and the second concerns Kaikeyi’s plottings to banish Rama and keep him

Daughter, if you have everything then why do you worry this son of a Khatri and give him a bad name? Ibid.

Then Chando Rani became quiet. [She] was not able to say anything. Then she went to her daughter. Said she, “Daughter Sulakhni, your sister-in-law has made me feel ashamed of myself. Look daughter, you should also act with your head held down.” Ibid, p81.
from the throne.\textsuperscript{174} Rao states that “[I]n the first story, women have no role to play except as passive bearers of children; in the second, the evil nature of women is highlighted in the descriptions of Kaikeyi’s adamant demands to have her son Bharata invested as the heir to the kingdom and to banish Rama to the forest for fourteen years.”\textsuperscript{175} However, one of the songs sung by the Brahmin women gives a new perspective on the events. This song presents the events in an entirely different light by crediting the women for the birth of the four sons and by eliminating the “evil nature” of Kaikeyi’s wish.\textsuperscript{176} Whereas in Valmiki’s \textit{Ramayana}, the birth of Dasarath’s sons is accredited to a sacrifice performed by a sage, in this song it is a woman who is responsible for their birth. Kausalya tells her husband to adopt Santa because she will bring good luck and they will have sons.\textsuperscript{177}

In the women’s oral janamsakhi tradition, as well, events common to both traditions are presented in an entirely different manner, because we have a different perspective upon the events. The focus is shifted to feminine concerns and these concerns will be presented in a more sympathetic manner because the female authors are able to empathize with the female characters and their situations.

One of the most obvious examples of this is the manner in which Sulakhni’s situation is presented. Rather than being depicted as a sullen and disobedient daughter-in-law, Sulakhni actually receives sympathy. There are no references to her being disobedient to her in-laws, nor is she ever depicted as complaining about Nanak. The

\textsuperscript{174} Kaikeyi is Rama’s stepmother. V. N. Rao. “A Ramayana of Their Own”, p122.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} The adoption of Santa is also significant because in Indian tradition it is usually preferred that the firstborn child be a son. However, in the women’s song it is suggested that a daughter would be preferred as the firstborn, because she would be a form of Lakshmi and bless the family with prosperity which would include the birth of sons. Ibid.
episodes where Sulakhni's mother confronts Nanaki about her daughter's unhappy state are completely eliminated. As in the women's song tradition of the Ramayana, women in these oral janamsakhis, never defy traditional rules of propriety. Sulakhni never complains about her marital state or behaves in a sullen manner. It is Nanaki who speaks on behalf of Sulakhni and empathizes with her situation. At one point Nanaki asks Nanak how he can leave, especially when he has a newly wed bride at home. She states, “And Sulakhni, daughter-in-law, is at home, you have brought and left her here.”

The fact that Nanak also takes some sort of interest in Sulakhni's situation indicates that we are receiving a woman's perception upon these events. In the Bhai Bala sakhis, Nanak never has anything to say about any domestic matters. However, here in the woman's oral tradition, we do hear from Nanak on matters concerning the domestic realm. When Nanaki asks Nanak how he can leave Sulakhni, he tells her, “You told me to get married ... I had not wanted to, but I could not refuse you. You said you get married and then do whatever you wish. Now the job, for which I have come, let me do that job as well. You take care of her, [Sulakhni].” Although Nanak does not remain home, he does take an interest in his wife's situation, by telling his sister to take care of her.

Sympathy is completely upon Sulakhni's side in the women's stories. One storyteller mentions that Sulakhni did not always understand her husband and found it difficult when he would remain apart from her for so long, but that this was understandable, since every woman desires that she be together with her husband.

178 Appendix III, Story 9.
179 Ibid.
Such sympathetic descriptions of women characters in the sakhis of the women’s oral tradition make the lack of empathy for women characters and their experiences in the Bhai Bala Tradition all the more glaring. This is just one aspect of the scarcity of the representation of the feminine in the Bhai Bala Tradition. A comparison of the stories from this tradition with the stories composed by women affirms a categorization of the Bhai Bala Tradition as a male and political literature.

Throughout the Bala Tradition we saw that women were rarely mentioned and their experiences rarely described because the male authors who controlled the promulgation of this literature did not deem the feminine important enough to be discussed. Consequently the few instances where we did see a representation of the feminine depicted these instances from a masculine perspective, so that the females and their experiences were still neglected. Because the composers of these sakhis were still men, readers saw the feminine from a masculine perspective, as Riding states: “And the lady of the house was seen only as she appeared in each room, according to the nature of the lord of the room. None saw the whole of her, none but herself.”

Men cannot sufficiently comment upon a woman’s position and her feelings (her fears, her hopes, her expectations), because he cannot see all of her. Because he is a man, he cannot possibly have a full understanding of a woman’s experience. When we read the stories written and compiled by men we only see the woman according to how he appears to her. We will see masculine perceptions about the woman and hear masculine opinions about her personality and conduct. We do not hear female perceptions until women are able to give

180 Appendix II, Story 14
181 Laura Riding quoted in Gilbert and Gubar, Madwoman in the Attic, p3.
themselves a voice through alternate forms of expression. Gilbert and Gubar states that because traditional texts subordinate women, women must escape these male-dominated texts and come up with alternate methods by which to express themselves:

Since both patriarchy and its texts subordinate and imprison women, before women can even attempt that pen which is so rigorously kept from them they must escape just those male texts, which ... deny them the autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them and kept them from attempting the pen.182

Women in the oral janamsakhi tradition are doing just that. They are escaping the “male texts” by formulating their own stories and finding alternative methods to the patriarchal authority, which has always dominated them. As a result, we arrive at an oral tradition, which is composed by the feminine and dominated by the feminine. The abundance of female characters focus upon plots which are of interest women storytellers who have traditionally been restricted to the domestic domain. Because the women are no longer muted (at least, not in this domain) their opinions are finally heard.

Chapter V: Women’s Voices

A comparison of the two different janamsakhi traditions (the Bhai Bala Written and the Oral Women’s tradition) succeeded in establishing the Bhai Bala as a political and a male literature. However, it also showed that, although women are normally silenced in dominant, written traditions, they do succeed in finding a voice through alternate forms of expression. And once these voices are expressed, we also see that different women will have different voices, or perspectives as well.

Women Finding a Voice Through Alternate Means of Expression

Our examination of the Bhai Bala janamsakhi tradition showed us that this tradition was lacking in feminine images – there was a scarcity of female characters and of female perspectives. The fact that this literature was controlled by the masculine resulted in it being a “male” literature, dominated by male characters, male plots and male images. Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh quotes Christine Downing on this phenomenon of literature being dominated by the masculine and the consequent need for female images:

We are starved for images, which recognize the sacredness of the feminine and the complexity, richness and nurturing power of female energy. We hunger for images of human creativity and love inspired by the capacity of female bodies to give birth and nourish, for images of how humankind participates in the natural world suggested by reflection on the correspondences between menstrual rhythms and the moon’s waking and waning.”

In the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi Tradition as well, female readers are starved for feminine images. They are denied a voice by the masculine authorities and therefore their stories

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and their experiences are not heard. Women have to find alternate means of expression in order to make their voices be heard, which is how the women's oral janamsakhi tradition came to be.

Not only have women's experiences not been recorded in traditional, masculine literature, but also often they have often been denied the opportunity to express their voices. Women traditionally have been denied a voice in patriarchal societies, often by males. They are not encouraged to speak or express themselves, and when the occasional woman does attempt to speak she is often silenced.

Heilbrun comments upon how, when women do struggle to communicate, they are often silenced by the male holders of power. Heilbrun draws on examples from Greek mythology in order to elaborate. She refers to how Penelope, despite consistently proving her independence and capability, is still denied a voice by males including her own son, Telemachos. Telemachos twice sends Penelope out of the circle of men and back to her weaving, disallowing her right to an opinion. He orders her: "Go therefore back in the house, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff, and see to it that your handmaidens ply their work also; but the men must see to discussion, all men, but I most of all. For mine is the power in the household." Heilbrun comments upon how women are denied voices and are restricted to the domestic sphere, away from the public. She states that "here again, woman is dismissed to her weaving, far from

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184 While Odysseus was away, Penelope, as a single mother, managed the entire household, even as she encountered difficulties with disloyal servants and lusty suitors. Penelope shows her intelligence and resourcefulness when, in order to ward off the advances of a particular suitor, she tells him to wait to marry her until she has finished weaving a shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes: Penelope then, while weaving her father-in-law's shroud during the day, proceeds to unweave it at night.
The brother-in-law then cuts Philomela’s tongue so that she cannot incriminate him. This is an extreme measure of how a male is depriving a woman of the right to express herself. However, Philomela finds a way to communicate to her sister Procne and to tell her about the crime by weaving the incident of her violation into a tapestry. “So silenced women find a ‘voice’.” Arachne and Philomela are two characters who, as defiant women weavers, represent women who “will not be silenced.” In a similar manner, women in the patriarchal Punjabi society, who did not have a voice in the janamsakhis, did not remain completely voiceless. Although the original, written janamsakhi tradition provided only men’s ideas and perceptions, women found voices in other areas. They found other venues through which they could express their ideas and frustrations. These venues included classic folk songs, where women would voice their frustrations about mothers-in-law, problems with their spouses and other such matters, and oral stories, including the oral janamsakhi tradition.

Women within South Asian traditions have been successfully in asserting their voices. A. K. Ramanujan acknowledges that Indians are “exposed to customs, tales and beliefs that may be quite contrary to what they find in the classics.” In his article “Toward a Counter-Sytem: Women’s Tales”, Ramanujan examines a number of tales told by women which concentrate upon women as the chief protagonists. These stories, just like the women’s oral janamsakhis, were told by older women to young children in a domestic setting, usually in the evening time during dinner in the kitchen, which, as Ramanujan affirms is exclusively within the realm of women. Ramanujan asserts that

188 Heilbrun, Carolyn G. “What was Penelope Unweaving?” 1985 published in Hamlet’s Mother and Other Women. [New York: Ballantine Books, 1990], 121.
189 Ibid 122
these women’s stories “present an alternate way of looking at things ... [where] the world of women is not the world of men.”

**Different Voices, Different Perspectives**

Gloria Goodwin Raheja refers to how various oral traditions are multiply voiced. Just as the stories told by men and women will differ, so will stories told by different groups of women. Raheja looks at the speech practices of North Indian women, focusing on two genres of expression in which patrilineal kinship is discussed. She states that although all the songs/proverbs told by women differ from those told by men, songs and proverbs told by different women also differ from each other. Women who are speaking as wives and daughters-in-law will speak differently than those speaking as daughters or sisters. Again, a difference in backgrounds and experiences will influence the stories being told and result in different perspectives.

A different perspective is also given on most events and characters depicted in the *Ramayana* songs previously discussed. Familiar events are seen through the eyes of a woman, whereas previously they have been told through a male perspective. One of the most obvious examples is a song, which summarizes the *Ramayana* with Rama’s elder sister, Santa, as the main character. Rama’s birth is another story, seen from a woman’s perspective, whereas his birth is usually described in glorious terms, the women’s song version of this event graphically depicts Kaushalya’s labour pains. In addition, women

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191 Ibid. p53.
in these songs voice any criticism or anger they feel towards Rama because of his treatment of his wife.\textsuperscript{194}

Although male writers have dominated in Sikh tradition, women within this tradition have also occasionally been able to take up the pen and put their own perspective on familiar themes. Amrita Pritam\textsuperscript{195} did this with her poem “The Annunciation” which was written in commemoration of Guru Nanak’s 500\textsuperscript{th} birth anniversary. This poem did not mention Nanak himself, but instead focussed on the pregnant Tripta and her “hopes, dreams and bodily experiences.”\textsuperscript{196}

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the women’s oral janamsakhi tradition has also presented alternative perceptions of familiar situations. When women did not find themselves represented in the written tradition, they turned to the oral venue as their alternate mode of expression as well. The women’s oral tradition brings an enormous change to the “way of looking at things.” Not only are female characters and female-oriented plots more common, but also women’s feelings and perceptions are allotted more importance.

For example, as previously mentioned, Sulakhni’s situation is treated with greater empathy and understanding in the oral tradition than in the written. The written tradition allocates no sympathy to Sulakhni. In contrast, in the oral tradition Sulakhni is never referred to as anything other than the proper, obedient and demure daughter-in-law.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid, p129.
\textsuperscript{195} Amrita Pritam is a well known and prolific Punjabi poet and novelist who has produced countless volumes of poetry, short stories and novels.
\textsuperscript{196} Not surprisingly this poem was not received with great popularity. Jakobsh writes that “the outcry that followed the publication of the poem was ruthless, demanding that the poem be banned by the government and questioning how a lowly “love’s worm” could attempt to write on so elevated a theme. It would appear that history, understood and presented from the perspective of the feminine, can only be vilified and postulated as incomparable to real history, that of the male perspective.” Doris Jakobsh, “Constructionof Gender,” p280.
Although it is clearly stated that Sulakhni did not understand Nanak's behavior and is hurt by his frequent absences and lack of interest in domestic affairs, she does not cross proper decorum by being quarrelsome or disobedient. Therefore, her situation attracts greater empathy from the audience. One woman stated that Sulakhni did not recognize Nanak as an enlightened being and found it difficult to be his wife and be parted from him during his udasis, but that was understandable, since "Every woman desires that her husband be with her at all times."\textsuperscript{197}

Stories told by women differ in content and perspectives from those told by men; but stories told by different groups of women will also differ. Different women will have different voices as well. All women do not share the same backgrounds and experiences and therefore do not share the same perceptions; consequently they do not share the same stories. Rao discusses how songs sung by Brahmin women differ from the songs sung by non-Brahmin women because of their differences in background and experiences\textsuperscript{198}.

Brahmin women lead generally sheltered lives, segregated from men and regulated with rules of proper behavior. Non-Brahmin women lead less controlled and sheltered lives because they work outside of the home as agricultural labour and have more contact with

\textsuperscript{197} Private conversation with Storyteller B in Jalandhar, Punjab, in March 2000.

\textsuperscript{198} The Brahmin women who sing these songs are segregated from men and lead relatively sheltered lives. They are expected to abide by generations old rules of proper behaviour, emphasizing obedience and modesty. Most of the Brahmin women who sing the songs studied by Rao have not been formally educated, although they are literate in Telugu. They come from families who have had less exposure to English education and urbanized life. These songs are usually sung late in the afternoon, after lunch, when most of the men have relocated elsewhere to sleep, talk or engage in various "male activities" such as playing cards. Non-Brahmin women work as agricultural labor in fields, making their own money and therefore leading less controlled and sheltered lives than Brahmin women. In their lives there is not the same separation of sexes that exists in upper castes. They are still seen as inferior to men and are assigned different jobs that require less skill. However, even though the women and men have different tasks (both at home and at work), one still does not see as clear a separation because the lines often become blurred, for example these men assist in taking care of kids. Although these lower caste women have family responsibilities, which are similar to those of Brahmin women, they are not as dependent on their husbands as Brahmin women.

men. Consequently, this results in a difference in the Ramayana songs sung by non-Brahmin women. While these songs also concentrate on women's themes (such as Sita's life in the forest or her request to Rama for the golden deer), there is little or no mention of rituals or of saris and ornaments, or of the conflicts that arise in joint families.199

As previously mentioned, although all the women from whom I collected stories were from Punjabi Sikh families and a similar age group, the rural-urban divide resulted in two groups of women who came from very different backgrounds and told very different stories. The women whose stories I examined lived a rural life and did not enjoy the amount of independence that the women leading urban lives did. None worked outside of the home and their social lives were restricted to the village. Even Storyteller B, who was now a resident of Canada, did not display much independence, spending most of her time in her house in the village while in the Punjab, and rarely venturing out of her home in Canada, where she looked after her grandchildren, except to attend the gurdwara. Most of these women possessed only rudimentary reading and writing skills as most of them had had only a few years of schooling. The activities of reading and/or writing did not figure prominently into their daily lives. There was a great contrast amongst the women across the rural/urban divide. The urban women from Patiala, whom I interviewed, all possessed college and university degrees and pursued active lives outside of their homes. They held jobs and reading and writing was a regular part of their lives.

With this group of women there were no women-oriented stories. This was perhaps because these women really did not have an established story-telling tradition of

their own. The stories that these women told were the same as the stories encountered in the Bala Tradition. It was interesting to note, that of the oral stories told, it was usually the stories of these formally educated women where the women did not have a stronger voice. This seems quite paradoxical. Women are receiving more education but this education system is still patriarchal, dominated by males with books written by males projecting male perspectives. So rather than learning to project their voice, women seem to be losing their voice and are again being rendered mute. It is only in the oral tradition that women’s experiences from within the domestic sphere were well represented, but unfortunately that tradition is slowly being lost in the Punjabi villages.

William Sax discusses that oral traditions are often given less credibility than written and printed texts because they are thought to be less permanent and thus inferior. It is not only dominant groups, such as men and the urban, educated women who are dismissive of the oral traditions, allocating more importance to the written text, the women who tell the stories are themselves dismissive of the oral tradition. They often asked why I was approaching uneducated women such as themselves for any information, insisting that it would be more productive for me if I approached more educated women who were well read in such areas.

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CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This comparison of the written Bhai Bala Janamsakhi Tradition and the oral women’s janamsakhi tradition indicates that in the patriarchal Punjabi Sikh society, women have traditionally been the subordinate group in society, muted by the dominant male group. As such, the literature in Sikh tradition is also reflective of this silencing of women. Because the janamsaks his can be used as historical sources to reflect the society of the period in which they developed, they can impart knowledge about that society’s general attitude towards and perception of women. The written Bhai Bala janamsakhi tradition is composed of sakhis firmly set within the public sphere, concentrating upon adventure plots, away from the domestic realm. The stories recorded in this tradition concentrate upon masculine characters and masculine interests, promulgating specifically masculine points of view. The popularity of the Bhai Bala Tradition amongst the Sikh panth of today indicates that it is these specifically male views and experiences, which are being related. The result is a lack of representation of women, and topics of interest to them, which relate their frustrations and experiences. These characteristics firmly categorize the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi tradition as a ‘political’ and a ‘male’ literature.

In contrast, within the women’s oral janamsakhi tradition, we see a shift in focus from the public to the private sphere. While many of the sakhis recounted by women still occur within the public sphere and revolve around adventure plots, the emphasis is upon the private sphere here. It is the women’s realm within the domestic world that is concentrated upon. Hence, we see a greater representation of women and of topics of interest to them. It is this oral tradition where women successfully found a venue in which they were finally able to express their frustrations and experiences. The focus of
these stories upon Nanaki and specific explanations of her stature as an “enlightened woman”, as well as their increased attention to other female characters, such as Tripta and Sulakhni is just one of the characteristics which differentiates the women’s oral tradition from the masculine narrative that is the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi Tradition. Most importantly, the attention paid to the feelings and desires of the various women characters (the pain a mother feels when her son is not understood, the anger a sister feels when her brother is misjudged and the empathy a woman feels for another woman whose husband is not with her), show that women are successful in finding a voice so that their own thoughts can also be shared. If the power of the pen is not in their hands it does not mean a permanent silencing of women – the oral janamsakhi tradition is a prime example of how women can still make their voices be heard.

It is unfortunate then, that this oral tradition is not allocated any importance within the society. Not only do the dominant groups ignore its presence but also the participants of this storytelling tradition are decreasing in number as more and more women are educated and prefer to leave the oral traditions aside for the written texts.
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Appendix I: Stories Told by Storyteller A

This is a transcription of the stories told by Storyteller A. She was 50 years old, and resided in the village Mahala in the District of Jalandhar. She had completed schooling up to the fifth grade.

Story 1
When Guru Nanak took birth again, it was Kalyug\textsuperscript{201} in the world – there was a lot of fighting and murdering in the world. There was a lot of disruption and the earth made a request, “O God, there is a lot of weight on me.” And He asked, “Are there a lot of mountains on you?” And she said no. He said he would lessen them. He said if people had built a lot of houses etc he would lessen those; rivers etc, those types of things. She said, “No.” He said, then what is the big weight on you? She said the sins of people – when they put their feet on me, then my chest burns. Lessen something that will allow for the cooling of my chest. Then God took the form of Guru Nanak and appeared himself on the Earth. Then when coming, wherever he heard of something happening, he would travel from village to village. Then he meets Mardana and taking Mardana he walks along and someone is travelling on a horse. [The man] has committed many sins and Nirankar says that he will face a lot of problems in his life. The traveller thinks a lot of himself; that he is a great man. Guru Nanak says we have to cool him down a little, and bring him down to a lesser place. But that man will not be lessened, he is very proud. Nanak walks ahead and Mardana walks behind him – and they used to do sing hymns, and Mardana had that instrument with him. And the man on the horse, he kicked Mardana as he passed him. He said, “Follower of a simpleton, leave some space as you walk”. And Mardana fell and his instrument broke. When he heard the noise, Guru Nanak looked behind him and thought, what was that noise? When he looked, he saw that Mardana had fallen, and the man with the horse had ridden on leaving clouds of dust and dirt behind him. And Mardana said to Guru Nanak, you know everything, you say to him “May you be unsuccessful, O traveller on a horse, may you be unsuccessful.” And Guru Nanak said, “O Mardana, I have come to help people, not to do them any harm.” Mardana said, “No, you say, may you be unsuccessful.” And Guru Nanak said if you listen to me you say to him one time, “O traveller on the horse, may you be successful.” He said I’m not going to say this, I can’t say this. He said that I am not so much as hurt by the kick he gave me, but he called you a simpleton. I am your student. He called you a simpleton and I am hurt by that. How can I say to him, “may you be successful”, you say to him, “may you be unsuccessful”. He said, “No Mardana, I am asking you for the third time to say, O traveller on a horse, may you be successful.” And Mardana said, I cannot refuse your request either. And he said, “O traveller on the horse, I do not wish to say this, but my guru has said may you be successful. So I will say this.” When Mardana had said this, the horse fell and died. There was a piece of steel on the horse and the traveller picked the steel up and started walking back in great anger, thinking, I had kicked him and he must have said something, that is why this happened to my horse. He came and said to Guru Nanak, “Hold him because I want to beat him because this happened.” He said, “Fool, you had committed so many sins in your life that there was a weight of many hells upon you. My follower said to you one time, May you be successful and that cut all your sins and all that weight which was on you was taken off. There was only one left and that was the weight of that steel. And so with the utterance of our words all your sins were washed.” Then he fell on Guru Nanak’s feet, exclaiming that you really are a high being. So he reformed. That is why they say that if you ... with kindness – The Guru did not say anything (give him a lecture) and still reformed him.

Story 2
When Nanak was born, after he was a few days old, his mother and father called a Brahmin. He was going to be thirteen days old and they wanted to put a junoon\textsuperscript{202} around his neck. When the Brahmin came, Guru

\textsuperscript{201} In the Indian conception of time, time is circular and is divided into four different yugs, or eras. These are the Satyug, the Dwipera, the Treta and the Kalyug. Satyug is said to be the age of truth (satya=truth) without any evil and sins. Slowly, as time progresses there comes more and more evil into the world. Kalyug is the era when there is the most evil in the world.

\textsuperscript{202} Sacred thread
Nanak asked him what is this junoon of? And the man said it is made of raw thread and you have to wear it around your neck, this keeps everything alright. Guru Nanak said, this junoon will at some time become dirty, then I will have wash it and to take it off and take care of it. Put such a junoon on me which I will never have to wash ... because the Brahmin was telling him that you can never touch this with jhuta hands, you have to keep it like this and that. He said put such a junoon on that will never become jhuta or have to be washed, that I'll never have to take off or to put on – which will always remain on. The Brahmin asked, what kind of a junoon is this? He said you say you know everything else, I can do this and I can do that, do you not even know this much? He said that junoon is that which is in my heart – fill my heart with some gul because of which my mind will never go towards bad deeds and so that I will always speak the truth and have nirmata and walk lower than others, and never give anyone any sorrow, but actually alleviate others’ sorrow. If you have such a junoon then put that on me. The Brahmin was amazed that he was such a high being and he told Nanak’s father that the child did not want to put it on. He said [Kalu said to Nanak] that you have to but Nanak replied, no, if he has the type of junoon I request then I will put it on but I will not wear a junoon made out of this thread.

Story 3
When he was small he would not do any real work. When he would play with others he would even give his own things to them. He could never tolerate seeing anyone’s grief. And his father would beat him and his mother would cry and tell him to do some work. He would ask what type of work should I do? And his father would also fight with his mother saying that you are spoiling him and not saying anything to him. Then she said we will send him somewhere to do some work. And one day she said it is only if you tell him to do some work that he will do so. He said, okay, he will not be able to do any other work – why don’t you get him to bring you the household groceries. So he gave him 20 rupees and Nanak went off. On his way he came across some holy men who were sitting hungry for 2-3 days. They were sitting in a jungle around a fire and the poor things were nearly dead from hunger. Nanak asked them why they were sitting there and they said it’s been 2-3 days and we have not had anything to eat. So Nanak said, I will give you some. The twenty rupees he used to buy them some food and after giving it to them he returned home. Then his father asked him, you did not bring the groceries and Nanak replied, “I have done a true deal”. And his father asked why did you do so? Nanak replied, at home we had other things and could have eaten something else, those poor people had been so hungry for so many days and I thought what could be a better deed than to give those poor people some food and they will give me blessings. What better job than this could I have done? His father again beat Nanak and again his mother saved him. Then they said well we will send him to Nanaki.

Story 4
So Nanak went to Nanaki’s and when he went there he told Nanaki that they do such and such with me, they say I don’t work etc. Nanaki said do this. - Nanaki’s husband – had a small store and used to sell groceries. He said okay, seat him at the store and he will work there. Whatever woman would come to buy something, Nanak would always put the same rock on and weigh the goods using that; whether someone was buying something worth Rs2 or worth Rs4, he would always weigh with that. Someone saw and said he’s plundering the store. He came and told her [Nanaki’s] husband, and her husband went and fought with Nanaki about this. Nanak said you are making these accusations against me, but if your store has suffered a loss with my coming then tell me. He said, whoever listens says “Modi Khanai, tera, tera” He has plundered the store, he keeps weighing out thirteen. Then she says to her husband, do not listen to people and quarrel, go to your store and see if your supplies have finished, or if you have too little money. He went and he saw that the amount of deals that were made were in order and of the money made, it was actually in excess. Then they believed that he was an enlightened being.

In Punjabi, tera means the number thirteen as well as the term yours. Here, the implication is that Nanak would be counting whilst measuring (ie, ..., ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen ..., dus, gyara, bara, tera ...) and he would lose himself once he reached the number thirteen, because he would begin to say, tera, tera, mein tera, mein tera (I am yours, I am yours).
Then he became angry, upset with them and he left there too. He said if you have doubt in me then I'm not
going to stay, I'm going elsewhere. And Nanaki was crying, "You're leaving because you're angry with me." However Nanak told her, "I have no anger with you. I worked here for a bit now I'll go elsewhere." He said I have no anger for you, I have love for you. Whichever day you remember me, I will come to you right then." Nanaki said, "Really? How will you do that?" He said, "You just see."

Story 5
And one day she is sitting in the vehra\textsuperscript{204} and making roti and don't crows start talking? And she says who are you talking? And one roti rises a lot. And Nanaki remembers her brother and says he said such, if he really is so then may he come and eat this roti today. Over there Nanak became aware of this – he knew everything – and he knew his sister was remembering him. He said – Bala and Mardana were with him – he told them, let's go and make preparations, we're going there today. They said, how can we go at this time? He said, "No, Nanaki has remembered me." They also were surprised and said, "Really?" And he said, Yes. They went and when he went there, after a little time, Nanaki goes and opens the door and sees that he really did come. And she asked him, should I bring you something to eat or drink. And he said "That fulka [rotii] by which you had remembered me, bring that very fulka" she said, how do you know? I was sitting here alone and when the roti rose I remembered you. He said, "Did I not tell you that when you remember me, I will come in front of you right then."

\textsuperscript{204} The vehra is a courtyard in traditional homes in Punjabi villages. It is where the majority of the household activities take place.
Appendix II: Stories Told By Storyteller B

This is a transcription of the stories told by Storyteller B. She was 64 years old, and resided in the village Bara Pind in the District of Jalandhar. She had completed schooling up to the third grade.

Story 1
Maharaja's birth (Guru Nanak's birth) happened in Talwandi, Raipur ki Talwandi, they called it before. Today they call it Nanakana Sahib. And when he was born, the daee (midwife) of that time - his feet had this type of shining that she said right at that time - that neither has this child cried, that it is God who has been born. So she gave congratulations and everyone rejoiced. When he became a little older they sent him to school ... the priest said that the number one is just one. He said, one is God - if you know then I can learn from you. The priest would come everyday and ask questions etc and he said, your son has already been educated, no one can teach him.

Story 2
Then when Maharaja became a little older, they told him to go and do a "sacha sauda" [true deal]. So they sent him - I've forgotten his name. [I interject - Mata Kalu sent him?] Yes, his father sent him and told him to do a sacha sauda. He gave him 20 rupees of that time ... Now sacha sauda is the name of that place, otherwise it's name was something else, but today it's called sacha sauda because he told him to go do business and buy some things with this 20 rupees and we will put them in the store. He saw some hungry holy men along the way. They said we've been hungry for 1-2 days. And Maharaja thought - this is the best deal. So he fed them there and came back empty. So his father asked, where are the goods? And he said, I used the money to do a "true deal". So he slapped him - his father and the sister asked, "Why did you slap my brother?" She said my brother is a form of God.

Story 3
Then there was a Patwari and some cows got into his field. Maharaja was sleeping and a snake gave him shade and the whole field was destroyed. He went and complained to Nanak's father, that you send your son but he does not know anything. He was asleep and the whole field got destroyed. When they went to see, the field was perfectly fine. Maharaja fixed it - when the snake came to him, he did not bite him - he felt a coolness with him and when the sun came down upon his forehead, the snake used it's hood to give him shade.

Story 4
There was Sajjan Thug - took peoples' clothes and killed them - he had taken the form of a sant. Then Maharaja went there at night, Sajjan's name was Sajjan Sant, but they call him Sajjan Thug now. Maharaja spent the night there and he thought he must have a lot of money. Maharaja did not sleep, he kept reading shabads and finally he began to say, You go and ask your wife, that what you do - do you do sins or do you do good? Will they take a part of your sin when you go to hell? And he said, fine I'll ask. They said, we want to eat goodness, you go and bring us our food from wherever. And Sajjan - he [Nanak] wanted to make him a sant from a thug and Sajjan found peace and he left that work. Otherwise he would kill people and throw them in the wells. And take their goods home with him. He had built a well into which he would throw them.

Story 5
Kauda Demon would do this too. Maharaja, wherever he went, all the bad people he would work to reform them. Kauda Demon did this too. He would put people in a cauldron and boil them and kill them. Then he caught Mardana and Mardana called for Maharaja. Maharaja came and the cauldron immediately became cold. Kauda Demon became a saint as well. Wherever Maharaja went, he always reformed people and not with any anger- very gently.

205 Sacha Sauna translates as "True Deal". This would be the "best business deal".
Story 6
He went to Mecca too and there he went in the clothes of a Muslim. And he went to sleep with his feet towards the face of Mecca. They moved his feet, saying that Mecca is here. And he said place my feet where Mecca is not. They saw that wherever they put Maharaja's feet, that is where Mecca would move. So they fell at Maharaja's feet. And he said, God is everywhere, there is no such place where God is not present. He is here and here and here, all four directions.

Story 7
Nanaki – his father said he [Nanak] does not listen to me. So she said, then send him to me. There they sent Guru Nanak and his wife and gave him a shop there, in Sultanpur Lodi. There were rocks there and whenever Nanak weighed anything, tera\textsuperscript{206}, tera “I am yours, I am yours” he began to say. And people complained about him – that he is allowing everything. Then – I've forgotten the name of the shopkeeper – [Rai bhullar? No, it was something else, I do not remember. Before, when I was younger I used to remember all the names. His wife – her name was Sulakhni. And they had two sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das.] When they came and looked at the business accounts they saw that everything was in order.

Story 8
Then one day Maharaja went to where he used to read the prayer, that is also there in Sultanpur. And they said, why don’t you read prayer with us? And he said, I would only read if you also read the prayer. You don’t read it either. You were thinking that your horse is going to give birth and there’s a hole there and the calf probably fell into it. You weren’t reading the prayer, your thoughts were elsewhere. The other man said, well, I do read it, even if he does not. He said you’re buying horses in Kabal. Your spirit, it has reached Kabal and is buying horses there. You were not reading the prayer either. He said, I will read the prayer now, so he read the prayer in front of everyone. Everyone began to exclaim, “Maharaja has become a Muslim – he has gone to read the prayer.” But, no, Maharaja had just gone to put them on the right path.

Story 9
With Sulakhni, she did not have full faith that my husband – she would sometimes go to her parents’ house and tell her parents that he does not stay at home. She may have understood him later, but not at first. The children too – once a coal fell into the mud and Guru Nanak Dev told his son, “Son, pick up that coal.” And the son said, “Maharaja, what are we going to do with this one coal? We have so much money. We’ll buy a new coal.” So he asked his other son, and he also said, “Maharaja, why should I go into the mud? Leave the coal, we don’t need it.” Then there was Lehna, Maharaja’s servant\textsuperscript{207} and he said, “Lehna, bring me the coal.” And he said, “As you say, Maharaja.” So he jumped into there, took the coal, washed it and gave it to Maharaja. Lehana listened to all Maharaja’s orders. Lehana, make a thura. Maharaja made him destroy it so many times. He would make it and Maharaja would make him topple it – it’s crooked, not straight ... He wanted to see if he would give up – because he was going to give him the guddi. And everyone was wondering why does Maharaja do this? And Lehana said, I am going to do the work, whether he make me make it or topple it, I am going to follow his order. Then Maharaja embraced him and said Lehana, you are going to get something from us and we are going to give you something. Then that is how Lehana came to be Guru Angad.

Story 10
The children did a lot of penance later as well. They thought, we were that house’s children and we got nothing. Their seat went as ... sanyasi\textsuperscript{208} and udasi\textsuperscript{209}. One’s was sanyasi and the other’s was udasi, Lakhmi Das and Sri Chand’s. They did a lot of penance later, but during his [Nanak’s] life they did not understand.

\textsuperscript{206} Tera = The number thirteen and the word your.
\textsuperscript{207} The actual word used here is sevak – and has much more religious significance to it. It is derived from the word seva (service) which concerns pious work. Whilst a servant has connotations of being paid in material goods, a person who does seva (pious work), does that service for its own sake, not for any intention of being rewarded in monetary goods.
\textsuperscript{208} Renunciation of all worldly possessions and relations
\textsuperscript{209} Travels
Story 11
Maharaja’s wedding happened in Batala. When Maharaja went to get married, his Baraati – some were of such a type and some were of such a type. There was no baraati or janaiti, with a lot of show that they took. [They took] people who prayed and sang hymns – some were lame and some were blind. So some of the people felt embarrassed about this, so there was an old wall and they said, we have a custom, that the groom should sit under this wall. And one women said, “You get up from here, this wall is not good, the wall is about to fall and when you sit here, the girls will give it a push and you will come under it.” He said, this wall is one which will survive for four eras. It will not fall, so even to this day, people go and do this wall’s darshan. People had begun to take dirt from it, so now they have glass on both sides of it. The dirt, people considered it sacred and used to take handfuls, this is in Batala where Maharaja got married.

Story 12
Bebe Nanaki was making rotis one time and in her heart she thought, I have such a beautiful phulka [roti] here that rose so well, may my brother come and eat it. So he said, Bala, Bebe Nanaki was remembering us. Close our eyes, and they closed their eyes and they were standing in front of Bebe Nanaki, ready to eat the phulka. Whenever Bebe Nanaki remembered him, he would come right then. There was great love between the brother and the sister.

Story 13
Only Nanaki had understood him, that my brother is God. [Only Nanaki or someone else?] The midwife and there was one ...[Rai Bhullar, I interject] Rai Bhullar – he had also said that your son was God, but Mata Kalu did not realize. Tripta also knew a little. The village’s name is Hassan Bhaddar and we call it Panja Sahib. And there, Mardana was very thirsty. There was no water nearby and Maharaja said, Mardana there’s Vali Qandari [he wanted to break his ego too] on top and he has a lot of water in a spring, you go there. He went, poor thing, it took half an hour to reach and he was very thirsty. Then he sent him back. And the third time he said, if you say my guru is so great and that he is God, then can’t he give you water? The third time Mardana came and started crying. He said, Maharaja he is telling me get him to give you water, I am not going to give you water. Then that spring’s water all dried up. That water came down and Vali Qandari became angry and threw a big boulder down, intending to kill him. And Maharaja, when he saw the boulder, he raised his hand and it became soft and Maharaja’s hand is still imprinted there. And Muslims go there too. And Vali Qandari’s anger left then too.

Story 14
His wedding happened at Nanaki’s saying. She took them with her – Nanak and Sulakhni. Sulakhni lived with her sister-in-law. Sulakhni and both the children were with Nanaki. She loved him a lot but she did not understand that he was God. Women do wish to be with their husbands.

Story 15
Kartarpur, Maharaja lived first – he used to do farming there, himself. When all his travels were finished. Other Singhs did farming there too and Maharaja went to Hardwar and there Brahmins were giving water to the sun. He wanted to explain to them too, so Maharaja began to give water towards Kartarpur and they said, “Where are you giving the water, we’re giving it to the sun.” He said my fields are dry in Kartarpur and I’m giving it there. They said your fields are so far away, how will the water reach there? They said, 14 leagues or higher is your sun – if your water can go so high up there, then it will easily go down as well. To make them understand, he never made any understand with bad words – whenever he taught he always used a good way. Then they also understood that that was right.
Story 16
Maharaja lit a fire and a raja’s son had brought a deer. Maharaja said put it in and they said, today it’s a sacred day and you have put the meat in there to cook. Maharaja said, where — meaning, he just wanted to explain to them — and said, dig a hole in this area and when he did so, animals’ bones were buried there. He said, you clean yourself on top but your souls are bad. And when they looked in the pot they saw that it was rice pudding being cooked in there. And he recited a shabad:
Mas namiya, masa chumiya …

Story 17
People used to say that woman is a man’s shoe, she is lower than him. Maharaja said:
Why speak ill of those from whom are born kings?
He always considered them equal.

Story 18
Guru Nanak went to another place with Bala and Mardana. And here everything was all the same price. Salt was 10 rupees, ghee [clarified butter] was 10 rupees and sugar was 10 rupees. And Mardana said, we should just settle here, it’s so cheap and people do such service. Nanak said Mardana, we do not wish to stay here, but he did not stop. So he said fine, your choice, when you say that is when we will go. In the town, they said bring a man who has 13 gullai, gulla and bring him here. And Mardana ate a lot and his throat became 13 gullai. And they were going to hang him. And Maharaja said, well Mardana how are things now? I had told you not to stay here. I don’t remember the story he told him, but they did not hang Mardana, let him go. And he told them to build a dharamsala there.

Story 19
Another place they went to — they did a lot of service and Maharaja said may you decline. And the ones who did not he told them to prosper. Sangat asked, Maharaja what did you do? The ones who did service you said may you decline and the ones who did not you said to prosper. He said the people who are good ones who think well and do good things they will go elsewhere, but the ones who do bad they will teach bad and so I told them to stay here.

Story 20
There were two boys – one would go to Maharaja for worship and the other went to a prostitute. The one who went to a prostitute, he was walking and hit a utensil and a piece of gold came out from there. So he picked it up and the other one was going and a thorn went in his foot and he could barely walk. And he said, What did you get? You always go for worship and you got a thorn and your foot has swollen and you cannot walk. And he said the justice for this I will get from Maharaja. He said, Look Maharaja, he says this to me. He said, sit both of you. He said, you were going to be hanged today, but your sooli has become a sool. And he had a pot filled with gold pieces, but they all turned to coal, this one piece was left today. So good deeds will bring good fruit, whether one believes or not you will certainly get it.

Story 21
There was Lalo Darkhan and Malik Bhago. He was very rich and he held a dinner for everyone. Maharaja did not go. He said, was anyone left? And they said, yes, at Lalo Dharkan’s house a sant has come and he has not come and he said, whatever it takes bring him here. Maharaja said I am not going, this roti is good for me. When they did not stop, Maharaja said, Fine, I will come but I am going to eat roti park kai. Lalo Darkhan had a bajra roti and Bhago’s was a puri, Maharaja held both and squeezed them, from one came blood and from the other, milk. He said, you are drinking the blood of the poor – even if you do feed some or give some charity there’s no point. He’s a poor man, does the work of 9-10 men and out of that he gave dinner. So Malik Bhago reformed and he gave everything to charity. Rori Sahib Gurdwara is there.

212 The Punjabi word used here is sool.
213 The term used for hanging is sooli charna. Therefore the sooli became a sool [the hanging became a mere thorn].
Story 22
The biggest praise is Nanaki’s. He stayed with Nanaki, Nanaki fed him, Nanaki bathed him – Nanaki did not consider him a brother, but parmatma [higher soul]. Nanaki recognized that he’s not my brother, he’s parmatma. He stayed with Nanaki for a long time. He would always leave from there whenever he went on sanyasis – he went on 3 sanyasis, udasis Is it called a sanyasi or an udasi? {sanyasi}

Story 23
He never used to say anything to his wife. Nanaki’s husband (I don’t remember his name). He just considered Nanak his relative but Nanaki considered him to be God. He kept him (his brother-in-law) in his home and his kids as well and got him a job. But Maharaja ate out of his own earnings. The job he did at the bania, he got earnings from there. From that Bebe would make the meals etc.
Appendix III: Stories Told By Storyteller C

This is a transcription of the stories told by Storyteller C. She was 56 years old, and resided in the village Mahala in the District of Jalandhar. She had completed schooling up to the third grade.

**Story 1**
Guru Nanak was born and as soon as he was born he sat crosslegged. And the daee – she had come and she asks for money – and she said I’m not going to take anything because to me he looks like a sadhu or sant. And everyone said, the daee says this. She said, so many children have been born from my hand but I’ve never seen one like him. He is someone separate. A form of God. The Mother was not going to say anything, but Mata Kalu said, I don’t know what type of child has been come, maybe he’s not good for us. And everyone in the village found out that there was a boy born at Mata Kalu’s house and they say that he sat crosslegged. A lot of people comes to see him and sometimes they don’t consider him good. And the sister, Nanaki, she says to her father, “Why do you say this? He’s my brother and it’s good, everyone comes to see her.” And he said, “Is this some show? People will say that this type of a boy was born in my house.” And she said “What will people say? There was one born is why people come to see him. Perhaps he is someone of God, or a holy man or saint, if he is doing things like this.”

**Story 2**
Then he was a few days older and they were going to purify the kitchen and with Brahmins, when a child is 12 or 13 days older, they put a thread around his neck (called a junoo). And everyone collects other men and the Brahmin comes to put it on. And when the Brahmin was going to put it in the throat, he spoke up and said, “I’m not going to put this on. What is it for? I should know what it is for.” He said, “this is a junoo and it stays pure. You should wash your hands before touching it ... you will be pure and be a Brahmin.” He said I don’t believe in such things. And he said, “No it is our tradition. Whoever wears it remains good.” They said with this a man speaks the truth etc. And he said, “Put such a junoo which will never be dirty, which will never have to be washed – you are saying keep this around your throat, do not get it dirty, do not touch it with soiled hands. I won’t be able to do all this. Put such a junoo on which will never have to be washed or taken care of.” And the Brahmin asked what kind of junoo is that? He said, “You are speaking of such junoos, I need that type which I will not have to take care of and which will remain with me.” He said, “a better junoo than this there can never be. It is of raw thread – it’s been made with pure hands. It is so clean.” And he said, “No matter how clean it is now, it will eventually become dirty. I will have to wash it, how much can I take care of it? Put such a one on that will remain in my mind.” He said, “what type of junoo is that?” And he said, “Put such a thought in my mind that I should always love the whole world and never lie – just remain in my heart and that I never do a bad deed. Never should a thought come into my mind that I think bad.” And he said, “Put such a thought in my mind that I should always love the whole world and never lie – just remain in my heart and that I never do a bad deed. Never should a thought come into my mind that I think bad.” And the Brahmin became surprised and he left in anger. And Mata Kalu became angry that already just after being born he has insulted me so much. I was finally able to bring a Brahmin and now he won’t come and our kitchen will not become pure. Before, until this happened, the women could not enter the kitchen. They said it was still impure. Only after bathing and putting the thread around his neck, and feeding everyone could she start to work in the kitchen. Until then, they would not take from her hands, saying she was still impure. So Mata Kalu became angry that he is so small, but he does all this. And Nanaki says to her father, “Baba, do not say anything to him. He seems to me some holy man or saint. He is not a boy. It is us who say he is a child but he is some great man who has come to our home. He is young of age, but he knows everything.” And he becomes angry with her as well, saying that you too are defending her. Then he begins to believe her a little.

**Story 3**
When he becomes a little older they put him in school. And when he went to school the master would tell him this language is this and this is this. And whenever he disagreed he would always speak up right then that this is wrong. So he brought his father and complained to him that, “Whatever I say, he says to me no it’s not like that, it’s like this. I cannot teach him, he is teaching me. The first thing that I tell him, he does not listen to that, he starts giving the reply immediately.” And he said to his father, the Master is telling me this. He is telling me incorrectly, the right way is this way.” Then the Master also said, “I don’t know if he is a child or something else. I cannot teach him.” So he refused. And he took him home and beat him,
saying, “Wherever you go you do something wrong.” And he said, “I do not do anything wrong, I am doing right. What is right I say that and that people don’t like. That is why people become against me.” And he asked, “Why do you say that anyways?” And he said, “I’m not going to do any bad deed. I have come here to do good deeds. What is right that is what I will say.” And he beats him again. He says, “You can’t do anything at home either, now is the time for you to be in school and you don’t go to school.” He said “There is no point in my going to school, whatever the master is going to teach me, I know more than that.” Then his sister – whenever anyone says anything to Nanak, his sister – there is great love and affection between them. And she feels great pain when – one because he is still very small and also because everyone says to him he does this and that. People always make complaints about him. And his sister also says that people, “Our boy – he is not a boy, but a holy man or a saint” and that is why people get angry [jealous]. That is why they keep saying this so that he will get beaten or something. The father becomes angry with Nanaki too, saying you always defend him and that is why he gets spoiled. When the mother also says something, he says you mother and daughter spoil him more. And the poor mother again cries again saying, God gave me a boy but at every point there are always complaints.

Story 4

Then they say, he is not going to go to school, let him do some other work. So they say, let him take the cows for grazing. And before, when children were small, whatever animals they kept they would go and take them to graze. Sometimes they would not have a lot of space and whatever extra place there was outside, that is where they would go to graze them. And you had to pay attention and take care that the crops which were sown, that they not be wrecked. And whenever it came into his mind, any bhakti, he would sit there and start praying. And his mind would go elsewhere. And where he had taken the cows to graze, the land there was of a big man – who thought much of himself and oppressed a lot of people, the ones who worked for him. And they said his earnings were gotten from making people miserable. And Nanak knew that he did such things, and maybe he might do something charitable. But he never did anything charitable, all he did was take advantage of people. And he said, nothing else will work, I will do this, I will sit and the cows – if God wants to show him mercy then the cows will eat his crops and in this way he will do a little charitable act. If he makes a lot of noise then it will not be considered a charitable act and will be counted as a sin. Otherwise his sin will be alleviated. So he sat and became immersed in his prayers and the cows went into the crops. Whatever they wanted to eat they ate – they ate little and wrecked more. He was still just sitting there and when the man came and saw, he beat and beat the cows and chased them out of there. And he made a huge ruckus saying, “Nanak had brought cows and oxen and they wrecked all the crops.” And meanwhile, Nanak came back home with his cows and oxen. And when he arrived, his father, Mata, beat him a lot. And Nanaki had gone outside to play and someone told her that Guru Nanak let cows and oxen go into someone’s fields and ruined all their crops and that man has come to complain. And she came running home and told her father that Nanak probably has not done anything, I know, he can never do something like this, he can never cause anyone harm. There must be something …he must not have caused him harm, he probably just did him good. And he fights with her as well, saying “Did good, all of the villagers also say what good did he do? He ruined all his fields and you are saying that he probably did something good.” Nanak says, “I did not do anything.” He said, you did not do it, but it was you who took the cows and oxen there and you should have taken care of them, you purposely let them get in there.” And he said, “Fine, you go and see. If it is okay there then say it to me.” But they do not listen and beat him a lot. Nanaki also says just go one time and see. If it is wrecked then my brother will pay for all the damages. When they go and see everything there is fine. Then Nanaki asks, If it even had happened then how did it get fine? Nanak said, “I had done some good for him.” His father said, “What good did you do?” He said, “If he had wanted this to be good, then he should have just left it but now the sins that were on his head, they have doubled.” But they still do not believe this and say he does this. Then Nanaki said, if he is crazy and does not know anything, then those crops which had been eaten, how did they become green again? You should really recognize his worth now.” She says a lot to her father. However, he says, No I don’t believe this. Folks keep giving me complaints and I am tired of it. I am not keeping him at home, I’m kicking him out.” So the mother and daughter do a lot of pleading with him. Then he says, fine, you cannot do this, - there was a city nearby – and he said, you can keep him here and get him to get some groceries and do some errands here.
Story 5
One day he said, okay, you don’t do anything else at home, go to the city and buy some things there, and he gave him 20 rupees. And he took it to the city and on the way he met some ascetics and there was nothing to eat there and they were very hungry. And they had a fire lit and were looking for something to eat. And Nanak asked them, “Baba what are you doing sitting here in the cold?” And they said we sat here because night had fallen and we have nothing to eat.” He asked, “You are hungry?” And they said, “Yes, we’re hungry.” And he said, “I have 20 rupees with me and I’ll give you ... He went to the city and whatever things he could get he brought for them and gave to them to eat.” And they ate it and said, “You are some form of God that has come for us, you that have come and fed us hungry people this food. May you always remain happy.” So they pray to him. And they say, “You ask from us what you want.” And he said I do not want anything I just ask that good happen to the whole world and that everyone remain happy. Then they ask, how can we help you? And he said help for me will be just if you say that only good happen to the world and that no one do anything bad. They say okay. And he returns home and they have been waiting to see what he will have brought. And he brings nothing. And his mother asks him, “You have been gone since the morning, Nanak, what did you bring?” And he said, ma, what was I going to bring? When I went there were all these holy men sitting there and they were all very hungry. They had a fire lit but they did not have anything to eat or drink. I thought which deal could have been more true than this? With 20 rupees, the best was this that those who were hungry were able to eat their fill. This was the best. And he was just telling this when Mata Kalu came up and started beating him again. And he had just about given up, that he is not doing anything. And he says to Nanaki, that you always help him, and to his mother as well. Nanaki says, You do not recognize him. I have always been watching him and his ways are different from all others. He is only young in age, as a child, but he is some wise person. But they do not believe her. And her mother even says one day, “it would have perhaps been better if he had not been born. Because when I see him beaten like this at every time, I cannot stand to see it.” And Nanaki says don’t keep worrying like this. Everything will get better on its own. One day he will know who he is and everything ... his father will start understanding him. And she said, But he does not understand and I cannot stand to see his pain every time.

Story 6
Then Nanaki gets married and she does not want to leave him either and she says I will take him with me. When he got a little bigger and each time whenever Nanaki used to see him – whatever child if some other child was bothering him then he would help him more. He never wanted to see anyone sad. If some kids were playing and someone took something away from him then he would take it from him and give it to him. He would always help them out. Sometimes children fight over toys and one child takes the toy and the other cries – he would take the toy from him and give it to the other. And Nanaki would see and saw that every time – he never said that I should have the thing. Even the things that he had himself he would give to others. Nanaki – it was Rakhri214 day – and Nanaki brought a box of sweets and gave him the box. He did not think that I should open it or eat a little of it. He took it and ran outside with it. His friends, the children that he played with, did distribute it to them. All the children that happened to be gathered together there – he distributed it all and did not keep any for himself. And Nanaki saw this and she was also happy and she said, “He seems some man to me, it is just us who say that he is a child. If he was some sort of child then any child first sees that I should take a bite of some thing, even a small thing and he did not take even one bite. When he first got it he ran off with it right then and some times some children say let me hide a little and I’ll eat it later. When we tell them to share it with others even then children say to keep for themselves and I brought this for him and gave it to him and I did not say anything to him and look, he distributed it all. And she is happy, her mother also agrees with this but her father does not agree with this talk. But she says with love, that I have always seen ever since he was small that his habits are also different, he is some form of God. You say he is a child but I don’t think so.

Story 7
When he was a little bigger and his father tried to get him to do all sorts of work but it did not work anywhere. So Nanaki came and he said, “Whatever work we tell him to do, he always does the opposite and people complain to us.” And her mother said, “Then his father always beats him everyday and I stand to see that”. Nanaki says to her father, “I, Bapu, am going to take him with me.” And he said, take him.

214 A traditional Punjabi festival which celebrates the love between a brother and a sister.
She said, "I'll get him started in some work there." He said, "We've tried to get him started in some work here but he does not do it." She said, "Fine, then I'll take him there." She took him there and after keeping him there for a few days, Nanaki's husband used to keep a shop there. ... And she said well we'll put him to work there. A little he will get help and he will also learn some work. So she took him and told her husband that because of such and such, there he does not do any work and the father and son end up quarreling and my mother remains very upset because of this. "This way you will get helped a little and he will learn the work." So he said, that's very good. I'll get him to sit at the shop for a little time and in this way I will get some rest as well. So he sat him at the shop and whoever used to come to buy anything, some would ask for a piya\(^1\) of something, some would ask for a seer and he would always use the same stone and always weigh with just that one. They said, people, that there is a man at his shop and whatever transaction there is, he keeps weighing tera, tera\(^2\). Then there were the other, past accounts — before it was like this at the shops, would bring the goods on credit and keep having them written down, that it's become this much or this much and then later they would settle the account, a month or two months later, and say you have this much money owing, give that much — and whatever women would come to give him money, that we are giving you this money now and this much will be left. If someone had 100 owing, if they gave only 50, even then he would tear the page of 100 saying your debt is settled, it is all full. If someone gave 20 or 25, then he would rip theirs as well. So people began to say, this is some madman who has come. He is doing this for everyone. He thought of their good, thinking if they cannot give any because they are poor, then however much they gave that is good enough. But they began to think that some crazy man had come. So they went and told at Nanaki's house that the man who is sitting at your shop he is plundering the whole store. Whoever comes he always weighs tera, tera for them and all the supplies have finished, he is going to cause your ruin. Your shop is going to be gone, he is causing you a lot of damages. Listening to other people's talk, to him [Nanak] he [Nanaki's husband] does not say anything. But he says it to Nanaki. He says, your brother has ruined me. And she said, My brother cannot do this. He always thinks of the good of others, he is not going to think of bad for me. He doesn't think bad for anyone, why would he think of it for me? For he is my brother. And he said, I can't say anything to him either. And she said I'll ask him. And when he comes, Nanaki tries to ask him — she is very worried and she thinks, now my husband has said and if I don't ask him, then I have a problem and if I do ask, then he is her brother and he will say, I being your brother would not try to wreck your own house. And indirectly, she is not saying it straightforward either, at night when he closes the shop and comes home — he is all knowing, he knows whatever thought is in someone's heart. And Nanaki gives him dinner and she wishes to talk to him but she is not able to and Nanak understands that she has a worry. And he asks "Nanaki, what is the matter? You are trying to ask me something but you are not asking." She says, No, it's nothing. And he says, I know what you are worried about. She says, "No I don't have a worry about anything." Then she also said, You Nanak, you are a form of God. You know everything, so why do you want to hear it from my mouth? He said, you just tell it to me. She said I cannot tell you. And he asked why can't you? She keeps brushing it aside and saying there's nothing. And he says there is something. And she said if you know that there is something then you also know what that something is. He said I want to hear it from your mouth. And she said I cannot say it. Then he said, Just tell me, I have no anger or complaint about it. You are not saying it from yourself — whatever has happened you just tell me. He had already known from before what the matter was. And she said, I heard that you have caused the store a great deal of losses.' He said, no you heard incorrect. I have just settled the accounts of the people who were there. Whoever I was supposed to take from I took and whoever I was supposed to give to, I gave. I have settled the accounts fairly, I have neither lessened nor increased. She said no, they say this. He said then I will leave. She said, then if you leave you are going to leave in anger. Then he is going to say to me that you said this to him and sent him away from here. I cannot send you away either and if you leave then everyone is going to say that that is why he is leaving, because he has plundered the store. I am not going to let you leave like this either. He said, Fine tell him to look at all his accounts and if the accounts are not in order then I will leave and not go back to the store, but if it is okay then if you wish I will remain at the store. She said fine and she told him [her husband], don't just listen to other people, you go and see for

\(^{215}\) Amount of measurement – 250 grams

\(^{216}\) In Punjabi, tera means the number thirteen as well as the term yours. Here, the implication is that Nanak would be counting whilst measuring (ie, ... ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen ... dus, gyara, bara, tera ...) and he would lose himself once he reached the number thirteen, because he would begin to say, tera, tera, mein tera, mein tera (I am yours, I am yours).
yourself.” And he said, “What am I going to see for everyone says this.” And when he went and saw the
accounts he saw that – I don’t remember now – but something like 200 or 250 rupees over in that time. In
those days there was only a little money too, 200 250 was over. So whatever goods there were, it was that
much over. Then he went and thought and he told Nanaki that people put me in doubt for no reason. There
is actually 200 rupees over. And Nanak said Good, now your accounts are settled and I am not going to
stay with you here. I am going to go. And when he leaves, Nanaki goes to take him home and her father
said, “Look you said that he did things here and now look he does that there too.” Nanak said No, he did
not do anything he is just not wanting to remain there.” And he said, you’ve taken him from here for so
long, neither have you taught him any work, neither have you arranged his marriage. She said fine, I’ll
leave him here for now and I’ll look for a girl for him.

Story 8
So she found a girl for him – Sulakhni. And after seeing the girl she sent a message to them and to his
nanakai217 – Nanak’s. They were Brahmin too and when they finalized the marriage they say that so many
days before you have to have the saha?
And the wedding they did in Batala – first there was just a jung ghar218 but now there’s a gurdwara there.
And in Batala, where they had the junj ghar there was a kachi219 kand [fragile wall]. And when they took
Nanak to get married, he said I am not going to go very dressed up, the way I am dressed now that is how I
am going to go. I’m not going to go the way other people go, getting all ready and decked out. When he
goes there, then the girls who get together and look at the groom’s party, they laugh a lot, saying that the
groom looks as if they grabbed a beggar from somewhere, the ones who go around begging, the fakir types.
And they go and say to Sulakhni too that the groom – his clothes and attire are like a faqir’s too, his clothes
are like that too and he looks like a faqir to us too. And then they decide amongst themselves – before
when girls got together they would do a lot of teasing, sometimes they would say sing us a song, or do this
or that, to the groom. Or they would see, when they sat the groom down they would seat him in such a spot
that he would fall. They would tease him and want to embarrass him. In those times, they also knew (the
ones who had come to get married) that they were going to do these antics. And they said when you are
going to see the girl off, and you have to seat the groom down, then this wall that there is, let’s seat him by
that wall. We’ll put the cot down by that wall and from behind we will push the wall. The wall is quite
small and he won’t get hurt that much, we’ll just push it down onto him. And an old woman heard this, one
of the ones who was there to do work. Hearing this she went to tell him that if the girls put your cot down
in front of the wall don’t sit there because they are going to throw the wall down on you. For them, they
thought, that if we tell them this then they’ll give us money. But Nanak was wise himself and he knew that
she had come to get money and he said Maee220, do not worry. The wall is not going to fall. And she said
how is the wall not going to fall? It is fragile, it will fall with the slightest push. He said, after today the
wall will not fall, it will become that strong. And the laagan221, chamari222 she says, No I keep telling you
that they have made a plan and the wall is going to fall. And he said, no I am going to sit right there where
they seat me, but after today the wall will not fall. And when they [the girls] go there, they laugh a lot and
all the girls get together behind the wall. And he asks them, why are you [girls] standing behind, if you
want to say something, come in front and say it. And they say we don’t want to come in front, we want to
stand behind here. And he said if you ever want to attack someone then don’t do it from behind, do it from
the front. Or you can change my side. And the girls began to laugh saying, what is the faqir doing? Then
they say are grooms supposed to be like that? You have the appearance of a faqir. And he said grooms are
not supposed to be like that, well sisters-in-law (saaliya) are not supposed to hide behind either. They
come in front and do their talking. They wanted to throw the wall on him, that was why they did not come
in front and he kept saying this to them again and again. Then he said, the task for which you are standing,
that is not going to happen. And they asked for what task are we standing? And he said, that much force is

217 Mother’s relatives
218 Junj ghar is where the groom and his wedding party would stay when they arrived at the bride’s village
for the wedding. Every village had one and, in the past, the groom’s party would stay in the village for 3-4
days and the junj ghar is where they would stay.
219 Something that is not baked or ripe – is not firm.
220 Endearing term for an older woman
221 A worker who would receive money during ceremonies on special occasions.
222 Scheduled caste workers who would typically work with dead animals and leather.
not going to come into you as you have come into. And they said, what force have we come to show here? He said you have come to show it, but your force is not going to show. Either you can come out front now, or you can try and show your full force. They said we’re not going to come in front and he said then put your full force into it. They said what force are we going to be doing here? He said, whatever thing you are going to be using your force on, put it on that. And they don’t believe him, they think he is just talking, what force are we going to have to use? So they don’t come in front. And at first Nanak had not wanted to sit there either, he had said come in front, but then he said, okay, whatever makes you happy. And he sits down. When he sits they become very happy that he has sat down on the cot, because first he was just talking. When he sits then they push it from behind and the wall becomes so firm that nothing happens to it, it really does not fall. So after they push with all their strength etc. and it does not fall then he asks, Your strength has been used up, now come in front. And they said, we did not use any force. And he said, you did but it did not work for you. And they ask, how did you know that? He said this wall that you had wished to topple today, it will never fall. You had wanted to topple it onto me, but it will not fall on anyone else either. And even today it is there and there is a gurdwara built there at Baba Batala. And the wall is still in the same state and it is such a powerful wall that it has not fallen to this day.

Story 9
After marriage, he began living with Nanaki, taking Sulakhni along. And after staying for a little time, he said whatever bad things happen in the world, taking Bala and Mardana with me, wherever there is someone suffering, I want to make them happy. And he went off. And the day that he was going to leave, Nanaki tried very hard to stop him. Asking, where are you going? And he said, I’m not going to stay at home now, I have come to improve the world and I have to do something for the world as well. And Nanaki said, I cannot live without you. And Sulakhni, daughter-in-law, is at home, you have brought and left her here. He said, you told me to get married then. I had not wanted to, but I could not refuse you. You said you get married and then do whatever you wish. Now the job for which I have come, let me do that job as well. You take care of her, Sulakhni. And she requests her a lot, saying you have forgotten me, even your sister. And he said, I do not forget you, whenever you remember me I will definitely come. But I am not going to stay here, I have no one place, I am going to travel the world and what I have come to do for the world, I am going to fulfill that.

Story 10
And one time they were gone somewhere very far away and at night, he slept for a little. And Bala and Mardana were with him and wherever they went, whenever the night fell, they would fall asleep there. And they would travel a little day by day. And they were about to reach Multan and there was a Muslim there who was a raja there, his name was Babal Hut. And he wanted to go to Multan and he found out that Babal Hud did a lot of sins there, they robbed a lot of people and did crimes against the poor. And when he reached Multan, there the people in Multan found out - the ones who were dressed as holy men, fake ones. They said that there is a holy man by the name of Nanak, very high and he is going to come here in Multan. If he is true then he is going to open our secret that we are actually fake and take advantage of people. So all the holy men got together and went to Babul Hut and they said, some holy man is coming here, do not let him come. And he used to read the nawaz a lot – Muslims read the nawaz, do their prayers – if he is really a truly enlightened being then I cannot stop him from coming here. I am the raja here and if someone comes then I do have to give them shelter. And they said if he stays here then we will be in trouble. And he said fine, we’ll meet with him outside of the village and ask him a question and if he answers well we’ll understand that he is a holy man, but if his answer shows that he is just trying to get rid of us then he cannot stay. And they had not reached the village and they were sitting underneath a tree. Babul Hut sent one of his servants with a glass full of milk with something mixed in it and said if they drink it then they will die and if they don’t drink it, they can not return it either. Because if you give a holy man some thing he cannot return it and say he does not want it. So he told the guy that was taking it, if he does not drink it then bring it back and if he does then come back and tell me. So he went and put the milk in front of him and Mardana said, this is good that milk has come because we’ve been hungry for so many days. Nanak knew and he said this milk has not come for us to drink it, it has come to get us out of this area, and we’re not going to drink it. And Mardana said, well if we’re not going to drink it then what are we going to do? And the servant left the glass of milk and then he was going to come back for the glass. And Nanak did a prayer and took something out of his pocket and with that he hung a flower on the glass. ... and he threw a chameli flower on the milk glass. And that glass had been completely full of milk, but
not a drop fell out. Some got absorbed in the flower and the flower went in. And the man came back to get the empty glass, thinking that they must have drunk it by now. And he said, in the way that this flower made room in the milk – the glass had already been full of milk and the flower went in and the milk did not spill. First there was not room for even another drop of milk and now a big chameli flower went in and the milk is still the same amount. The way that this flower made room for itself, in that way we will make room. So return this glass to the raja and tell him that in the way that this flower made room, we will also make room. So he returned and told them that I gave the milk but they put this flower in it and they said that how this flower made room, in the same way we will make room. The raja understood that he is really an enlightened being, holy man who knows that we were trying to get rid of him, he gave us an answer that I am going to make myself a place. And they all got together to go see him. And they had realized that he was an enlightened person, but they had not rid themselves of their pride. They came and started to say you are very enlightened etc, but they did not bow to him or anything. They said you can stay as many days as you wish but this night eat dinner at my house. And Nanak said, fine, we have to eat and if you want to feed us that is fine. And he said whatever you like to eat tell me. And Nanak said whatever you wish. And he said no whatever you want because I am very happy with you – underneath he was not happy but he was just showing. He said I am very happy with you, whatever you wish I will give. And he said, you said you would feed dinner and we will eat whatever you happily give us. And he asked what dal sabji will you eat? And he said whichever you like. And he still would not stop, kept asking again and again what do you like, tell me? And he said I don’t like anything, whatever anyone feeds me is what I like, what anyone feeds me happily. He said fine, when you prepare the food, prepare everything else fine, but be sure and include one piya of garibi [poverty]. And Babul Hut thought that perhaps this was the name of some vegetable. And he asked what vegetable is this which is called garibi? And Nanak said, I don’t know but be sure to give me a piya of garibi with it, garibi meaning love and compassion. If feed dinner and think to yourself that I am great etc, not like this, but if you feed it out of love then. He said okay. Nanak said be sure to include one piya garibi. And he asks Nanak what is this thing, where will one get it? From what store, what city? And Nanak asked how far is your reach? And he said my reach is up to Khuda [God]...He said okay if your reach is up to God then you can get this. ...He said, whenever I remember God, he asks me to ask for anything because I do so much praying etc that God asks me to ask for whatever I wish. But I’ve never asked for anything because I already have so much, being the raja. And Guru Nanak said, today when you sit and pray, ask for one piya of garibi to give us. Because your reach is up to God, you’ll be able to get it. But he did not know what it was – that he meant love. And he came back and wondered what did this faqir ask for, one piya garibi? If he wanted to ask for something he should have asked for something of some use, he did not know what they called garibi. And he thought I have never heard of such a thing. And he said, I have told you the way. So he decided that today I will do this work first. So he came, bathed and sat to pray his namaz and no voice came asking him to ask for whatever he wished. And he said himself, Oh God I do all this for you and you always ask me to request whatever I wish and today I heard no voice. I’ve never asked for anything before and neither will I again but today I need one piya of garibi. May I get that and he got the voice and it asked, Has Guru Nanak come to your house? And he thought, how did he know that Guru Nanak had come? And he again asked, I am asking for one piya garibi, I am not asking for anything else. And he asked again, Has by chance Guru Nanak come to your house since you’ve suddenly felt the need for one piya of garibi? He told God no, no Guru Nanak has come here, I just need one piya garibi. And God said, one seer of garibi was collected in the world world and Guru Nanak took 3 parts when he came to the world. We had asked him to ask for whatever he wished and he asked for nothing else but the 3 parts garibi. – No he had asked for a seer, 3 parts he had taken and one part was saved. And we had saved that because we thought there would be someone like you and then we would give it to you. And he asked, How did you know Guru Nanak had come here? They said, this one part of garibi that there is, it is also for Nanak. 3 parts he had already taken and we had saved one part, but that Nanak said also that he was going to take it. This means Guru Nanak has come to you. ... He said, No not Nanak, it is I who wants it. Then he said, how do you know? And he told him, three parts garibi Guru Nanak took and one was left for people like you. Those who do this to the world. On the one hand you have reached God and on the other, your heart is dirty. And he asked, do you know what garibi is? Actually, no, he said, at least tell me this what thing is garibi? If Guru Nanak took three parts already, leaving one part and now wants even that part coming to my house. And he told him, God, humbleness, love. And he came to know that he is really a holy man and he went and fell at Guru Nanak’s feet. And he
said my pride, which no one in the world could break. you broke and after today I shall not do any such thing and will not keep any dirt in my heart.

Story 11
Then after leaving from there he went elsewhere. And there they had said to him, you stay here. And he said the task for which I had come, that has been accomplished and now I must go elsewhere, we are not going to stay any one place. And they went on and night fell and they sat there. And he told Mardana, there is a village there and if you can get anything there then see. He went to one or two houses and got some roti and they ate those and went to sleep. And he sleeps and he feels as if Nanaki ... and Nanaki is making roti and she is thinking my brother. And while she is making the roti one rose a great deal. And before, old women used to say that if a roti rises very well then that means someone is very hungry. Or someone with a lot of love is remembering. And she said, "this roti rose a lot, perhaps my brother is hungry." And she said, "If he was here then I would quickly give him the roti." And over there, he is all-knowing anyways and he realized that his sister had remembered him. And when it was a little later – he was in one village and she was in another and he had gone very far away so there was a difference in time between the two as well. And he said to Mardana, when it was morning, that, make preparations, we're going there, to visit Nanaki. And they said how can we travel that much in such a short time? You're saying we have to be there in such a little time. And he said, you close your eyes and open them when I say. And they sit in their bhakti and are singing hymns and he says you close your eyes and read this prayer, and he read it himself too and when they opened their eyes, within an hour they reached there. And when they opened their eyes, they said, "We really have reached here." And they went and knocked on Nanaki's door. And Nanaki said to Sulakhni, "Bahu [Daughter-in-law], someone is outside, you look, I am making roti and you go and open the door." And she goes to open the door – No, she says "Bahu, you look" and meanwhile, their servant goes and she comes back and tells Sulakhni, "Bahu, Nanak has come." Sulakhni laughs that, "How could Nanak have come this early? There was no knowledge of where he was or when he was going to come." And she does not believe it and meanwhile Nanaki calls to her that the door has been opened but no one has come in. "You Bahu go and look to see who it is." What would the servant know who it is? She was thinking that it was probably her mother or father or other relative. And Sulakhni does not speak and she goes over there as well. And when she goes to see, Nanak touches her [Nanaki's] feet. And she says, do not touch my feet. And he says, "you are my elder sister. Whoever I may be but it is my respect." And she said, "No, you are connected to God and so are elder than me." And he says, "No, you are my elder sister and I am just your brother at this time. Do not say this to me that I should not touch your feet." And he touches her feet and then they sit and she asks them what they wish to eat and drink. And she asks how they came to visit, for he had not given any message of coming. And he said, "Did I not tell you that when you remember me with love, I will come to see you then." And she said, "But I remember you every day, why today?" And he said, "No, you remembered me in such a way today that I had to come." And she asked what he wanted to eat or drink. And he said, "Bring that roti by which you had remembered me." And he said, don't lie now, tell me. And she said, "Really, a roti had risen and I had said, Oh, that my brother was here." So they ate and she said, "Spend the night." And he said, "No, you had said this much that he eat and I completed my duty and ate and now I must go."